

# Fish Out of Water

**OBJECTIVES:** Students will be able to:

- describe the procedures involved in hooking and landing a fish
- relate the proper way to release a fish
- explain how to prevent the spread of viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS)

**METHOD:** Students will go fishing on a field trip.

**MATERIALS:**

- 1) Tackle
- 2) PFDs
- 3) Bait
- 4) Fishing licenses
- 5) First aid kit
- 6) Other equipment necessary for a field trip

● See Appendix N for Fishing Journal (also found on back page of student booklet).

**SETTING:** Outdoors

**DURATION:** One half to one full day field trip (combine this lesson with the next lesson, **Cooking, Cleaning, and Companions**)

**VOCABULARY:** Stringer, CPR, VHS

**STANDARDS:**

**Physical Education:** B 8.3, 12.1; C 8.1, 12.2; D 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 12.1, 12.2, 12.3; F 8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.6, 12.1, 12.5, 12.6. **Environmental Education:** D.8.5. **Science:** C.8.6, F.8.10, 12.7, 12.8.

**BACKGROUND:** Choose a location for your fishing trip that will accommodate your entire group without impacting the surrounding environment. Make sure all students who are 16 or older have a fishing license. Assemble fishing gear, PFDs, and chaperones to meet your group's needs. The Wisconsin Tackle Loaner Program is a great resource for outfitting your class for the day. Check the DNR's Website for more information.

**OPENING:** Assist students in selecting the bait, lure, and other terminal tackle necessary for the fish they are hoping to catch. Check to make

sure they have selected an appropriate fish for the fishing location.

**MAIN ACTIVITY:**

**The Fishing Trip.** At the location, encourage students to discuss where they think fish are most likely to be found. In other words, "read the water" as a group. Have students overturn rocks, examine banks, and observe the current to learn more about fish habitat. The less experienced anglers may want to warm up or review casting techniques on dry land using casting plugs before they head for the water.

For students who choose not to fish, select an alternative activity such as sketching the location of the fishing trip, noting aspects of the location that make it quality fish habitat and any habitat degradations or restorations that are evident.

**CLOSING:** Have students record their trip in a fishing journal using the back page of their booklets. If students would like more journal pages, extra journal blanks can be found in Appendix N. Discuss as a class the factors that helped students to be successful and have students evaluate what they will do differently the next time they fish.

**ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS:**

1. Describe what happens to fish with VHS, how they get VHS, and three ways an angler or boater could help prevent the spread of VHS.

*ANSWERS: VHS causes fish to bleed to death. It is caused by a fish consuming another with the disease, or by fish swimming in water infected with the virus. To prevent the spread of VHS, don't move live fish, only purchase minnows from licensed dealers, report sick fish, drain water from your boat and bait wells before moving to a new lake, and put unused bait in the trash.*

2. What are three steps you should take when releasing a fish?

*ANSWERS: Don't play the fish, use a landing net, leave fish in the water or wet hands before touching the fish, keep fish horizontal, don't remove swallowed hooks, do it quickly (in 10 to 15 seconds).*

● If you have downloaded this booklet, please see the appendix that follows for additional materials.

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## Fish Out of Water

Once you've selected your fishing spot, set up your gear, and cast your line, you're ready to land a fish. Follow these steps to get the fish out of water:

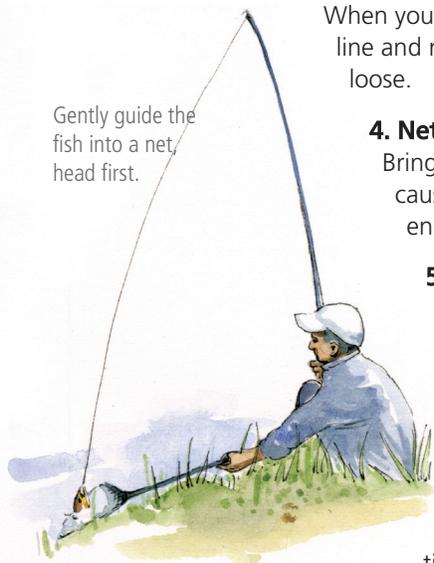
### 1. Stay Calm!

**2. Set the Hook** You want the hook to be secure in the fish's mouth before you reel the fish in. To set the hook, give the line a quick jerk. How hard you pull on the line to set the hook depends on the fish species. Be gentle with soft-mouth fish like crappie, but jerk hard to set the hook in the bony mouths of musky and northern pike. Frequently the fish will set the hook themselves as they engulf your bait and try to swim away.

**3. Reel It In** Keep your rod tip up. An upright rod acts like a spring to keep the line from breaking, yet keeps tension on the hook so it does not slip out. Be careful to keep the line from rubbing on the boat, dock, and rocks and keep it clear of the boat's motor. Tension weakens the line and may cause it to break. If your fish jumps up out of the water, release the line or the fish may dislodge the hook as it shakes its head. Many experienced anglers recommend bowing to the fish as it jumps.

When you bow, you will automatically give the fish more line and reduce the chances of the fish pulling the hook loose.

Gently guide the fish into a net, head first.



**4. Net It** Gently guide the fish into a net, head first. Bringing a net up behind a fish might spook it and cause it to swim away in a frightened burst of energy.

**5. Store or Release** If the fish is of a legal size and species and you have not exceeded your daily bag limit, you have to decide whether you want to keep or release it. If you are releasing a fish, do so immediately by following the instructions below. If the fish is legal and you decide to keep it, try to keep it alive until you can put it on ice. A wire basket or **stringer** will keep the fish alive all day. If that is impractical, quickly kill the fish and put it on ice. You must kill your fish (remove it from water) **BEFORE** you leave your fishing spot to prevent the spread of **viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS)**.

**6. Record Your Catch** One of the best ways to learn how to fish is to learn from yourself. Keep a fishing journal to track your fishing success. Note where you caught the fish, what the weather conditions and water temperature were, and what type of tackle you used. For ideas see the back page of this booklet. If you are careful in your record keeping, you will soon have a book of knowledge on how to catch fish.

### Play Nice

Do not "play" the fish any longer than absolutely necessary, especially if you are planning to release it. As the fish fights, it builds up lactic acids in its muscles. This can ultimately kill the fish even though it was still alive when you released it.



Frequently the fish will set the hook themselves as they engulf your bait and try to swim away.



An upright rod acts like a spring to keep the line from breaking, yet keeps tension on the hook so it does not slip out.



When releasing a fish, handle it in the net; don't bring it out of the water.



Keep a fishing journal to track your fishing success.

## Catch and Release

What if you want to catch a fish, but do not want to keep it? Catch and release is a very popular form of fishing in Wisconsin. In fact, even though approximately 88 million fish were caught in the 2007 season, only 33 million were kept! Catch and release is a conservation practice that allows people the pleasure of fishing, but if done effectively, doesn't lower the fish population of a lake. Catch and release is a necessary skill to learn so that you can follow regulations when you catch a fish under the legal size or within a restricted size range.

## Different Strokes for Different Folks

People have a variety of opinions about catch and release. On one extreme are people who always practice catch and release, and on the other extreme are people who never practice catch and release. The people on these extremes may have very strong opinions about why you should or should not catch and release a fish. One argument for releasing is that it lets people enjoy fishing, but does not deplete the fish population in the lake. One argument against releasing is that if catch and release is not done with great care, the released fish may die soon after being put back in the water. In that case, you have depleted the fish population without getting a tasty meal.

Most anglers have opinions between the extremes. In other words, they only release certain species of fish, or only release on certain fishing trips. What would be reasons for releasing some of the time? Before heading out on your own fishing trip, consider your own catch and release philosophy.

## CPR For Fish

If you decide to catch and release, **Consider Proper Release** (CPR) to help fish survive after you have put them back in the water. Fish can be traumatized, weakened, or injured during the catching and releasing process. By following the CPR steps, you can help fish survive.

- Don't play the fish to exhaustion. Use a landing net to bring the fish under control and be as quick as possible.
- Handle the fish in the net; don't bring it out of the water.
- If you must take the fish out of water, wet your hands first, turn the fish belly-up, and keep the fish horizontal while removing the hook.
- Don't remove swallowed hooks, just clip the fishing line. If legal, consider keeping fish with swallowed hooks, as they are unlikely to survive.
- Don't keep a fish out of water for more than 10 to 15 seconds.

## Very Horrible and Scary

Viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) is an invasive disease that causes fish to bleed to death. It caused large fish kills in the lower Great Lakes in 2005–2006 and was detected in lakes Michigan and Winnebago in May, 2007. VHS spreads easily when a healthy fish eats an infected fish or when fish swim in water carrying the virus. Infected bait (often minnows) is a primary source of the disease. Anglers can make a big difference in preventing VHS from moving into new lakes.

- Do not move live fish or fish eggs away from any water.
- Only purchase minnows from a licensed Wisconsin bait dealer. You can use these minnows again on the same water or other waters if no lake or river water or other fish were added to the minnow container.
- You may not harvest minnows from VHS waters. However, suckers can be taken, but may not be transported away while alive. Check the DNR Website for the list of VHS waters.
- Do not use dead fish for bait unless they have been preserved by methods other than refrigeration or freezing.
- Report sick fish to the DNR.

VHS does not harm humans, but it is deadly for fish. Do your part to keep the fishery healthy.