

ODFW Winter Steelhead Report

by ODFW

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OVERVIEW Steelhead anglers have ample opportunities throughout the state. The winter steelhead update is designed to help anglers identify productive river systems and specific locations for pursuing winter steelhead and to draw attention to any recent angling regulation changes.

ODFW maintains a rigorous stocking and fishery management program throughout Oregon, to maximize angling opportunities. All anglers are advised to read the 2006 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations, available at license retail outlets on the Internet at www.dfw.state.or.us before heading out.

GENERAL ANGLING TIPS Many anglers who are new to steelheading try a basic rig, drift-fishing roe and yarn on a leader, about 20 to 24 inches under a three-way swivel. On the third eye of the swivel attach a short dropper of line with a weight attached; the amount of weight is determined by the flow and depth of the river. This gear is cast slightly upriver and allowed to bounce along the bottom until it drifts toward the bank below the angler. Adjust the weight until you feel the weight tapping along the bottom. Anglers occasionally lose some weights with this technique, but it is important to keep the bait near the river bottom.

Another popular technique is drifting a bobber and bait, or bobber and jig combination for winter steelhead. A sliding bobber is rigged with a stop on the line, to adjust for the proper depth. While steelhead will hit a brightly-colored maribou jig, many anglers use roe or sand shrimp as an added enticement.

The most popular baits are cured salmon or steelhead eggs and sand shrimp. Other baits include worms, crayfish tails and prawns. Casting spoons or spinners accounts for many fish. Boaters often back-troll plugs or run diver-and-bait combinations behind the boat.

When rivers get low and clear, go to smaller baits with more subdued colors. A small pale offering that looks like a single egg often will draw a strike from a steelhead when the river is gin-clear. When rivers become turbid during and after rainstorms, use larger baits with brighter, flashier colors. "Plunkers" often are successful using bait in turbid river conditions, when the river is considered out-of-shape for drift anglers.

Surplus hatchery steelhead returning to ODFW hatcheries often are stocked into local lakes to provide additional angling opportunities. Casting lures or flies, from the shore or a boat, is the most common technique for catching steelhead released in lakes. Steelhead stocked into lakes are classified as trout. Anglers do not need a Combined Angling Tag to angle for these fish.

Successful winter steelhead angling depends primarily on water temperature, river levels or flow rates, and water clarity. Updated river flows and water temperatures are available at www.wrd.state.or.us. Anglers are encouraged to contact local ODFW offices for current water conditions. Local sporting good stores also are a popular source of information on the current local river conditions and steelhead angling techniques.