

## **Guide to Releasing and Harvesting Fish** **Enjoy the Catch, Preserve the Future**

Harvesting fish is a rewarding part of the fishing experience, providing fresh, delicious meals. By following these guidelines, you can ensure that you are doing so in a sustainable and respectful way.



### **Follow Local Regulations** [Manitoba Fisheries Legislation and Regulations](#)

**Know the Limits:** Always check local fishing regulations for bag limits, size restrictions, and seasonal rules. These regulations are designed to keep fish populations healthy and ensure that everyone gets a fair chance to enjoy fishing.

**Get Your License:** Make sure you have a valid fishing license before harvesting fish. This not only keeps you legal but also supports conservation efforts.

[Hunting and Fishing Licences - Manitoba Licensing](#)

**Be prepared to release fish:** Don't be caught by surprise when you land a fish, anglers who have all their release, measurement, and photography equipment at the ready are far more likely to handle fish quickly and prepare them for a safe release.

**Use the right gear:** Select your rods, reels, fishing line, and terminal tackle based on the species you hope to catch. Extended fight times due to using light gear for the species being fished risks fighting fish to exhaustion where they may not recover.

**Keep them wet:** Using basket-style landing nets with a deep basin allows anglers to keep the fish secured and submerged in water while they prepare for measuring and handling. This is a safe and recommended option for all species whether fishing from a boat or from shore.

**Limit handling time:** Anglers should aim to release fish within 30 seconds of removing them from the water. This requires skill and organization but ultimately improves the health and survival of the fish. Be sure to have your tools and equipment ready for a quick and safe release of your catch.

**Stay out of deep water:** Avoid catching and releasing fishing in depths greater than 30 feet (9 m) when targeting species that are vulnerable to barotrauma (See barotrauma section)

**Watch the weather:** Extreme temperatures in some cases can worsen survival outcomes for released fish.

- High summer water temperatures can cause thermal stress and increased mortality in a variety of species, do your research, and avoid hot temperatures for sensitive species.
- Alternatively, exposing fish caught through the ice to frigid temperatures can lead to freezing injuries that can leave fish impaired after release, handle those fish quickly and try to protect them in a shelter when possible.

## **Helpful tools for catch and release fishing**

- **Longnose pliers**



For hook removal, longnose pliers' aids in removing deep hooks safely and helps with small-mouthed species.

- **Jaw spreaders**



Can be critical for species with high jaw strength such as Northern Pike and Muskellunge, these fish can clamp down their jaws leading to extended hook removal times, jaw spreaders used in conjunction with longnose pliers reduces handling time in this scenario.

- **Deep basket net with coated rubber mesh**



Landing fish in net reduces playing time, secures the fish in a safe environment, and allows you to keep the fish in the water while preparing your release tools or camera.

- **Bump board**



Having a bump board with walls on 2 sides ready can make for fast measurement and control of the fish during handling. Some of these boards float to allow for measuring in the water, but even splashing some water on the board before measurements can help protect a fish's slime layer and ease recovery.

- **Descending device**



Keep one on your boat ready to deploy, you never know when it might save a fish's life!

- **Fish gloves**



These can be very handy at times for handling fish, tightly fitting cotton gloves allow anglers the chance to wet their hands.

## **Barotrauma: What You Need to Know**

Barotrauma is a condition that occurs when fish are captured in deep water and brought to the surface, causing gas in their body to expand and damage their organs. There are two types of swim bladders: open and closed. Open swim bladders can release excess gas, while closed ones cannot. Fish with closed swim bladders such as Walleye, bass, crappie, and perch are more susceptible to barotrauma in depths exceeding 25 ft.

Symptoms include a distended abdomen, bulging eyes, and in severe cases, stomachs being pushed through the throat. Fish with barotrauma are at high risk of immediate or delayed mortality.

To prevent barotrauma, avoid targeting fish in deep water, especially sensitive species.

Descending devices are a popular method to treat barotrauma. These devices attach the fish to a

weight and sink it to the capture depth, allowing the fish to recover at the correct depth. Keep a descending device in your boat and use it quickly and carefully to minimize additional stress on the fish. Remember, prevention is key.

### **Tips to avoid barotrauma during catch-and-release**

- Avoid catch and release fishing for species listed below in waters deeper than 30 ft.
- When fishing for trout species or other species with open swim bladders, avoid extreme depths (i.e. over 70 ft) and be sure to practice responsible catch-and-release practices.
- If you are releasing a fish with severe symptoms of barotrauma, do not fizz or vent the fish! Get a descending device and learn how to use it.
- Do not play fish slower to let them “acclimate,” it is best to fight them quickly and rapidly return the fish to the water while it has more strength to submerge.
- Do not keep fish with barotrauma in a live-well to recover, release or descend them as quickly as possible.

### **Sportfish species *not recommended to target in deeper than 30 feet***

- Percids (Walleye, Sauger, and Yellow Perch)
- Centrarchids (Smallmouth, Largemouth, Bluegill, Black Crappie, Rock Bass)
- Coregonids (Lake Whitefish, cisco)
- Esocids (Northern Pike, muskie)
- Burbot

Check out this Hooked magazine article: [Putting the Pressure on Fish](#)

## **Safe Fish Handling**



**Keep It Clean:** Always handle your catch with clean, wet hands to prevent damage to the fish’s skin and scales, which could spoil the meat.

**Avoid Contamination:** Keep your catch in a cooler or on ice, separated from other items to avoid cross-contamination.

### **Safe and effective ways to hold a fish**

- Safe fish handling is a fundamental skill for all anglers. It is especially important to consider each species unique anatomy may require different holding techniques. The following chart describes safe and effective holds for several of Manitoba’s common fish species.

<b>Hold Type</b>	<b>Species</b>
Thumb inside of mouth applying downward pressure. Index and middle finger on underside of jaw, applying upward pressure with other hand supporting the abdomen.	Smallmouth Bass, Largemouth Bass, Yellow Perch, Black Crappie, Freshwater Drum, Burbot
Hand holding gill-plate with other hand supporting the abdomen.	Northern Pike, Muskellunge, Walleye, Sauger
Both hands gripping from below.	Suckers, Carp, small to medium sized trout
Hand gripping caudal peduncle (tail grab) with other hand supporting the abdomen.	Trout species, Channel Catfish, Large trout
Grip style fish grabber	Most species, but never use these to hold fish vertically, always support the body with the other hand.

## **Tips for Selective Harvesting**

Recreational anglers in Manitoba have many opportunities to harvest fish and bring home a healthy, sustainable food source. The following tips are recommended to improve the ethical dispatch of fish and guarantee food quality in the field:

**Be prepared to dispatch fish:** Ensure you are aware of the regulations for the waters you intend to harvest from, and always keep a measuring device accessible to verify that your catch complies to size regulations.

**Choose Your Catch Wisely:** Focus on keeping fish that are within the recommended size range. Smaller, younger fish should be released to allow them to grow and reproduce. Larger, older fish are important breeders and also produce more offspring.

**Release Endangered Species:** If you catch a species that is considered at risk or threatened, release it immediately, even if it is legal to keep.

**Try something new:** Diversifying your catch can be an enjoyable way to explore new food options, bring more food to the table, and reduce the pressure on our most popular food fish species. Study the species in the waterbody you are fishing, explore new recipes, and experiment with new foods!

## **Humane Harvesting**

**Quick and Humane Dispatch:** If you decide to keep a fish, ensure that it is dispatched quickly and humanely. This minimizes stress and suffering. The most common method is a sharp blow to the head, just above the eyes.

**Immediate Icing:** After dispatching the fish, place it on ice or in a cooler with ice packs as soon as possible. This keeps the fish fresh and prevents the growth of bacteria, ensuring the best quality meat.

## **Filleting Your Fish**



**Use the Right Tools:** A sharp fillet knife is essential. A dull knife can tear the flesh, making the process more difficult and may lead to wasted meat.

### **Step-by-Step Filleting:**

- 1. Make the First Cut:** Start by making a diagonal cut behind the gills down to the backbone.
- 2. Follow the Backbone:** Turn the knife and run it along the backbone towards the tail, keeping the blade as close to the bones as possible.
- 3. Remove the Fillet:** Lift the fillet away from the body, then repeat on the other side.
- 4. Skin the Fillet (Optional):** If you prefer skinless fillets, hold the fillet by the tail and gently slide the knife between the skin and the flesh, pulling the skin taut as you cut.

## **Storing and Preserving**

**Immediate Cooling:** After filleting, keep the fish fillets cold by placing them on ice or refrigerating them as soon as possible. Proper cooling preserves the flavor and texture of the fish.

**Freezing for Later:** If you are not cooking the fish right away, freeze the fillets. Use vacuum-sealed bags or wrap them tightly in plastic wrap and foil to prevent freezer burn.

**Label Your Catch:** When freezing fish, label each package with the date and type of fish. Use the oldest fish first to ensure you are always enjoying the freshest catch.

## **Enjoying Your Harvest**

**Cooking Tips:** Freshly caught fish can be prepared in many delicious ways—grilled, baked, or fried. Consider pairing it with local ingredients like wild rice or fresh vegetables.

Check out these recipes: [Recipes - Fish Forward &](#)

**Sharing the Bounty:** If you have more fish than you can eat, share it with friends, family, or neighbors. It is a great way to build community and celebrate your successful day on the water.

## **Preserve and Respect the Environment**

**Leave No Trace:** When you are done for the day, make sure to clean up all fishing gear, bait, and any waste. Leaving the environment as you found it helps protect the ecosystem for future generations.

**Use Fish Parts Wisely:** If you are cleaning fish near the water, dispose of the remains responsibly. Some anglers use the scraps as fertilizer in their gardens, while others return them to the water where it is legal to do so.

**Keep in mind:** Harvesting fish is not just about catching dinner—it is about doing so responsibly. By following these tips, you help ensure that Manitoba's waters remain full of fish for future anglers, while also enjoying some of the best-tasting meals you will ever have.

**Happy fishing!**