

Releasing Fish



Hold the fish with wet hands, beneath the belly, behind the pectoral fins. Use forceps or small pliers to remove the hook.

For all native fish and any nonnative fish you intend to release, bring the fish in as quickly as possible. Do not play the fish to exhaustion.

Unhook the fish in quiet water such as an eddy or slow spot. Do not drag the fish across land. Use forceps or small needle-nosed pliers to quickly remove the hook.

Always make sure your hands are wet if you must handle the fish. Dry hands damage a fish's protective mucous film. Hold the fish with one hand around the tail section and the other beneath the belly, just behind the pectoral fins. Never grab or hold a fish through the gills unless it is already dead.

If you want a photo of the fish, make sure the photographer is ready before you handle the fish. Make it quick.

Never just throw a fish back into the water. If a fish becomes passive, it is probably close to exhaustion. Gently remove the hook within calm water, then lightly cradle the fish with

your hands to see what it does. If it struggles to keep itself upright, hold the fish around its tail and beneath its belly with its head facing upstream into the current. Move the fish gently back and forth toward and away from the current. You should notice the gills opening and closing due to the rush of water. This is like giving a fish mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. When the fish has recovered, it should swim away on its own.

Tackle, lures, and hooks

Hooks and lures typically have barbs when purchased. With small pliers you must pinch down the barbs. Without barbs, more skill is required in landing and bringing in fish, but hook removal is easier and less traumatic to the fish.

Spinning lures typically have one hook with three points on a common shank, which is called a treble hook. With wire cutters you can snip off one of the points or snap one off with pliers; you also must pinch down all the barbs. Two pointed hooks are still effective, easier to remove, and less traumatic.

If the fish is deeply hooked, cut the line, do not pull out the hook. Most fish can survive with hooks left in.

