

CATCH-AND-RELEASE GUIDELINES

Most catch-and-release research to date has focused on examining species-specific responses to potential factors which affect mortality. However, due to the large number of studies that have been completed to date, a number of general trends are emerging. Thus, while caution should be used when applying species-specific findings to other species, the following recommendations are, given the available knowledge base, general guidelines to be used to reduce catch-and-release mortality for most species.

Angling Techniques

Circle hooks should be used as they will minimize the chance of deep hooking.

Barbless hooks are recommended as they are easier to remove and therefore reduce handling time.

The use of live/organic bait should be discouraged as it increases the likelihood of deephooking.

The use of artificial lures should be encouraged.

Fishing lines must not be left unattended as unattended lines have a greater chance of deeply hooking a fish.

Fishing line used should be appropriate to the species of fish being sought. This will prevent line breaking and reduce playing time.

Avoid angling during extreme water temperatures, both hot and cold, if you plan on releasing your catch.

Landing a Fish

Angled fish should be retrieved as quickly as possible to prevent fish exhaustion.

Fish should be landed by hand where possible.

Where a landing net is required, it should be knotless and preferably made of soft rubber.

When landing extremely large fish (e.g. muskellunge), the use of landing cradle should be considered.

Handling and Photographing a Fish

Keep fish in the water as much as possible to minimize air exposure.

Never place your fingers through gills or in the eyes.

Don't hold heavy fish by the jaw as this may damage the jaw and vertebrae.

Hold large fish horizontally and support its body to avoid damage to the internal organs.

Use wet hands or wet cloth gloves to handle the fish.

Have camera ready prior to landing fish to minimize air exposure.

If possible, photograph the fish while in water.

Unhooking a Fish

Have longnose pliers available to back the hook out.

Remove the hook quickly, keeping the fish underwater.

If the fish is deeply hooked, cut the line and release the fish as quickly as possible.

Avoid using stainless steel hooks as they take longer to corrode if left in the fish.

Depressurization

Avoid fishing deeper (5-6 m) waters if you intend to release your catch.

Consider depth of capture when deciding on whether or not to release a fish.

Release the fish quickly after it is landed.

Avoid artificial swim bladder deflation ("fizzing").

Revival

If there is current, hold the fish upright, facing into the current.

If there isn't any current, gently move fish back and forth or rock the fish from side to side in the water until gill movements return to normal and it is able to maintain its balance.

When the fish begins to struggle, let it swim away.



Casselman, S. J. 2005. *Catch-and-release angling: a review with guidelines for proper fish handling practices.* Fish & Wildlife Branch. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Peterborough, Ontario. 26 p.

