

## Useful Resources

*FishSmart* is designed to enhance, not replace, many successful programs in place to help anglers reduce the mortality of fish that they catch.

The first stop that any angler should make is to the web page or angling guides of their states' natural resources agency. In coastal and Great Lakes areas, the national Sea Grant programs also offer advice on improving the survival of released fish. Here are some useful links to programs that offer additional information:

[www.catchandrelease.org](http://www.catchandrelease.org)

[www.takemefishing.org/fishsmart](http://www.takemefishing.org/fishsmart)

**Rockfish barotrauma video:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2c0CN1veT0>

**Additional Links and Resources at:**

**[www.fishsmart.org](http://www.fishsmart.org)**

## What is *FishSmart*?

Recreational anglers have always been on the leading edge of conservation in the U.S.. *FishSmart* is a program fostered by the sport fishing community, with the cooperation of state and local government fisheries agencies, to continue this tradition by taking a science-based approach to reducing the mortality of fish where high numbers of released fish is a problem.

Elements of *FishSmart* include:

- **FishSmart Tackle** program to recognize innovation by in designing gear for the safe release of fish.
- **Research** with anglers, industry, scientists and managers to determine the state of knowledge into our understanding of released fish survival.
- **Outreach** to get the information into the hands of anglers where they can make a difference.

**Supporters include:**

- American Sportfishing Association
- NOAA Fisheries
- Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation
- Keep America Fishing
- Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
- Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- Florida Sea Grant

*FishSmart* ....

For the Future of Fishing



***Best Practices*** for the Safe  
Release of your Fish

**[www.fishsmart.org](http://www.fishsmart.org)**

## Why “Best Practices” for the Release of Fish?

It's ok to keep fish that you are allowed to retain under fishing regulations. However, at some point all anglers will be faced with returning fish to the water that they are not allowed to keep – due to size, season, or creel limits – or if they are voluntarily practicing catch-and-release.

Nearly ½ billion saltwater fish are caught each year with 59% of those being returned to the water. Improving survival of these fish by even 1% will save 3 million fish annually! In freshwater 84% of anglers *voluntarily* release fish that they could have legally kept.

Implementing “Best Practices” for releasing fish is the right thing to do and will help ensure sound fisheries in the future. Live release in many fisheries (bass and trout for example) has contributed to healthy and sustainable fishery resources.

FishSmart....for the future of fishing.



## Best Practices for Releasing Fish

**Plan Ahead** - Expect to release fish on any given trip and prepare the equipment necessary to do so.

**Avoidance** - Develop skills to target the size and species you desire.

**Appropriate Gear** - Use gear suited to the size of fish that you are trying to catch. Use circle hooks where recommended and be aware that fishing techniques are different from “J” style hooks.

**Landing Fish** -Don't play fish to exhaustion.

**Handling Fish**-Use knotless rubberized landing nets and rubberized gloves, to avoid removing the slime layer from their body.

- Keep the fish horizontal; support the body when lifting large fish.
- **DON'T DROP THE FISH** onto hard surfaces or long distances!

**Releasing Fish**- If needed, use a release tool (dehookers, recompression tools) to minimize handling.

### **Time is of the essence!**

Release fish as soon as practical and do not keep them out of the water longer than necessary.

## Deep Water Release

Saltwater fish caught in deep water may be suffering from “barotrauma,” a buildup of swim bladder gases that makes it difficult for them to go back down. Generally, fish caught deeper than 30 feet will suffer some effects. Follow these basic tips:

**Assess condition while reeling in fish** -Signs of barotrauma include:

- Sluggish swimming.
- Eyes bulging (“pop eye”).
- Stomach protruding from mouth.
- Bloated mid section.

If the fish appears normal release it without removing it from the water.

**Recompression** - Rapidly returning fish to depth is the method of choice for returning barotrauma affected fish. A variety of tools are on the market, including descender devices, release weights & baskets, etc.

**Return to Depth** -Return fish to the depth of capture. If catching fish at very deep depths, returning them as deep as possible will dramatically improve survival.

**Venting**- If rapid descent is not possible, venting is another option. Use established guidelines for venting such as found at <http://catchandrelease.org>.

**Note that the fish's stomach may protrude from its mouth. Do NOT puncture the stomach.**