

LKGA Develops Fish Handling, C&R Best Practices

In a move to improve C&R survival rates and increase awareness of the need to keep our fisheries sustainable, LKGA has created guidelines for effective C&R and proper fish handling. These guidelines are based on research and personal experience and may be revised as more information becomes available. Please feel free to email us at info@lkg.org if there is something we have overlooked or should consider adding.

Fish Handling:

-the 15 second rule: do NOT keep a fish out of the water for more than 15 seconds. When you have a fish out of water, hold your breath to give yourself an idea of how long is too long.

-wet hands/wet fish: preserve the protect coat of slime on fish by avoiding dry hands or a dry net coming in to contact with the fish.



-try not to remove the fish from the water. In some cases it is illegal to remove certain species from the water unless you intend to harvest that fish—know the rules. Specifically in Florida, it is illegal to remove tarpon that are longer than 40 inches and sailfish from the water, even for a photograph, unless you intend to legally harvest that fish. In the case of tarpon, the only legal way to do this would be to apply for a world record for that fish; in the case of sailfish, the aggregate limit per boat per day is one sailfish over 63 inches and any fish removed from the water would be considered harvested. These fish must be photographed in the water next to the boat or, in the case of a shallow water capture, the angler must get in the water with the fish for a photograph.

-when possible, try not to touch the fish during release. Use pliers or one of the many varieties of de-hooking devices to remove the hook while the fish is still in the water.

-do not force hook removal. More damage is done by trying to remove a deep or awkwardly located hook than by leaving it in. In the event that a fish is hooked deeply, simply cut the leader as close to the hook as possible and leave it in. Hooks left in fish rarely hamper their survival and are quickly disgorged or rust out. To facilitate this, use thin wire hooks and pinch barbs.

-if predators are present, transport fish to shallow water or to areas with ample cover before releasing your catch.

-revive fish the correct way. Do NOT push them back and forward in the water. Moving fish backwards in the water column activity removes oxygen from the gills. It literally suffocates the fish. Instead walk, idle, or hold the fish head first into the current. Do not release until fish can control its equilibrium.

Fish fighting:

-fight fish as quickly as possible; be aggressive.

-use the engine to quickly close the gap between angler and fish. Do not follow a hooked fish for more than 5 minutes before changing the angle or increasing the drag pressure. Many fish are fought for too long by following them with minimal pressure.

-adopt the practice of a "catch" occurring when the leader enters the tip of the rod. This eliminates extended fights and harmful hook removal. Get the leader in then cut it as close to the fish as possible

-avoid fishing areas with high concentrations of predators. The avoidance of areas known for predation can ensure the best possible chance for survival for your catch.

Photography:

-much of the improper fish handling occurs as a result of a desire to immortalize a catch. Use restraint—not every fish needs to be photographed.

-if the fish is to be removed from the water for a photograph, keep the hands wet and don't let the fish get dry, but above all else *do it quickly*.



-plan the shot before you take it. Make any necessary (wardrobe or otherwise) adjustments before the fish is removed from the water, ensuring that the time during which the fish is out of the water is kept to a minimum.

-get creative with your photographs to minimize time out of the water. Rather than dry a fish off, get wet and get in the water with it, or hold it by the jaw or bill next to the boat.

This list serves as a guide, and it should be noted that each fisherman bears the responsibility to those who may catch that fish next. Understand that your responsibilities as an angler extend beyond when you let the fish go, and that what you do while fighting, handling and photographing the fish has a large effect on what may happen next. If you familiarize yourself with effective C&R practices and follow these guidelines when you fish, the chances of survival for a fish caught and released is close to 100%.