



## NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE



### CATCH AND RELEASE QUICK REFERENCE CARD

COMPLIMENTS OF:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
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#### WHY RELEASE FISH?

1. After being caught, fish may need to be released because of size, season, or catch restrictions.
2. Stressed fish populations need your help to recover.
3. Catch-and-release fishing can be a way to help conserve a valuable resource.
4. A personal commitment to conservation can add satisfaction to your fishing experience.
5. The future of sportfishing is in your hands. Pass it on!

#### HOW TO BEGIN

1. Use hooks that are barbless and made from metals that rust quickly.
2. Always keep release tools handy, such as needle-nose pliers, hemostats, or "hookouts."
3. Set the hook as soon as possible to prevent a fish from swallowing the bait.
4. Make a decision to release a fish as soon as it is hooked.
5. Land your catch quickly; don't play it to exhaustion. However, bring a fish up slowly from deep water so it can adjust to the pressure change.

#### HANDLING YOUR CATCH

1. Leave the fish in the water (if possible) and don't handle it. Use a tool to remove the hook or cut the leader.
2. When you must handle a fish:
  - use a wet glove or wet rag to hold it
  - avoid holding the fish by the gills or eyes
  - turn a fish on its back or cover its eyes with a wet towel to calm it
  - protect the scales and mucous membranes
  - return the fish to water as quickly as possible
3. Keep the fish from thrashing against objects.

4. Do not net your catch unless you cannot control it any other way.
5. If a net is necessary, keep the netted fish in the water. Also rubberized nets cause less chaffing.
6. Protect against personal injury by careful handling.

## REMOVING THE HOOK

1. Cut the leader close to the mouth if a fish has been hooked deeply or if the hook can't be removed quickly.
2. Back the hook out the opposite way it went in.
3. Use release tools to work the hook and protect your hands.
4. For larger fish in the water, slip a gaff around the leader and slide it down the hook. Lift the gaff upward as you pull downward on the leader.
5. Do not jerk or pop a leader to break it. This may damage vital organs and kill the fish.
6. If a fish is hooked in the gills or eyes, consider keeping the fish (if regulations allow); mortality is usually high for these types of injuries.

## RELEASING THE FISH

1. Place the fish in the water gently, supporting its mid-section and tail until it can swim away.
2. Resuscitate an exhausted fish by moving it gently back and forth or tow it slowly (up to 30 minutes) alongside the boat so that water enters its gills.
3. Use an ice pick, needle, or hook point to carefully puncture the expanded air bladder on a fish taken from deep water.
4. Watch your fish to make sure it swims away. If it doesn't, recover the fish and try again.
5. A released fish has an excellent chance of survival if handled correctly.