

Catch and Release Best Practices



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

Office of Sustainable Fisheries



CATCH AND RELEASE FISHING

Do

- Keep the fish in the water as much as possible
- Use circle hooks and barbless hooks to enhance survival
- Assist in the recovery process of the fish prior to release
- Learn the proper release technique for the type of fish you're pursuing

DON'T

- Don't simply toss a fish back into the water
- Don't play the fish to exhaustion
- Don't try to pull the hook out of a gill or gut hooked fish
- Don't squeeze the fish or handle it more than necessary

Many anglers now use the practice of Catch and Release to help ensure that their favorite fishing spot has plenty of fish to catch. Catch and Release fishing is a great way for anglers to enjoy their sport, and still maintain adequate stocks of fish and a healthy ecosystem for future anglers. Some wildlife regulations require anglers to release certain fish to help ensure robust populations in the future.



What Else Should I know?

Unfortunately, releasing a fish after it's been caught takes more effort than some anglers think. It's just not enough to toss a fish back in the water after you unhook it as many fish released that way will die later. In order to provide the fish with a good chance at survival, Catch and Release must be practiced correctly and there are several things to consider.

Proper release means using the right gear and techniques to help improve the chances that fish will survive. Research your chosen fishing location and be prepared for the species of fish you are pursuing. The correct tools make releasing fish much more efficient and effective, so keep pliers, nets, measuring tape, camera, etc., close at hand in order to limit the amount of stress a fish will experience as you release it.

Important Catch and Release Reminders

- Never play a fish to complete exhaustion. Use tackle of sufficient strength for the potential size of your quarry.
- If possible, unhook the fish while it is in the water. If a hook is swallowed and you can't get it out, do not try to pull the hook out. Cut the line as close to the hook as possible and leave the hook in the fish. Use barbless hooks to make release easier.
- If you must remove a fish from the water, keep air exposure to a minimum. Less than 30 to 60 seconds is ideal.
- Handle the fish as little as possible and only use wet hands and/or a wet towel to touch the fish. Use an appropriate release tool.
- When holding large fish for a photo, support their weight by holding them horizontally, not vertically which may cause fatal injuries.
- Re-acclimate a fish by facing it into the current then gently release it into the water.
- Use a soft rubber mesh landing net which is less damaging to eyes, fins, scales and the protective mucous membrane.
- Not all fish that are released will survive, so an angler's restraint plays an important part in the practice of Catch and Release.
- Catch and release fishing is all about preserving the sport of fishing. Anglers that take the time to learn to handle and release a fish unharmed are ensuring that others will be able to enjoy the sport in the future.

Where Can I learn More About Catch and Release Fishing?

Catch and release is more than just tossing the fish back in the water. Proper release means using the right gear and techniques to help improve the chances that fish will survive. Learn more things you can do to help fish survive at www.nmfs.noaa.gov.

The future of sportfishing is in your hands.
Pass it on!

