



DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME

S t a t e o f A l a s k a

Proper Release Methods

Why Release?

The diversity of Alaska's fish species and fishing opportunities are unequalled. The salmon species found in Alaskan waters are some of the largest in the world, the rainbow trout and grayling fishing in the state is exceptional, and anglers could spend years pursuing the state's countless saltwater species. These unique attributes of Alaskan fisheries attract a diverse array of anglers. Alaska is one of very few locations worldwide where truly wild fisheries still exist. Sport fishing in Alaska requires sound and ethical angling practices to ensure its continued health and opportunity.

Proper release practices are used by anglers who desire to enjoy fishing in Alaska and who would like to preserve the resource for future generations. Anglers release fish for a number of different reasons. They may choose to release a fish because it is not the targeted species, not of legal size, not edible, or if the fish is improperly hooked (snagged) in freshwater, regulation mandates that the fish be released immediately.

To some, the value of a day spent fishing is not measured in harvest, but in the experience outdoors. Regardless of an angler's motivation for releasing, fish survival can be increased by following a few simple steps. The practices detailed in this brochure are some of the most important steps an angler can take to sustain Alaskan fisheries. By following these tips, an angler is doing their part to help maintain and preserve one of the world's most unique and important resources.



Tackle Choice

- Single hook lures or flies may allow for easier release.
- The use of barbless hooks can also make it easier for an angler to quickly release a fish.
- Don't use bait if you plan to release fish. Fish typically take bait deeper which can increase release mortality.
- The use of hooks that will rust away provides anglers the option to cut the line near the hook if the fish is hooked deeply or in a vital area.
- Use appropriate line strength and hook size for the fish you are targeting. This will help to land the fish in a timely manner.



Be sure to wet your hands before handling the fish.

Handling Your Fish

- Keep the fish in the water while handling. The longer the fish is out of the water the lower the chance of survival. A good rule is to hold your breath while the fish is out of the water. When you need to breathe, so does the fish.
- If you do handle a fish with your hands, make sure to wet them first. Dry hands can rub the slime coat off the fish. This is a protective layer on their skin, which protects them from infection.
- Do not touch the eyes or gills of the fish.
- If you need to hold a fish, do so by gently placing one hand on the underside of the fish by the pectoral fins and the other near the base of the tail. This will help avoid injury to the internal organs.
- Never hold a fish vertically, only horizontally.
- Never squeeze your fish or hold them by their jaw or gill plate. Never hold a fish up by its tail, this can dislocate their back.
- Never let a fish drop to the ground or on the floor of the boat.

Landing Your Fish

- Land the fish as quickly as possible. The longer they fight the more unneeded stress is placed on the fish. Proper line strength is important.
- Use a landing net. Knotless or rubber nets are preferred. Other types of nets can damage fins and remove the slime layer on their skin.
- It is best not to touch the fish, leave it in the water and use a tool to quickly remove the hook.
- Never use a gaff to puncture a fish intended to be released.

Hooking mortality is often higher for fish that have been hooked in vital areas such as the gills or esophagus. The use of bait greatly increases the chances of hooking a fish in these areas.



Always check fishing regulations for area restrictions.

Hook Removal

- Keep the fish in the water.
- If the fish is hooked deeply or in a vital area, cut the line near the hook.
- Use hemostats, pliers, or de-hooking tools to remove the hook while the fish is in the water. This will allow you to remove the hook without touching the fish with your hands.
- Back the hook out from the same hole in which it entered.

Revive Your Fish

- In flowing water, position the fish with its belly down and with the head facing into the current.
- In still water, place the fish so the belly is down and hold the fish near the tail. Gently move the fish back and forth.
- When the fish starts to quiver, it's time to let it go.

Taking Pictures

- If feasible, take a picture of the fish while it's in the water.
- If you take a fish out of the water for a picture, do so when the photographer is ready. Water should be dripping off the fish to illustrate this point.
- Make sure hands are wet before touching the fish.
- Stand or kneel in the water while taking the picture. This will help to minimize injury if the fish is dropped.
- Be aware that some regulations do not allow anglers to remove a fish from the water if it is intended to be released.

It is illegal in some areas of Alaska to remove a fish from the water.

Being a Steward of the Resource

Anglers take pride in harvesting fish for personal consumption. Fish are healthy and provide a significant amount of protein. When releasing fish, practicing proper release methods promotes sustainable fisheries and helps ensure Alaska's fishing legacy remains healthy and intact well into the future. It's truly up to the angler to choose to be a steward of the resources that comprise Alaska's unique natural world.



Hot Spots and Regulations

For weekly in-season fishing reports and to access state regulations, visit:
www.adfg.alaska.gov.



For information about camping, accommodations, fishing guides, and other visitor services, contact the agencies listed in this publication, or the Alaska Travel Industry Association at 2600 Cordova Street, Suite 201, Anchorage, Alaska, 99503
web: www.travelalaska.com email: info@AlaskaTIA.org



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