A FISH IS TOO VALUABLE TO CATCH ONLY ONCE!

Florida is the “Fishing Capital of the World,” largely because Florida carefully manages its valuable marine resources.

We often are required to release saltwater fish when we catch them to help maintain fish populations, and more and more anglers are practicing “catch-and-release” to do their part to conserve marine fisheries while they enjoy their outdoor fishing experiences.

For more information on catch-and-release fishing, proper fish handling techniques, and saltwater fishing regulations, contact these offices:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
620 South Meridian Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600
www.MyFWC.com/saltwater
(850) 487-0554

Florida Sea Grant
PO Box 110409
Gainesville, FL 32611-0409
www.flseagrant.org
www.catchandrelease.org
(352) 392-1837

HANDLING FISH PROPERLY

By adopting just a few simple habits, you can increase the survival rate of fish you catch with proper handling during the landing and release. This means you can positively influence the future of Florida’s saltwater fish populations, so strive for 100% survival of the fish you release!

- Decide beforehand which fish are to be kept, and immediately release all others.
- Release a fish while it’s in the water whenever possible. Large fish such as tarpon can injure themselves and anglers.
- The protective slime on a fish is important, so handle fish as little as possible. If you must handle a fish, only use wet hands and never use a towel.
- It is best for the fish to take pictures of it while still in the water.
- Avoid lifting a fish from the water by the line. If you use a landing tool such as a Boga-Grip® to control the fish, support the body of the fish with your hand if you have to lift it into the boat.
- If a fish needs to be taken out of the water to measure it, vent it, or to remove the hook, this is a perfect opportunity to quickly take a picture of the fish.
- Avoid lifting a fish by its jaw, especially large fish. This can injure the fish so it can’t feed normally and may harm its internal organs.
- If a hook is deep in a fish’s throat or stomach, cut the line as close as possible to the hook. The hook will eventually dissolve or pass.
- Once you are ready to release the fish, gently release the fish head first into the water. If a fish is exhausted, revive it before releasing it by passing water over the gills. Move it forward in the water with its mouth open or hold it facing into the current, allowing water to flow through its mouth. Be cautious of predators while reviving fish.
- Only gaff a fish when you intend to keep it.
- Never hold a fish by its gill cover and never put anything in a fish’s gills or eyes.

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Sea Grant Florida
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TACKLE, TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES – CONSERVATION-MINDED ANGLERS STRIVE TO SAVE 100% OF THE FISH THEY RELEASE!

QUICK TIPS

- Use tackle heavy enough to land a fish quickly, which helps minimize exhaustion. A less exhausted fish will be able to better avoid predators.
- Use a dehooking tool to help remove hooks safely and quickly without handling the fish.
- Use either corrosive or non-stainless steel hooks because they dissolve if they remain in the fish.
- Use circle hooks, which tend to hook a fish in the jaw, thus reducing the chances of damage due to gut hooking.

If you use lures with multiple sets of treble hooks, remove 1 or 2 of the points from the remaining sets of trebles makes it easier to recover the lure from the fish.

CIRCLE HOOKS

- Use circle hooks, which tend to hook a fish in the jaw, thus reducing the chances of damage due to gut hooking.

The chief advantage to using circle hooks is that fish are almost never deep-hooked.

Circle hooks are made so the point is turned perpendicular to the shank to form a circular or oval shape. Circle hooks are best used any time you are using natural bait, live or dead.

Research has found that circle hooks are more likely to hook a fish in the mouth instead of in the esophagus or stomach. Hooking a fish in the mouth reduces internal harm and decreases dehooking time.

Kahlé, or Circle-C hooks are not considered circle hooks.

DEHOOKING TOOLS

- There is a wide variety of de-hooking tools available on the market today.

Dehooking tools, or dehookers, allow the hook to be secured and the barb shielded without re-engaging when the hook is removed from a fish.

These tools come in a variety of shapes and sizes: use the tool that works best for you and the fish you are targeting. If a fish swims away from the hook, it is better to cut the line as close as possible to the hook instead of trying to remove it. The hook may eventually dissolve or pass through the fish.

DEEP-WATER RELEASE

Successful release of fish caught in deep water can be a challenge. Reef fish taken from deeper water undergo expansion of gases in the swim bladder as they are brought to the surface. This can result in a ruptured swim bladder and other physical damage to the fish, a condition called barotrauma. Because the expanded gas is still trapped in the body cavity, it is difficult for the fish to swim back to the bottom on its own.

WILL A FISH NEED YOUR HELP?

Both venting and descending devices should only be used when signs of barotrauma are present. Make sure to follow current fishing regulations when deciding which tools to carry on your vessel.

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