

Catch-and-Release Fishing



Catch-and-release fishing continues to increase in popularity in Saskatchewan. Results from the most recent survey of recreational fishing in Canada indicate that almost all anglers in Saskatchewan practice some form of catch-and-release. Therefore, it is important to follow best practices to limit injuries or death. Factors such as handling, hook placement and environmental conditions can influence post-release mortality.

Proper Tools for Effective Catch-and-Release

- Needle nose pliers, hemostats or special hook-removing devices; line cutters for deeply hooked fish; landing net or cradle; wet cloth glove and camera (if you want to take a picture).
- Landing nets or cradles should be constructed with non-abrasive, knotless materials such as rubber or tangle-free coated nylon. Cradles are recommended for larger fish such as pike.

Angling Techniques for Effective Catch-and-Release

- Land the fish as quickly as possible to avoid fish exhaustion. The tackle used should match the size of the fish targeted; avoid intentionally using light tackle to prolong the catch.
- Catch-and-release fishing in depths greater than nine metres (30 feet) should be avoided, as most Saskatchewan fish species aside from lake trout are unable to rapidly adjust to the changes in water pressure as they are pulled towards the surface, resulting in greater mortality of released fish.
- Venting of distended swim bladders, or fizzing, is discouraged, as it can cause stress and has the potential to harm other internal organs.
- Use unscented artificial lures rather than bait or other organic materials (e.g. dough balls, corn) to minimize deep hooking of fish.
- Limit your angling during periods of extreme heat or cold, as extreme temperatures can contribute to post-release mortality.

Fish and Wildlife Development Fund

Donations can be made to the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund (FWDF) through HAL to help maintain Saskatchewan's fish and wildlife populations. Contributions can be directed to the FWDF's fish enhancement and/or wildlife development programs. Monies directed to fish enhancement will be used for priority fisheries programs, such as upgrading the aging infrastructure at the province's fish culture station.

Fish Handling Techniques for Effective Catch-and-Release

- Minimizing air exposure is one of the most important factors in limiting post-release mortality. Ideally, fish should be released without removing them from the water.
- Single, barbless and/or circle hooks can help reduce handling time and air exposure.
- Handle the fish as quickly (under 30 seconds) and as little as possible. Use a wet cloth glove or wet hand to prevent damage to the fish's protective mucus coating.
- Once a fish is landed, be careful not to let it flop around as this can lead to injuries.
- Do not hold or support a fish's weight by the gills, gill cover or eyes. If a fish must be held, hold it in a horizontal position, with one hand placed under the forward belly area and the other hand gently around the tail area. This will help minimize damage to the fish's spine and internal organs.
- If a fish is hooked in a vital area such as the gullet, gill or eye, consider keeping the fish if regulations allow, as post-release survival of these fish is greatly reduced.
- If you must release a deeply hooked fish, consider cutting the line close to the hook and follow proper release techniques.
- Hold a fish horizontal in the water until it is fully revived and swims away on its own. Move the fish in an S-shaped pattern to run water through its gills.
- If you must release fish that have been retained in a livewell, proper management of your livewell is crucial. Stress from prolonged confinement and low dissolved oxygen levels from overcrowding and/or warm water can result in higher mortality rates. Limit the number of fish in a livewell to 0.1 kg of fish per litre of water, or roughly one pound of fish per gallon of water. Limiting retention time in a livewell can also help reduce stress and improve post-release mortality.
- If a fish is bleeding or cannot be revived, count that fish towards your limit if regulations allow.



Packaging your Fish for Transport



(1) Whole (Round)

- head and entrails intact
- can be easily counted and identified



(2) Headless Dressed

- head and entrails removed
- can be easily counted and identified



(3) Fillets

- at least 2.5 cm (1 in) patch of skin and scales intact on body (not belly)
- only two fillets per package
- can be easily counted and identified