

LUNKER HUNTER SPOONPLUGGERS MEETING DECEMBER 3, 2009

“FISH MORTALITY”

Larry Simonsen gave a very informative program on **delayed fish mortality after catch and release**. He emphasized that we need to pay more attention in handling fish if we release them. He had done extensive review of Internet sources, printed out and highlighted important points from many articles, and thoroughly reviewed them with us (likely the lawyer in him made him do it!). He noted from one study that **after many bass tournaments, dead bass appear floating the day after**, and that over ½ stayed on the bottom and did not float up right away. **Spring** tournaments showed a **6% mortality** but **summer** tournaments showed **39% mortality** because of the warmer water (80 degrees). Mortality is **greater with the larger bass** because they are less adaptable. A musky study showed a 5-30% mortality estimate with **longer fights increasing mortality** due to more lactic acid buildup in the fish. Too light equipment used, fishing alone, and high winds can be factors increasing fight time. A walleye study in June showed a mortality rate up to 79%. Warmer water and the fact that walleye are extra sensitive to handling may be a factor here. How the fish are hooked can be a factor also. Walleye are often fished with **live bait** and can be **deeply hooked** and bleeding. Just because a fish swims away doesn't mean it will survive.

If releasing a fish, don't use a net, but remove the hook with the fish in the water by the boat. With any bait or lure, **set the hook as quickly** as possible so the fish doesn't swallow the hook. Lip hooked fish are the least traumatized. Bring in all fish as quickly as possible so they are stronger when released. Buck Perry has always emphasized that **heavy enough rods, reels, and lines** are essential to **landing fish quickly**, and not just playing with them. If you do touch a fish, **wet your hands first**, and don't lay them on a dry carpet or boat floor. Bending down the hook barbs will make for an easier release, especially if the hook is deeper in the fishes mouth. If you must **weigh a fish**, weigh it **in the net**. That will only take a few seconds and the weight of the net can be subtracted to give an accurate weight. **To measure** a big pike or musky fairly accurately, get a flexible **plastic yardstick** that can be placed next to the fish while it is **resting in the water in the net** to get the length. Taking a **picture** of a big pike or musky can be the most traumatic, so **leave the fish swimming in the net** (make sure you have a big enough net!) for a while **to recuperate before you pick it up** for a picture. Next to trout and salmon, pike and musky are probably the most sensitive fish to handling, so make sure camera and everything is ready before the fish is lifted for a picture, which should take less than 30 seconds. Get instructions from more experienced fishermen on how to properly hold and subdue them to reduce trauma. **Adequate tools** can save the lives of many released fish. This includes **large nets, sturdy rods, reels, and lines, long needlenose pliers, hook removers, and jaw spreaders**. This was a thoroughly enjoyable program, and we thank Larry much for giving us this information!

Chase Klinesteker