



Catch & Release Fishing: Guidelines for Anglers

Harvesting fish is an important and valued part of recreational fishing. With preparation, information and experience, catch and release fishing can help maintain sustainable fish populations. Anglers might practice catch and release voluntarily **or** because it is required by regulations (for example, when a fish is out of season or isn't within size limits).

To effectively catch and release fish, you should minimize stress and injury to the fish. A less-stressed fish can recover faster and will be less likely to:

- Develop infection
- Be vulnerable to a predator
- Suffer a more serious injury when returned to the water

Keep in mind:

- Fish that cannot legally contribute to your limit must be released **immediately** to the waters where you caught the fish
- Fish must be released in a manner that causes the least harm

It is unlawful to target a species during its closed season even if you intend to release it. Delaying the release of a fish for pictures or weighing is unlawful unless the fish can be legally kept towards your limit.

Tips to increase fish survival:

- 1) **Plan your trip.** Avoid catch and release fishing in extreme hot or cold weather. This reduces stress on the fish. Avoid targeting spiny-rayed species such as bass, wall-eye, or crappie in waters deeper than five to six metres if you plan to release fish. This will prevent harm to the fish caused by changes in water depth. Familiarize yourself with the regulations and size restrictions ahead of time.
- 2) **Choose the appropriate gear.** Select appropriately sized rods, lines, and hooks for your target species. To minimize the likelihood of deeply hooking a fish and causing injury consider using either barbless hooks or circle hooks. Where possible, choose artificial baits over natural baits. Using the appropriate bait and hook for your target species is a simple way to reduce injury and increase survival if the fish is released.
- 3) **Set the hook and catch the fish quickly.** Pay close attention to your rod so that you can set the hook as quickly as possible. Try to reduce the playing time on the line so that the fish is not exhausted by the time you catch it. Both practices will reduce stress caused to the fish.
- 4) **Reduce handling.** Limit the time spent handling the fish and avoid touching the gills wherever possible. Land by using a clean, wet hand or while wearing non-abrasive gloves. To help reduce damage to the organs, avoid hanging the fish vertically or by the mouth if you are taking pictures or weighing the fish. Whenever possible, unhook the fish when it's still in the water or use a large landing net with rubberized mesh.
- 5) **Avoid retention.** Fish placed on a stringer are not good candidates for release. If you plan to release a fish, return it to the water as soon as possible. Avoid keeping a fish in a live well or holding pen if you intend to release it.
- 6) **Limit air exposure.** Once you catch a fish, reduce the amount of time you keep the fish out of the water. Aim for 10 seconds of total air exposure from catch to release. Always have your hook removal tools ready to use as soon as the fish is landed, so you can release the fish immediately. Use tools to remove the hook. If the hook is too deep, cut the line instead of struggling to remove it.

