

R

eckon with the weather

During winter, fish shouldn't be released on extremely cold days if they are taken out of the water, so remove hooks while the fish is still in the hole.

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very second counts

Minimize the time fish are kept out of the water. If possible, keep fish in the water when hooks are removed. Even a few inches of water under a fish can reduce injury. If a fish must be removed from the water, be careful not to drop it. Don't let it thrash around on shore or inside the boat. This can injure the fish and remove the slime coating which helps protect it from disease.

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ook elsewhere

Catch and release has some mortality associated with it, even when practiced properly. An ethical fisherman, therefore will catch a few fish, keep the ones he or she wants, practice good catch and release methods on others, and then pursue another species.

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ven in summer

Generally, the cooler the water the better the chance a released fish will live. Taking a fish from deep, cool water up to warm surface water can be especially stressful. If you plan to release your catch, avoid fishing during extremely hot periods of the summer.

A

ttention to deep water releases (more than 10 metres or 30 feet)

Cold water species such as lake trout can rapidly equalize changes in water pressure. They can usually be released successfully regardless of the depth they came from. Warm water species don't have this pressure-equalizing ability. Fish such as pike and walleye therefore should be brought to the surface slowly and then be released immediately, if possible. Fish caught from deep water can be released by allowing them to slip out of your wetted hands head first into the water, while you are in a standing position. This not only heads the fish in the right direction, but also sends a blast of oxygen through its gills. If you plan on releasing your catch, avoid fishing in deep water.

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tringers are for keepers

Never place fish you are intending to release on a stringer. Live baskets should not be used to hold fish unless you plan to eat them later. Wire baskets, when kept near the surface, expose fish to warm surface water that causes added stress. Although some anglers keep all fish in their live wells and release them at the end of their fishing trip, this practice is discouraged. Delaying the release may result in unnecessary stress to otherwise healthy fish, and could reduce their chances of survival.

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nsure against disease

If using a net to help fish, consider buying one with a coated or rubberized mesh that helps reduce injury to gills, eyes and fins. The coated or rubberized mesh nets can help to minimize removal of slime from fish and scratching and splitting of fins. Using a wet hand or wet mitt to assist in hook removal will help avoid excessive loss of slime.

Catch and release fishing is a concept that is 'catching' on!

Not long ago, an angler's expertise was measured in pounds of fillets and photographs with stringers of dead fish. Now, live releasing all or part of the catch is more common, as anglers across Ontario become more conservation-oriented. They realize that no body of water has a limitless supply of fish, and understand that they have a responsibility to protect and improve the fishery.

Thanks to this new attitude, more anglers are finding satisfaction in quickly and carefully returning their fish to the water so they can spawn and be caught again. Careful live release also allows for a selective harvest of fish: releasing large spawning-age fish and keeping smaller fish for the table.

Developed by the East Algoma Stewardship Council, Fisheries Management Zone 10 Advisory Council, and the Ministry of Natural Resources.

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Planning for
successful catch
and release

Catch and Release

The number of anglers who catch and release fish is growing rapidly. Many anglers who practice catch and release fish for the sheer enjoyment of the sport.

Of course many anglers have always 'let the little ones go to grow up and get big', while keeping the bigger fish to eat. Fisheries managers and anglers have realized that letting medium-sized to large fish go makes even more sense. This is because larger, older mature fish are instrumental for reproductive success.

With size limits for many fish species now widespread, most anglers will be participating in catch and release. The successful use of size limits depends on anglers who can handle and release fish properly. When catch and release is properly practiced, this results in both more fish and bigger fish.

To ensure released fish survive, anglers must practice good handling techniques to minimize injury and stress to the fish. In this way, anglers who learn and practice good handling techniques will have taken an important step in the wise use and conservation of our fisheries resources.

Careful gear selection

Selecting the right rod, reel and line is the first step. Your tackle should be matched to the kind of fishing you will be doing. For example, an ultra-light outfit with four pound test line might be fine for 6 - 10 inch (15 - 25.5 cm) brook trout, but not for pike or muskie. A long fight to bring in these big fish causes them enough stress to greatly reduce their chances of long-term survival.

Artificial lures as an alternative

Artificial lures generally result in fish being hooked in the mouth or lips, and not the gills or throat, since the hook is set as soon as the strike is felt. This reduces handling time and injury due to deeply ingested hooks. Using artificial lures is also fun and challenging.

Try barbless hooks

Using barbless hooks makes releasing fish quick and easy. Often barbless hooks can be removed without even touching the fish. If you cannot find barbless hooks at the tackle shop, simply pinch down the barb with a pair of pliers or file the barb off.

Capture correctly

Learn how to hold a fish and remove your hooks. There are a variety of different methods to safely hold fish while removing hooks. In general, larger fish should be held using two hands, with one hand firmly gripping the tail and the other supporting the body. Never hold a fish by the gills or eyes, this can result in serious damage or death. Mechanical grabbers are also harmful to fish.

Hooks out

Hooks can be easily removed by using long-nosed pliers or forceps. Pliers let you reach into the mouth and let you grip hooks much better than you can with your fingers.



The use of size limits is an effective tool in the management of our fisheries resources. Knowledgeable and conscientious anglers are the key to make sure they work and result in a great fishing future.

Administer aid

Most fish that become stressed from the trauma of being caught can be revived by administering first aid. In a moving water situation, the fish should be held heading upstream into current to allow oxygenated water to flow through the gill filaments. In a lake or ice fishing environment, fish should just be carefully cradled in the water and NOT moved back and forth.

Never hang up

Because water is much more dense than air, taking fish out of water puts a tremendous strain on their muscles, internal organs, and skeletal system. The risk of injury increases with the size of fish. When you take fish from the water, either to remove the hooks or take a picture, you can minimize damage by keeping the body of the fish in a horizontal position.

Don't let it swallow

Small hooks, used with bait, are often ingested deeply, so rather than remove them and risk serious injury, it is better to cut the line and leave the hook embedded. A small hook, even in the throat of a fish, will dissolve in a few days and the fish will be fine. Quick strike rigs, used when fishing with large live or dead baits will also help prevent deep ingestion.