

Catch and Release

Tutorial **17** /24
EVENT PLANNING SERIES

Inherent in the stewardship of the resource is the responsibility to conserve fish populations to maintain the natural biodiversity and health of aquatic ecosystems.

As angling pressure increases and fishing technology improves, catch and release fishing becomes an increasingly important means of conserving our fish resources. Proper catch and release fishing means large, mature fish are released to spawn and help maintain a healthy fishery. Releasing small immature fish allows them to grow. This type of selective harvest can be a very effective method of maintaining or improving angling quality in many lakes and rivers.

During spawning, fish concentrate in small areas, making them easy targets for anglers. But it doesn't make sense to harvest these fish just as they are about to reproduce. Angling effort should be directed away from spawning fish.

Use artificial lures, not bait, when practicing live release. This will reduce the chances of deep hooking. Minimize the time the fish is played once it is on the hook. Playing a fish to exhaustion may cause it to die after it is released. Fish caught from deep water should be raised slowly to allow the fish to adjust to the decrease in water pressure that occurs as the fish is brought to the surface. A rapid change in pressure can damage the fish's organs.

To release a fish, keep it in the water as much as possible while removing the lure. If you must handle the fish, use a pair of wet cotton, wool or other soft gloves. If these are not available, keep your hands wet and hold the fish gently behind the gills. If it's a fish without sharp teeth, like a bass, hold its lower lip between your thumb and index finger. Don't squeeze the belly or put your fingers in the eye sockets or gill covers. Do not use rough, hard-surfaced gloves or mitts as you may remove the slippery coating that protects them from fungal infections and disease.

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Catch Fishing®

READ BEFORE THE EVENT

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When removing the hook, run your hand down the line to the fish's mouth, and use long-nosed pliers to grasp the shank, working gently back and forth until the hook is free. Try turning the fish belly up in the water to quiet it while the hook is removed. Never tear out the hook. If the fish is hooked deeply and the hook can't easily be removed, cut the line to release the fish. The hook will rust, dissolve, or become loose without harming the fish. Never throw a fish back into the water. When releasing the fish, hold it in the water in its normal swimming position, moving it slowly back and forth in an S-shaped pattern, allowing water to run through its gills. It should swim away under its own power. The time involved in this step may vary from a few seconds to several minutes.

Barbless hooks

There is a growing trend among conservation-minded anglers towards the use of barbless hooks. In fact, hooks with barbs are illegal in some jurisdictions. Check the fishing regulations by jurisdiction for the requirements in your area. Barbless hooks permit easier removal of the hook, reducing handling time and increasing the fish's chances of survival. It is recommended that the barbs on hooks be filed off or pinched down with pliers. Barbless hooks can be purchased from your local fishing tackle retailer.

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