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## HANDLING AND RELEASING FISH



Largemouth limit released after picture

I believe that **catch and release** should be part of our fishing, especially for Spoonpluggers, since we often catch more fish than most. Yet I do not feel guilty keeping some fish to eat. I wrote a short article about "Better Breeders" stating the fact that big, old fish do not contribute much to the "gene pool" and that younger fish are far more fertile and produce more vigorous fry. Mr. Perry states that if one wishes to keep fish, the big old fish would better be kept, not the younger fish. Proper handling depends on the species, how tough they are and how to safely handle them. **Pike and muskies** should be picked up for photos with one hand grasping under one side of the lower jaw and the other supporting the belly. **Bass** can be lipped, and supporting the belly helps calm them down also. **Walleye** seem similar to pike but may have a tougher skin than pike against damage and handling, although they do not survive as long in the live well, probably due to their greater demand for oxygen.

The only fish I have caught and released after a stringer picture are largemouth and smallmouth bass when **caught from a school in a short period of time** (the **ultimate goal of a Spoonlugger**). Place them in the live well with the **water**

**pump running** constantly. My live well is **dark colored** on the inside and I **keep the top closed** to calm them down (a light colored container or open lid makes fish real spooky!). After the movement is finished, take a metal clip stringer and reach into the live well without opening the lid very far and **lip the fish by feel**, poking the metal clip through the thin membrane of the lower jaw only and secure it on each fish. The camera is readied with the fish still swimming in the livewell. When everything is set, the livewell lid is opened, the **stringer is lifted**, and the **pictures are taken quickly**. They can then be **easily released** into the water by unclipping them. With any fish that are going to be released, the least amount of handling in the shortest amount of time is best. If **length** measurements are desired, a **metal yardstick mounted** on the gunnel of the boat that is easily accessible is best.

**Catfish** seem to be the **toughest** to survive handling, with **carp and drum a close second and third**. Then I would rate **largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, and walleye**. **Northern pike and musky are fairly fragile fish** and can easily damage themselves (and the fisherman) with their thrashing. **Salmon and trout are the most sensitive** and liable to not survive a long fight. One benefit of Spoonplugging is that we **use heavy equipment** and are instructed to **bring fish in fast**. This greatly increases the chances of survival of any fish because they are less **exhausted**. Although fun to use, light lines and flimsy rods almost guarantee that large fish will be completely exhausted by the time they are landed. **Toxins build up in the fishes' tissues from a long fight**, often causing **death later**.

All fish that you will not be taking pictures of and wish to release should be **taken off the hook in the water**. Use a **needle-nose plier** or hook release for that. Released fish **survive** much **better** in **cold water** than in warm. At 80 degrees or above, extreme care should be taken. Sometimes fish are caught from very deep water. **Much over 30 feet deep**, fish can be **damaged because of the pressure change**. If fish show no signs of damage from deep water pressure changes and you **wish to release them, do so right away** and they may survive. If **any bulging eyes or distended bellies are seen**, they are **probably doomed** unless you are familiar with how to "fizz" them. Somewhere in Mr. Perrys' material it says that there are 4 atmospheres of pressure at 35 feet as opposed to one at the surface, a really big change! This pressure change is likely a major factor in fish taking time to move from the deep to the shallows. Once a fish turns belly up, the end may be near. This is usually due to exhaustion and lack of oxygen and is **why when releasing big pike and musky**, many **hold them up and move water through their gills** until they can hopefully swim on their own.

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