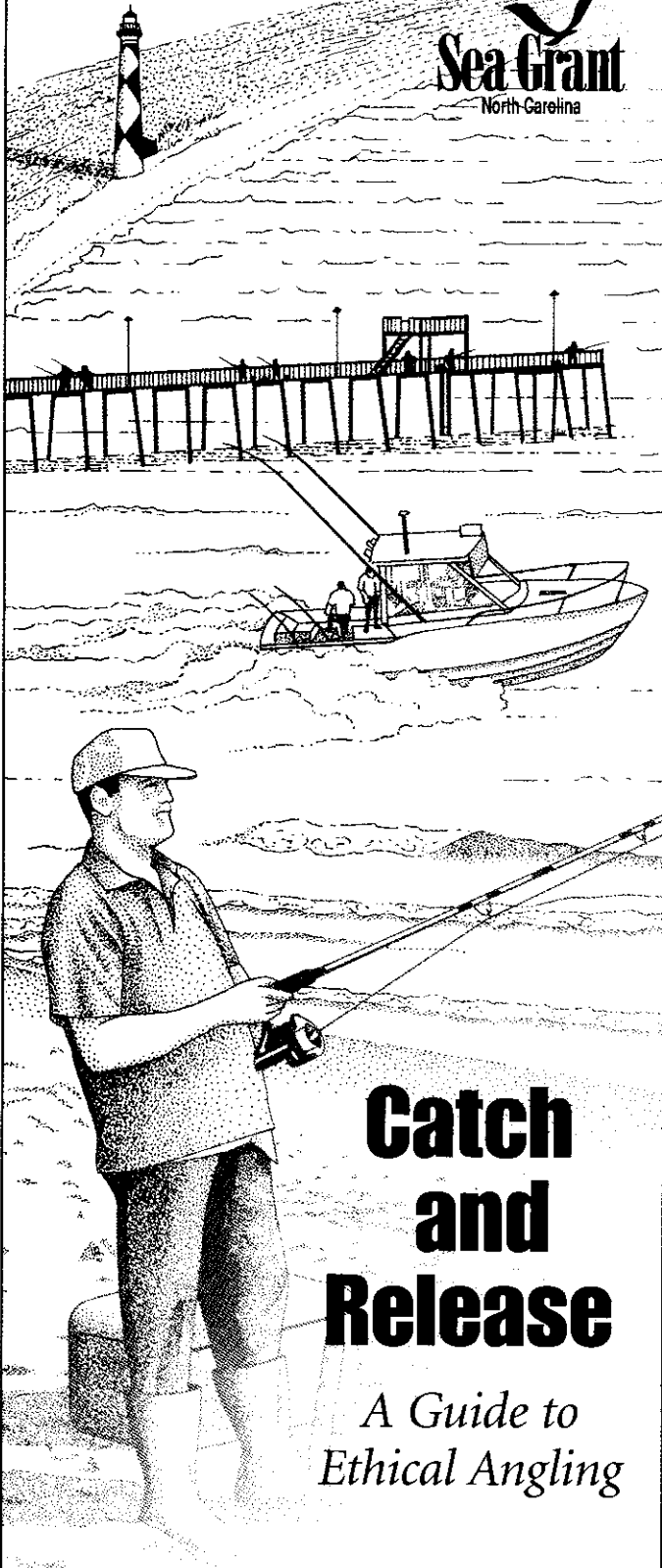


  
**Sea Grant**  
North Carolina



# Catch and Release

*A Guide to  
Ethical Angling*

*"Catch and release is one of the ethical angling practices that helps reduce waste while fishing for fun. It has made its way from freshwater streams to marine waters, where many sportfishing enthusiasts are concerned about preserving saltwater fisheries stocks."*

—Preston Pate, director,  
North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries

### Why Ethical Angling?

The idea of ethical fishing practices developed in response to stricter fishing regulations and concern over depressed fish stocks in recent years.

Ethical angling advocates

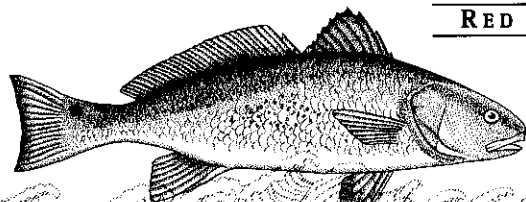
- know and abide by regulations;
- encourage the protection of fish stocks and their habitat;
- emphasize fish conservation and environmental stewardship;
- respect private property and the rights of all recreational users of natural resources;
- help manage fish stocks for future generations; and
- promote the use of catch and release as a way to enhance saltwater fisheries.

### Why Catch and Release?

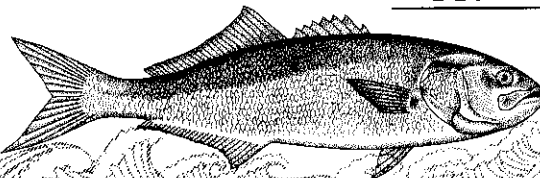
- Done promptly and properly, and with the right equipment, fish sustain minimal injury and stress — and swim away for another day and another fish story.
- Regulations dictate season, size and daily bag limits for nearly all species. The fish don't know the rules, and even the most experienced angler can't predict or control what will "take the bait."
- Several sport fishing tournaments use various and innovative means to verify their catches without bringing the fish to the docks.

### What Species are good candidates?

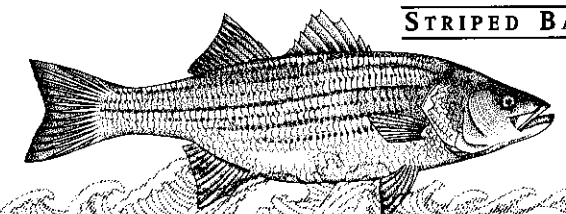
Sport fishing groups promote catch and release for species such as red drum, the North Carolina state saltwater fish, which carries a daily bag limit and an 18- to 27-inch size restriction. Catch and release methods work with other species including tuna, king mackerel, striped bass and bluefish.



RED DRUM



BLUEFISH



STRIPED BASS

### Catch and Release Practices

Here are some tips on the responsible use of proper catch and release methods to help enhance popular recreational saltwater fisheries.

- Know and abide by Division of Marine Fisheries rules for season, size and daily bag limits for recreational fish species.
- Match your gear to the size of the fish. The lighter the tackle, the longer it takes to get a fish to the boat. The harder and longer a fish fights, the less chance it has to survive after being released.
- Use circle hooks. Studies show fish are less likely to swallow circle hooks than the traditional J hooks. The circle hook sets in the jaw, not the gut.
- Consider bending down barbs on circles hooks for easier removal.



Circle hooks  
with barbs  
bent down.

### Follow these catch and release techniques:

- Once the fish takes the bait with a circle hook, don't jerk the line to set the hook.
- Circle hooks will slide into the corner of the fish's mouth as it swims away.
- Reel fish in and scoop the fish into a coated landing net.
- Keep fish immersed in water while removing the hook.
- Handle the fish as little as possible.
- Keep hands away from gills.
- Use dehooking tools to reduce stress on the fish.
- Cradle the fish under its belly and gently lower it in water to restore breathing.
- Release the fish into the water.

*If hook is difficult to remove, cut leaders close to the mouth and release the fish. Hooks made of metals other than stainless steel will deteriorate and fall away in time.*

### Benefits of Catch and Release

- Reduces recreational fishing pressure on stocks;
- Gives undersized or immature fish a second chance to reach sexual maturity;
- Ensures that sexually mature fish will have opportunities to spawn;
- Makes a difference in the conservation and management of fish populations;
- Preserves fish for the future by "limiting kill" instead of "killing the limit;"
- Provides a good conservation model for children;
- Expands economic horizon for charter fishing by targeting catch and release anglers in addition to "meat fishers;"
- Extends the fun of each fishing trip beyond the legal "take" limit; and
- It's just the right thing to do.

### The Next Step: Catch-Tag-Release

Catch-tag-release programs are important to the saltwater angling community's conservation ethic. The effort

- Gives recreational anglers a chance to contribute to scientific understanding of fisheries stocks;
- Documents growth, longevity, movement and migration patterns of fish;
- Identifies species' dependency on critical habitats or water areas;
- Documents post-release survival of fish;
- Contributes to fisheries management strategies; and
- Gives recognition to model ethical anglers.

*"The days are gone when you can catch all you want. Those who do so are looked down upon as archaic. It's important that we become ethical anglers and do our part in protecting fisheries for future generations."*

—Jim Bahen, North Carolina Sea Grant,  
recreational fishing specialist

## *The Pledge of an* **ETHICAL ANGLER**

North Carolina Sea Grant is dedicated to the wise use of coastal and marine resources, including the bounty of saltwater fisheries.

To protect and preserve these resources, Sea Grant encourages the adoption of responsible and ethical recreational fishing practices.

Consider taking the Sea Grant Pledge of the Ethical Angler:

- "As a good steward and an ethical angler, I will
- S**ave fish for the future by practicing conservation of this precious resource.
- E**mphasize catch and release techniques.
- A**dopt the use of circle hooks.
- G**ain knowledge about – and abide by – N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries season, size and catch regulations.
- R**espect and protect water and fish habitat quality.
- A**lways match gear to the size of the fish to decrease "fight" time and increase fish survival.
- N**ever take more than I can use.
- T**each fellow anglers about fishing ethics."

*For information about recreational fishing in North Carolina, contact Jim Bahen, Sea Grant recreational fishing specialist, 910/962-2492.*



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