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Expert Tips For Winter Steelhead Anglers On Oregon's South Coast

Posted by TravelCoosBay on November 5, 2014



Winter steelhead are one of Oregon's most prized game fish – and one of the most challenging to catch. But the promise of large hard-fighting fish, fresh from the ocean, lures many anglers to brave the cold, wet conditions in search of a trophy.

As the salmon and river trout fishing season come to a close, it's time to look ahead to the winter fishing season. We checked in with fishing expert **Gary Vonderohe** from the [Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife](#) to get his Winter steelhead fishing forecast on Oregon's South Coast! Here is what he has to say.



Winter Steelhead Fishing in the Coos Basin

By Gary Vonderohe



Gary Vonderohe

The winter steelhead season in the Coos Basin typically begins around Thanksgiving, and in some years steelhead can be available into April. The peak harvest occurs from late December to late February.

In the Coos Basin only adipose fin-marked fish may be retained. From December 1, 2014 through April 30, 2015, steelhead anglers will be allowed to harvest 1 additional adipose fin-slipped steelhead for a total aggregate of 3 adult fish harvested daily.

Excellent steelhead bank fishing opportunities are available on both the East and West forks of the Millicoma River system. On the East Fork Millicoma, bank access is available in Coos County's Nesika Park, with several excellent fishing holes and drifts from which to choose.

On the West Fork, public access is available at ODFW's Millicoma Interpretive Center (MIC), about nine miles upriver from Allegany. Located on lands administered by the Oregon Department of Forestry, the banks at MIC and for several miles upstream provide excellent steelhead fishing opportunities. The ponds at MIC are used for acclimation of steelhead smolts, so adult fish are drawn back to this area.

Limited boat fishing for steelhead occurs on the East and West Fork Millicoma. There are no developed ramps on either fork, but primitive slides do exist here. Both forks have bedrock and boulder areas that make for difficult boating when flows are low.

In the South Coos River, the best hatchery steelhead fishing is in the lowest five miles above the head of tidewater (located at Weyerhaeuser's Dellwood Log Camp). The Big Creek Acclimation Site, also known as the "Fivemile Hole," at milepost 5 is a good place to target adult steelhead returning to the area where they were released as smolts. Access to the South Coos River above the Dellwood Gate is by permit from Weyerhaeuser Company, and is subject to their rules. Anglers should call the Weyerhaeuser hotline number at 1-888-741-5403 or go to the www.weyerhaeuser.com for information on access and permits.

There are river gauging stations on the South Fork Coos along with the East and West Fork Millicoma rivers that steelhead anglers can use to look at river levels before they leave home. River levels are updated approximately every 15 minutes onto the Coos Watershed Association's website at www.cooswatershed.org.

Fishing Techniques

Novice anglers are encouraged to try drift-fishing roe and yarn or a corky on a leader about 20 to 24 inches under a three-way swivel. On the third eye of the swivel attach a short dropper (4-6 inches) of line, weighted to bounce slowly along the bottom. Adjust the amount of weight to allow the bait to drift at a natural rate, ticking the bottom periodically.

Cast slightly upstream so that the bait is on the bottom by the time it is straight out from the angler. Bobber and jig combinations can also be a good method for the novice angler; if the bobber-to-bait length is adjusted accordingly it will keep the hook away from bottom snags. Long, straight runs with a uniform depth are good places to try this gear type. Sand shrimp are often added to the drift-fishing rig or on the jig, to further tempt steelhead to bite.

Flyfishing for steelhead is becoming more popular on the Southern Oregon coastal rivers. Drifting an egg fly pattern under a strike indicator is a very effective and simple technique to catch steelhead. Fly anglers can also catch steelhead by swinging flies through short to medium runs that have prime steelhead holding water.

During steelhead season, don't discount periods when the rivers are low and clear. By scaling-down your bait or lure size, and toning-down the colors, steelhead can be enticed to bite in clear water. For the bobber and jig anglers, a small black jig often works when a neon-colored or pink jig will spook fish.

Another tip is to try fishing in the late afternoon/evening hours. Many steelhead anglers are out early in the morning and quit by mid-day. After the fish have had a chance to settle-down, and with most anglers off the river, you can have sections of river almost to yourself.

To learn more, you can always check with the [Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife](#) for the most up to date recreation report and visit [Oregon's Adventure Coast](#) for a list of local bait and tackle shops. Visit our website to learn about more [fresh water fishing options in Coos Bay](#).



Top Picks for Steelhead Rivers on the South Coast

Coos River

In the Coos River basin winter steelhead fishing typically starts the week of Thanksgiving. We have steelhead acclimation sites on the West Fork Millicoma River, East Fork Millicoma River, and South Fork Coos River. Fishing on the West Fork and East Fork Millicoma rivers are best in December through mid-February. Fishing on the South Fork Coos River is best from December through March. There is good fishing access at the Millicoma Interpretive Center on the West Fork Millicoma River and Nesika Park is a good place to fish for steelhead on the East Fork Millicoma River. Access to fish the South Fork Coos River is through Weyerhaeuser property and a permit is needed.

Coquille River

In the Coquille River basin winter steelhead fishing starts the last week of November. There are steelhead acclimation sites on the North Fork (LaVerne Park), East Fork (near China Creek), and South Fork (Woodward and Beaver creeks) Coquille rivers. The best months to fish the North Fork Coquille River are December through February with excellent access on foot at LaVerne Park. There is good foot access at Frona Park and right near the mouth of China Creek on the East Fork Coquille River and best months to fish are December through February. The South Fork Coquille River is an excellent river to be fished by boat. There are multiple access points to launch drift boats. Some of these access points are good areas to fish from the bank. The South Fork fishes well from December through April with the best fishing lower in the river early in the season.

Tenmile/Eel Creek

Fishing for winter steelhead in Tenmile Creek starts in late December with the best fishing in January through late February. Best fishing in Eel Creek is from January through March. There are three steelhead acclimation sites on Tenmile/Eel Creek. There is excellent boat and foot access on Tenmile Creek at Spinreel Park. There are a few access points to Eel Creek but it is accessible by foot traffic only. Eel Creek is very brushy and the pools that hold steelhead are small.