



CATCH & RELEASE



Harvesting and eating a freshly caught fish is part of the angling experience. However, catch-and-release fishing has taken off in popularity, and there is nothing wrong with fishing for sport and putting your catch back to be caught another day. If you choose to do so, it is important to follow certain steps to ensure the fish you release truly will survive to fight another day. The following guidelines will help released fish live.

- **Land fish as rapidly as possible**, using tackle that is adequate but sporting. A fish played gently for too long may be too exhausted to recover and has an increased chance of dying after release

- **Keep the fish in the water as much as possible and handle it with care.** Gently restrain the fish to minimize its movement while unhooking it.

- **Remove hooks gently and carefully from fish hooked in the lip, jaw or mouth. Never rip the hook out. Use the "hook shake" method.** Reach into the fish's mouth and grasp the hook shank with fingers or pliers. Lift the fish slightly out of the water, rotate hook shank so eyelet is down and shake gently. The weight of the fish will cause it to pop off the hook.

- **Use barbless hooks, or pinch the barb flat with pliers, to quicken the unhooking process.** Barbless hooks, when used with bait, can increase the survival of released fish.

- **Do not attempt to remove the hook if the fish is hooked in the gills, throat or stomach.** Leave the hook in the fish by cutting the line as close to the knot as possible, taking care not to injure the fish. The hook will often rust out of the fish or be passed within a few days. However, if legal, an injured fish is always a good candidate for harvesting!

- **When fishing with live bait, watch the line continuously and set the hook as soon as possible.** This reduces the chances of the fish swallowing the bait and the need

for cutting the leader and leaving the hook in the fish.

- **Try not to expose the fish to the freezing air when ice fishing.** Keep the fish in the hole while unhooking it, if possible. If not, unhook it as quickly as possible and return it to the water immediately to prevent the fish's eyes and gills from freezing.

- **Before releasing an exhausted fish, cradle it in a swimming position in calm water and move it gently back and forth to force fresh water through its gills.** Let the fish go when it is able to maintain an upright position on its own and is beginning to struggle. This process can sometimes take up to 10 minutes for large, exhausted fish.

Practice these methods and teach them to young anglers, our next generation of conservationists!

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

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