

Tips on Releasing Muskies

C – P – R

Catch-Photo-Release

1 Preparation: It is important to have all the proper tools available in your boat before heading out on the water. Tool suggestions would include long-nosed pliers, small bolt cutters, hook-out, jaw spreaders, large landing net and/or cradle, floating ruler, and a camera.



2 Landing a muskie: Maintain constant tension reeling the fish in, keeping the rod tip down to prevent the fish from jumping and potentially throwing the bait. Play the fish to the point of submission, **not to a state of exhaustion.** A “green” muskie or fish that has not been played out can be extremely dangerous if landed too soon.

Lead your fish into the net or a cradle **head first.** Leave the fish in the water where her body is supported.



Next remove the hooks while the fish is still in the net. Use the small bolt cutters to cut any imbedded hooks that cannot be easily removed. **(Rule)** *This hook removal process should be completed within 15 seconds.*

Once the lure and hooks are free and have been placed out of the way, the fish can now be lifted from the landing device for a quick photo. *It is preferable to take photos of the fish held horizontal.* **(Note:** If you are interested in photos for a magazine cover take a quick “vertical” photo-fish remains held horizontal).



Lifting the fish from the water should **never** be done by placing the fingers/thumb in the fish’s eye sockets or squeezing the gills. The proper method would be the use of a tool such as a Boga Grip or placing the fingers **BETWEEN** the gill plate and the gills-sliding your index and middle fingers forward to where the gill plate and gills attach to the cartilage. Press the thumb against the lower jaw and lift gently and firmly. Watch carefully as the fish may begin to shake vigorously.



Be careful so as not to drop the fish. It is important to support the fish with your other hand under the belly, in order to balance the weight.

Measuring can easily be accomplished with a floating ruler back in the water. Another thought would be to apply a vinyl tape measurer to the side of your boat near the water line. Don’t forget to obtain a girth measurement before releasing your fish. The combination of length and girth will give you an estimate of the fish’s weight.

(Formula: Girth x Girth x Length ÷ 800 = Approximate weight).



If necessary, a livewell is a good option for holding your fish, in order to orient your boat to take advantage of sun angles, clean up your boat, put your gear away, or get out your camera, etc. Be sure the livewell is full of water and pumping fresh water.

3 Releasing your fish A water release is the most appropriate method of releasing your fish. In a water release the fish is never removed from the net or cradle. All hook removal, measuring, etc. is done in the water, in the net. This method offers the least amount of stress to any fish. It is also the most difficult release for an inexperienced angler. Practice this release on smaller fish, before attempting on a larger fish.



Once your fish has been removed from the net, hold the fish at the narrow area just above the tail with one hand, supporting the fish with the other hand. Keep the fish in an upright position and gently move the fish back and forth in the water to create a flow of water through it’s gills. This will facilitate the fish’s breathing. Sooner or later the fish will be able to maintain it’s own upright position and then swim off under it’s own power.

Consider the location of where you first caught your fish and compare that location to where your boat may have drifted at the time of release. Never release a muskie over deep water. An exhausted and stressed fish is sometimes unable to adjust to the pressure of deep water.

4 Other considerations when releasing muskies: These suggestions are directed primarily at catching and releasing the larger freshwater species such as muskie and northern pike.

- If you are fishing with live bait, always use a “quick-strike” rig. This generally prevents the fish from ingesting the bait too deep, thus allowing the fish to be released uninjured.
- Large predators can be extremely dangerous, especially when handled by inexperienced anglers. Therefore, it is always better to fish with a partner who can assist you.
- Obtain accurate measurements and photos before releasing your fish. Then consider having a graphite reproduction of your trophy, if you wish to have a mount/memory of your experience.
- Use heavier line and appropriate tackle when fishing for these large fish. It is your responsibility to land this fish quickly and with the least amount of stress.
- Minimize the time out of the water at each stage. If you can hold your breath for 90 seconds this is the maximum time your fish should be out of the water.
- Avoid any contact with the eyes and gills. Keep the eyes and gills from drying out. Keeping the fish in the water reduces the possibility of removing the protective mucous from the fish’s body.
- Do not be too concerned if there is some slight bleeding from the gills-this is not fatal. Just return the fish to the water as quickly as possible.
- The more you know about catch & release, and practice it, the more you will be doing to benefit our fisheries.

5 FINALLY: Go out and Have a Good Time!
Remember

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