Everything you need to know about organizing a fishing event. Available at www.catchfishing.com

Water Weigh-In System

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EVENT PLANNING SERIES

In order to ensure the sustainability of the resource, there are some important things to remember when organizing a tournament. The most important factor in handling fish at a "catch & release" competitive fishing event is adequate oxygen at all stages of the weigh-in procedure. This begins at the transfer of the caught fish from live well to plastic bags and continues through the holding tanks to the actual weigh-in to releasing the fish back into the water body. Research by Dr. Bruce Tufts of Queen's University, in partnership with Shimano, has shown that oxygen deprivation is the single most important factor in causing undue stress to tournament fish.

As a result of the research, "The Shimano Water Weigh-In System" was developed.

The system begins with the transfer of fish from the competitor's boat. The transfer bag should be leak-proof and large enough to hold the fish comfortably and should be used only to transport fish a very short distance to the weigh-in site. Once at the weigh-in site, the fish should be transferred to a well-aerated water trough, shaded by a canopy, into a covered basket with a series of holes in the bottom. If a water trough is not available, portable aeration devices or hoses of compressed air could be used in the bags to keep the oxygen level acceptable. The best way to ensure that the fish don't suffer from oxygen deprivation at this stage is to keep the fish in the live well until it is that angler's turn to weigh his catch.

The baskets can be easily obtained by drilling a series of holes around the base of any standard weigh-in basket. The holes will allow aerated water to quickly move in and out of the basket as it moves through the weigh-in. Be sure to eliminate any rough edges from the drilled holes to minimize any physical damage to the fish. The goal is to obtain baskets with identical weights. Baskets with flip-top lids are desirable as they minimize the chance that a fish will jump out.

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READ BEFORE THE EVENT

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As in any weigh-in, the most critical element is the scale itself. Because of the weight of the water, the scale should have a capacity of at least 100 pounds. The scale should also have a base that will support the water basin as well as a zeroing function to determine the initial weight of the fish basket, water basin and water before it is zeroed. Consider borrowing or renting one of these scales to keep the tournament within budget.

The next item required is a container that will serve as a basin on top of the scale. It must have dimensions that allow a fish basket to be easily placed within it, but close enough around the basket so that the water required to fill the basin past the level of the fish is minimized. During the weigh-in, the basin is filled with about 6 to 8 inches of water (permanently marked as a standard level on the basin).

Once all the necessary equipment is in place, the process of weighing the fish in water is quite simple. First, the water basin is filled with an appropriate volume of water (usually to a pre-determined fixed mark that coincides with 60 to 80 pounds of water). Next, an empty fish basket is placed across the top of the water basin. By pressing the zeroing function at this point, the scale will now automatically deduct the weight of all these objects. The scale is now ready to weigh a basket of fish, but will only supply the weight of the fish, because the weight of everything else on the scales has already been taken into account.

Ensure that you have at least one volunteer with proper training, whose job is to monitor the aquatic environment. Partner with another organization to purchase a good oxygen meter, and some system of aerating the water in your trough.

To be certain that the most accurate weights are obtained, there are some important points to keep in mind. It is best to zero the scale between each new fish basket to account for any small changes in the volume of water in the fish basin. It's also imperative that all of the water is drained from each fish basket as it is moved from the trough to the scale. Remember that oxygen in the water of the weighing basin will be depleted over time. It is best to have an air hose available to aerate the scale basin when fish are not being weighed. Another good idea is to exchange the water in the basin several times throughout the weigh-in as it accumulates fish mucous, wastes and ammonia. Exchanging the water in the scale basin also minimizes the possibility that fish will be exposed to extremely warm temperatures.

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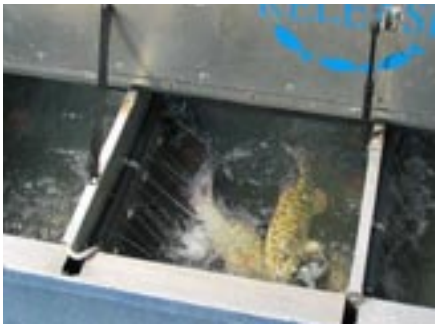

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Once the weigh-in is finished, it is imperative to return the fish to the water in a timely fashion to keep the time that the fish are out of water to an absolute minimum. Similar to the other steps in the weigh-in process, the fish should be placed into a well-aerated aquatic environment. Depending on the configuration of the weigh-in, this might be the lake itself, a live-release boat, or a portable transportation tank to take the fish to the shoreline or release vessel.

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Many larger events now use live-release boats to redistribute fish around the water body at the conclusion of each tournament day. The main item of concern is that the fish not become stressed by oxygen deprivation. The importance of sufficient oxygenation for tournament fish cannot be overemphasized. If there is only one piece of equipment that every tournament organizer should have, it would be an oxygen meter. Once the ability to measure oxygen is achieved, individuals responsible for the well being of the fish at these events can gather their own information about the oxygen levels in all of their tanks, live-release boats, etc.

Apart from oxygen, the next most important measurement that tournament organizers should monitor is temperature. Substantial deviations in water quality and temperature either above, or below, that of the water body where fish were caught should be avoided.

To obtain the complete booklet on the "Water Weigh-in System", contact the CNSF head office.

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