

SAFE FISH HANDLING TECHNIQUES

"Practicing safe fish handling techniques is key to being a responsible angler and protecting resources for the future"



CATCH AND RELEASE: Fish handling techniques are especially important when practicing catch and release angling. Releasing a fish does not always guarantee the fish will survive. These basic tips can lower the stress on a fish and give it a better chance of survival post release.

- Match tackle to the fish you are targeting. Minimizing the fight time increases the chance of survival and lowers the stress on the fish.
- Have release tools ready (landing net/cradle, pliers, measuring board, camera). Keep the fish in the water or limit out of water exposure to less than one minute. If possible, measure the fish while in the water.
- Best tools include a rubberized/knotless landing net or fish cradle and needle nose pliers.
- If you must handle the fish, wet your hands or wear wet cotton/wool gloves. This prevents any damage to the fish's protective mucous.
- Do not; hold the fish by the gills, eyes or squeeze the belly. No vertical holds, this can harm the fish. Hold the fish horizontally with one hand supporting the belly.
- If the hook is deep in the fish's throat, snip the line as close as possible to the hook and release the fish. The hook may work its way out. This is the best option for this scenario.

- Take time to learn the fisheries' regulations before you begin fishing. Anglers often unnecessarily stress a recently caught fish while determining "if they can keep it or not".
- When releasing fish, always release head first. If there is current or drift, always orientate the fish's head against current. Do not "rock fish back and forth". Simply hold the fish upright and until it regains its strength and swims away.

AVOID FISHING WARM WATERS: Warm water holds less oxygen and as temperatures rise, these lower oxygen levels increase the stress on the fish (optimum temperature for many trout species is 15°C). When fish are already under stress, the added pressure of being caught, handled, and released lowers their chances of survival. By using a thermometer (or sonar unit), anglers can measure water temperatures. Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) state; on days when the water temperatures are 22°C or higher, anglers should:

- Not fish that waterbody but instead find a cooler waterbody to fish
- Fish in the early mornings or late evenings, when the water is cooler
- Minimize the exertion and handling of the fish by using heavier angling gear and reducing the playing time
- Refrain from photographing the fish, and release it as quickly as possible

WATER DEPTHS ARE A FACTOR: Walleye and yellow perch have a decreased chance of survival when caught in water deeper than seven meters (21 ft) (AEP). When a fish is caught in deep water and brought to the surface too fast, their swim bladder does not have time to adapt to the fast-changing water pressure. The internal damage can harm the fish. To prevent this, fish in shallower waters where there are great angling opportunities. Signs of barotrauma include; hard sides where it should be fleshy and/or a swim bladder protruding from the mouth. Do not attempt to fizz the fish (penetrating the swim bladder to sink the fish). Fizzing does not increase survival, causes internal damage and will kill the fish. If a fish appears to have a swollen swim bladder, simply release the fish. Time can correct the bladder and the fish has a better chance of survival on its own. As a general rule, avoid fishing for species other than lake trout and sturgeon in depths greater than 30ft (9m).

KNOW THE REGULATIONS: Regulations differ between regions, areas and waterbodies. Carrying the current Manitoba Angler's Guide should be a staple item in tackle boxes. Do not release fish that have been on a stringer or in your live well. Studies show that mortality of released fish significantly increases if they are held in live wells (AEP). These fish are considered in your possession and need to fall within the allowed limits and size restrictions for the waterbody being fished.