



Photo by E.J. Harris

Hook into a good time

A man fishes for steelhead in a swollen Umatilla River in February 2016 west of Rieth.

**Columbia River
tributaries offer
great fishing —
even if you don't
have a boat.**

The Columbia River is the lifeblood of Northwest fishing.

In Eastern Oregon — almost 300 river miles from the sea — that lifeblood offers plenty of good salmon, steelhead, sturgeon and walleye

fishing right out of Umatilla and Morrow counties.

Fishing for salmon and steelhead can be especially productive in late winter and early spring at the mouth of the Umatilla River, where the fish can

stack up awaiting rain and snowmelt.

But some of the best fishing — especially if you are lacking a boat and a guide — can come on some of the Columbia's tributaries.

The John Day River is the second-longest undammed river in

the continental U.S., and salmon and steelhead runs there are in the middle of a decade of good returns. Hatchery steelhead are common, and can be kept for uncommonly good eating. Wild steelhead — easily recognizable by an intact adipose fin — must be released. Late in the season, steelhead move into the watershed above Service Creek in the upper John Day, providing a spectacular opportunity for wade fishing.

In the heat of the summer, the John Day is also an excellent warmwater fishery — smallmouth bass abound and catching them on topwater baits is about as much fun as you can have on the water.

The Umatilla, too, is having a resurgence of anadromous fish runs. February and March are the best months for catching fish above Three Mile Falls near Hermiston. The regulations are different for fishing on tribal waters, though non-tribal

members can purchase a CTUIR fishing license. On national forest land at the headwaters of the creek, small bull trout are plentiful. But remember, they must be returned unharmed.

For lake fishing, consider Olive Lake, about 50 miles outside of Ukiah, which has been stocked this year by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife with both legal and trophy-sized rainbow trout.

In the winter the lake ices over and requires a snowmobile just to get to it — but the catching can be great, if you bring an auger.

The passing of seasons can bring a change in equipment, but the catching is just as good. Sport a bathing suit and sunglasses while casting to cruising rainbows, both pan-sized and wall-sized during a hot Eastern Oregon summer.

For the dry side of the state, fishing here is well worth wetting a line.

—Tim Trainor