



**RESPONSIBLE FISHING PRACTICES AND PRINCIPLES  
OF PERSONAL CONSERVATION:  
MAKING A DIFFERENCE, ONE ANGLER AT A TIME**

Fly Fishers International recommends that fly fishers adopt the following fly fishing practices and principles. These principles reflect contemporary angling practices and values and are based upon the most current research regarding conservation minded fishing. It is recognized that these practices are continually evolving and that they should be updated regularly as responsible angling practices change based upon new scientific evidence and evolving social values.

**ANGLING PRACTICES**

Practice Catch and Release

Fly fishers limit their catch and practice catch and release. Releasing fish is a management tool for the development of high-quality fisheries, particularly for heavily fished species. If the fish is undersized or outside of the published slot limit, is a protected species, or you have caught your limit, proper release is mandatory.

Land Fish Quickly

The time you take to land and release your fish and the way you handle it is critical to its survival. A protracted fight lessens the fish's chance of survival upon release.

Minimize the time you play your fish to the extent possible. Your gear and tackle should be strong enough to land the species and size of fish you are fishing for as quickly as possible before they are played out. Bring your fish to hand or the net as quickly as possible.

Keep Fish in the Water

Keep your fish in the water as you remove the hook and revive the fish, if possible. Keeping the fish in the water increases its chance of survival. Leaving a fish in the water gives it oxygen for quicker recovery and also supports the fish's weight, reducing stress on its internal organs and spine.

Use a net, if possible. Nets minimize damage and handling time. A net with a rubber bag is less likely to remove slime from a fish and minimize damage. Never drag a fish onto the bank or shore when landing it.

Proper Handling

Wet your hands before handling the fish. Hold the fish horizontally and support its weight with both hands. Hold your thumb and forefinger or hand around the base of the tail and use your other hand to support it under the belly. Try not to squeeze the fish; if you do you may damage its internal organs. Keep water flowing over the fish's

gills by keeping the fish submerged, and avoid placing your hands over the mouth or gills. Do not “lip” fish and hoist them up as you may damage the fish’s jaw.

#### Removing the Hook

Remove the hook quickly and gently while keeping your fish in the water, if possible. Use hemostats, pliers or hook remover to back the hook out of its entrance hole. If your fish is hooked deeply, cut the line near the hook.

#### Photographing Fish

Photograph the fish in the water or minimize it’s time out of the water. Have both camera and photographer ready to take the picture before the fish is handled. Keep the fish in the water until ready and snap your picture quickly.

Keepemwet ([www.keepemwet.org](http://www.keepemwet.org)) recommends, “If a fish is momentarily taken out of the water, keep it as close to the water as possible and fully submerge it between pictures to give the fish a quick breather. Ideally, let the photographer call the shots - 1, 2, 3...raise the fish....and click.”

#### Reviving and Releasing Fish

Revive the fish carefully before releasing it. If the fish is in a stream hold the fish’s mouth upstream and let water flow over the fish’s gills until revived. Do not move the fish back and forth as water should be moving naturally over the gills. In a lake, move the fish forward in a “figure eight” pattern so that water moves in a natural fashion over the fish’s gills. From a boat, revive a fish by leaving it underwater in the landing net with the opening facing into current until the fish swims free. Release the fish when the fins move in a coordinated fashion and the fish is able to keep itself upright.

#### Water Temperature

Summer temperatures increase stress on fish and make quick and careful catch and release critical to their survival. Avoid fishing for cold water species (ie. trout) when water temperatures near 70 degrees. Some anglers now refrain from fishing if the temperature may reach 70 degrees at any time during the day. Fish are stressed in high temperatures and are less likely to survive when released.

## **FISHING GEAR AND FLIES**

#### Tackle

Use tackle that is matched to the size and strength of the species for which you are fishing. This will enable you to land your fish more quickly and help ensure its survival upon release.

### Hook Removal Devices

Carry and use hemostats, long nose pliers or other hook removal devices to safely and quickly remove the hook from your catch.

### Nets

Use a net when landing fish when possible. It reduces the stress on the fish. Use a net with a rubber bag. Rubber nets are less abrasive than cloth or knotted line and are less like to catch on a fish's gills. Hooks are also less likely to get caught in a rubber net.

### Hooks

Go Barbless! Barbless hooks allow for a quicker release and decrease injury to fish. If you buy flies, make sure the hooks are barbless or pinch the barbs down before fishing. Tie your flies with barbless hooks or compress the barb on the hook with pliers before you tie your fly.

Consider using circle hooks, especially when fishing for saltwater species or fish that are prone to swallowing the hook. Using circle hooks reduces the chance of a fish being hooked deeply.

### Get the Lead Out!

Go lead free and eliminate lead from your fishing. Use lead free materials ( i.e., tungsten) when tying flies and use lead substitutes for weight on your line.

## **PROTECTING THE FISH, WATER AND RIPARIAN ENVIRONMENT**

### Clean, Drain and Dry After Fishing

Stop the spread of invasive species. Clean your waders and boots carefully before moving to new waters. Remove any mud or plant material. Use rubber soles rather than felt soles when possible. Use rubber soles with studs or aluminum bars for safety in waters with slippery river bottoms. Check local fishing regulations to confirm what kind of soles are legal in the water you are fishing.

Thoroughly clean your boat or float tube before moving to new waters. Remove any mud or plants before launching again. Power-wash your boat and trailer before moving to another watershed.

### Pack it Out!

Take all waste materials with you. Don't leave leader and tippet material where it may harm birds. Dispose of leader and tippet materials properly in your fishing vest or bag.

### Protect the Fish

Avoid walking on spawning beds and redds when wading streams. Avoid targeting spawning fish. Catching them may interrupt the spawning process and catching a fish that is already weakened by spawning decreases its chance of survival.

### Protect the Stream

Choose access to fishing spots wisely. Avoid walking on fragile stream banks and help prevent erosion and damage to stream banks. Avoid disturbing fragile plants or wildlife nesting or breeding areas.

## CONSERVATION LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Know the regulations where you are fishing and follow them. Be aware of size limits, seasonal fishing prohibitions and protected species. For example, fishing for bull trout in some areas of the west is prohibited. Know the trespass laws where you are fishing and respect public and private property. Report illegal activity and littering.

### References

*Aquatic Invasive Species.* (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.michigan.gov/invasivespecies>.

Danylchuk, A. *The Release: Fundamentals of fish and the path to responsible angling.* (2015) Retrieved from <http://www.patagonia.com/thecleanestline>.

*Keepemwet Tips.* (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.keepemwet.org>.

*Tips for Catch and Release* (Brochure). (n.d.) Livingston, MT: Fly Fishers International.

*Tips for Responsible Fishing.* (n.d) Retrieved from <http://www.treadlightly.org>.

*Tips for Saltwater Catch and Release* (Brochure). (n.d.) Livingston, MT: Fly Fishers International.

*Use Circle Hooks.* Retrieved from <http://singlehooks.org>.

Approved by FFI Executive Committee, April 23, 2018