

Catch & Release

Although a fresh fish dinner can be the climax of a great fishing trip, more and more anglers have come to realize that quality fish populations can only be maintained if catch and release angling is practiced. This is particularly the case for large gamefish that are typically rare in a population and usually take an extended time to grow to a quality size. With the advent of fiberglass fish mounts, it is no longer necessary to kill a trophy to get it mounted. Before releasing your trophy, take a photograph of it and measure its length and girth. Take this information to a taxidermist and they can produce an accurate, long-lasting replica of your catch. To ensure that the fish that you release have the best chance of survival, please follow these guidelines:

1. Quickly play and land the fish that you catch. Using light tackle is challenging to the angler, but can result in an exhausted fish that may not be able to recover.
2. Have the necessary tools in convenient reach, so that you can rapidly remove the hook.
3. Minimize the length of time that the fish is out of the water. Handle and unhook the fish in the water.
4. Avoid contact with the gills. Do not squeeze the fish or handle by the eye-sockets. Minimize a fish's contact with dry surfaces. Wet hands before handling to avoid removal of the fish's protective slime coat.
5. Anglers catching large members of the pike family should remember to always hold the fish horizontally (preferably in the water). When fish with long bodies such as these are held vertically, the weight of their internal organs can cause them to shift to the rear of their bodies, often resulting in irreparable harm.
6. Do not jerk hooks out of a deeply hooked fish. Instead, cut the leader close to the eye of the hook.
7. Consider using barbless or circle hooks. Circle hooks, when used properly, usually ensure that the fish is hooked in the mouth and are particularly good for fishing with bait.
8. Avoid culling fish. Anglers keeping fish in livewells should be sure to keep oxygen levels high and water temperatures below 75° F. Additional information on avoiding fish injury in livewells and at tournaments can be found at <http://sports.espn.go.com/outdoors/bassmaster/conservation>

9. Fish caught in deep water may be injured by rapid pressure change and may suffer from an expanded swim bladder. To minimize these problems, a moderate retrieve rate should be employed to ensure that the fish has an opportunity to adjust to the change in pressure. Depending on the fish species, there are techniques that may be helpful if your fish suffers from an expanded swim bladder that prevents it from swimming properly. Go to www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/9224.html for a discussion of these techniques.
10. Avoid catch and release fishing for thermally stressed trout because many of these fish will die after they are released.

RELEASE GUIDELINES FOR PIKE & PICKEREL

All members of the pike family tend to be very intolerant of handling. Please follow the following guidelines to reduce the stress on the fish you catch:

- Never play your fish to exhaustion.
- If at all possible, do not remove your fish from the water. Release your fish in the water where its body is supported.
- Never hold a fish by the eye sockets or gills.
- If you intend to release your fish, never hold it vertically as this can put unnecessary strain on body tissues and vertebrae that can lead to its death. If you must hold it out of the water, hold it horizontally with one hand cradling its belly.
- Remember—chain pickerel, northern pike, muskellunge and tiger muskellunge can all grow to record proportions in New York waters, but only if you release the intermediate size fish that you catch.

