

Catch-and-Release in Sportfishing

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As Florida's resident population (about 16 million citizens in 2006) and annual numbers of tourists continues to grow (40+ million), so do pressures on all of our natural resources, including sportfish populations. In 2004, Florida recorded more registered boats (946,000) than any other state, for the first time surpassing Michigan (944,800) and California (895,000), both of which experienced declines in 2004 boating registration, while Florida's registrations increased. Accompanying these large numbers of boats, the numbers of fishermen also continues to climb, so the need for conservation of our fishing resources grows annually in importance.

One of the methods used to conserve the most popular species of fish is known as "catch-and-release." This works best if the fisherman does not land the fish, but leans over the side of the boat, at all times keeping the fish submerged in the water, so the fish may be "de-hooked" and immediately released. It is best to use gloves in this exercise, both to help prevent the fisherman from being injured by sharp teeth or fin-spines on the fish, and to help prevent damage to the protective slime-coating covering the fish's body. If the fish was hooked at a depth greater than about 30 feet, it may be necessary to "vent" the swim-bladder using a hypodermic needle, or a special device, the Florida Sea Grant / Novak / Venting Tool, available in kit-form for repeated usage at :

<http://www.dehooker4ARC.com/FSG%20Vent%20Tool.htm>

The venting tool allows escape of air that may have over-pressurized and inflated the swim-bladder as the fish was reeled to the surface from the bottom. This allows the deflated fish to swim back down to the bottom. Other tools that enhance catch-and-release success include Circle-hooks, and mechanical de-hookers.

Catch-and-release is required by law if the fish is not of "legal size," or if the fish is caught during a "closed season" for that species. Updated State of Florida Recreational Saltwater Fishing Regulations are published twice yearly by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Division of Marine Fisheries Management, in their Newsletter. The free hard-copy Newsletter is widely available at bait and tackle shops, sporting goods retailers, the Brevard County Extension office, and elsewhere. For an online copy, go to:

<http://myfwc.com/marine/lines.htm> (Click on January 2006 "Fishing Regulations," or on "Newsletter")

Regulations concerning fish caught offshore in U.S. South Atlantic Federal Waters may be obtained online at:

<http://www.safmc.net/fishid/SAFMCregs05.pdf>

State and Federal fishing regulations are similar, but should always be checked for any differences so as to avoid unnecessary and possibly expensive rules-violations fines.

Additional information on catch-and-release techniques and education may be obtained online at many websites, including:

http://www.flseagrant.org/program_areas/fisheries/venting/index.htm

http://www.floridamarine.org/features/view_article.asp?id=3907

<http://myfwc.com/marine/lines.htm> (Click on January 2003 Newsletter - see Circle Hooks)

<http://www.mote.org/index.php?src=directory&view=staff&srctype=display&id=443&category>

<http://www.futurefisherman.org/programs/4h.php>

<http://www.catchandreleasefound.org/fishstory6.html>

