



Muskies Canada Inc.

Muskie Catch and Release Tips

The ability of future generations to enjoy species of fish like the muskellunge is based in part, on catch and release fishing today. The quality of the fishery depends on how carefully anglers release their fish. Over the years, a series of generally accepted handling procedures and suggestions have been developed by the catch and release community. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

Match the tackle to the fish you're after. For muskies, this means heavy action rods and reels, strong line, and high quality snaps, swivels, split rings, leaders, and hooks. This will allow you to land your fish in a reasonable amount of time without putting undue stress on the fish. It will also minimize the chance of a muskie breaking off and swimming away with your favorite lure stuck in its mouth.

Have your landing equipment ready. Recommended landing methods include the use of a large Muskie net or a cradle. The hand landing method is recommended only for the very experienced, and even then, accidents can still happen. (*Muskies have very sharp teeth and can do quite a bit of damage to misplaced hands and fingers, not to mention all those big treble hooks!*)

Have your release tools ready and within easy reach. Must haves include: needle-nose pliers (*for hook removal*), jaw spreaders, and small compound bolt cutters (*for cutting hooks if deeply embedded, or hooked near sensitive areas like the eyes, gills, or undersides*). Additionally, you should carry a seamstress' measuring tape (*for getting those length and girth measurements*), and a camera (*for those necessary photo's*).

Keep your landing area ready. Keep the floor of your boat clear of clutter and keep loose hooks and lures in a tackle box, not on the floor or seat. This will help to avoid many potential accidents as well as give you plenty of room to land that trophy fish!

Practice proper release and resuscitation techniques. Always remember to minimize "out of water" time. If possible, remove the hooks and take your measurements while the fish is still in the water. Always revive the fish before letting it go. Sometimes it's almost instantaneous, and sometimes revival can take up to 20 minutes or more ... so be patient. Hold the fish by the tail section before the caudal fin with one hand, while using your other hand to gently balance the fish under its belly behind the pectoral fins. This gives the fish additional support. Gently roll the fish from side to side to ensure that the gill covers are moving softly. This helps force water through its gills and increase oxygen intake. When the fish is strong enough to wriggle away and stay upright, it's a candidate for successful release. If the fish is having problems maintaining its balance after release, the revival process should be continued.

Summer release considerations. During midsummer on some waterbodies, particularly shallow areas, water temperatures can reach the high 70's to low 80's. With water temperatures this high, muskies are subject to high rates of mortality due to angling stress. In these situations avoid muskie angling if you possibly can. Otherwise, reduce stress factors by reducing "fight time" to the absolute minimum. Also, the captured muskie should not be boated, practice water release and handling only, photograph the fish in the water, ensure proper resuscitation, and stay with the fish until it's fully recovered.

Never lift a muskie vertically by its jaw. This has the potential of causing severe injury to the fish especially if it's a big one. When lifting a muskie for a photo or any other reason, always do so horizontally using your other hand to support it under its belly. Also, never ever hold any fish by its eye sockets. This definitely causes damage to the fish.

Bleeding and muskie. During the landing process, you may sometimes note a little blood emerging from the gill area. These slight injuries are not usually fatal to the fish and they should still be released. It is also fairly common with muskie to note bleeding from the fins and tail. The cause of this bleeding is not fully understood, however it doesn't seem to have any adverse effects on the fish and the muskie should still be released. Generally, when fish are bleeding from the gills, the angler must make a value judgement as to whether it's worthwhile releasing the fish. If the fish is bleeding profusely, or arterial blood (*pulsating*) is observed, then the fish should be kept *only if it is within the minimum size limit*. By law you must release the fish if it's not minimum size regardless of its survival prospects.

Consider fishing barbless. Removing or reducing the barbs on the hooks on your muskie lures has several advantages. It makes removal of the hooks from the fish much easier. And, in the event of an accident, it makes removal of those giant hooks out of you much easier!

Consider a fiberglass reproduction. If you catch a trophy sized fish, instead of keeping it to get mounted, consider releasing it and getting a fiberglass reproduction instead. Most taxidermists produce these replicas and their quality is absolutely stunning! All you need are the length and girth measurements, and a picture of the fish and they can produce a beautiful reproduction out of fiberglass. Unlike skin mounts, a fiberglass replica will last "forever" and you'll get the chance to catch the fish again in the future. Muskies are too valuable to have the joy of catching them just once.

Finally, if you're not sure what to do, don't be afraid to ask. You can get additional information from other experienced anglers, through fishing magazines and books, and on the Internet. Now that you have joined **Muskies Canada** not only will you learn about muskie fishing and catch and release, but you'll get to meet a great bunch of people who share your interest in this wonderful resource. Take full advantage of your new membership and attend the Chapter meetings, also visit our web site at www.muskiescanada.ca.

– Tight lines and good luck!!!

