

Useful Resources

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

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

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's *Best Fishing Practices*
SAFMC.net/best-fishing-practices

Short Leader Circle Hook Video
TakeMeFishing.org/FishSmart

Florida Sea Grant CatchAndRelease.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 federal 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 in designing gear for the safe release of fish.
- [Research](#) with anglers, industry, scientists and managers to better understand released fish survival.
- [Outreach](#) to get information into the hands of anglers so they can make a difference.

[Supporters include:](#)

- State fisheries agencies
- American Sportfishing Association
- Yamaha Motors
- NOAA Fisheries
- Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation
- Keep America Fishing
- Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies



... For the Future of Fishing

Best Practices for the Safe
Release of Your Fish

**South Atlantic
Red Drum Conservation**



At some point all anglers will be faced with returning fish to the water they are either not allowed to keep – due to size, season, or creel limits – or because they are voluntarily practicing catch-and-release.

Every year, roughly 350 million saltwater fish are caught by recreational anglers in the South Atlantic, with 60% being returned to the water. Improving survival of these fish by even 1% could save 2-3 million fish annually! In freshwater 84% of anglers *voluntarily* release fish they could have legally kept.

Implementing “Best Practices” for releasing fish is the right thing to do and will help ensure healthy fisheries in the future. Catch and release in many fisheries (freshwater 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 the fish.

- 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 (dehooking and 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.

Red Drum Conservation

Studies have shown that using *short leader rigs with circles hooks* can reduce deep hooking and improve the chances of survival for released red drum. This is especially true when fishing in slow or slack water.

To be effective, we recommend:

- a fixed weight or sinker clip less than six inches from the circle hook;
- sinker heavier than 2 ounces;
- a barbless circle hook with the barb either compressed or removed;
- when using either braided or monofilament mainline, it is advisable to add a 5 foot leader of heavier 80lb–100lb monofilament or fluorocarbon between the mainline and terminal rig to minimize abrasion and break offs.
- depending on the tides, heavier weights may be required.

For more detailed instructions, go to www.sportfishingmag.com and search for "how to tie short circle hook rigs"

