

CATCH & RELEASE REQUIREMENTS

{Bonefish Tarpon Trust}

I. FISH HANDLING

If you handle a fish, make sure you use clean, wet hands. Dry hands or hands covered in sunscreen are much more likely to remove fish slime and cause infections.

Support the fish beneath the head and belly. Don't hold fish with one hand!

Minimize Air Exposure. Bonefish exposed to air for more than 15 seconds are six-time more likely to die post-release

Don't use mechanical lip-gripping devices on active fish. They can cause serious jaw injuries. If you need to weigh a fish, use a cradle.

Keep fingers away from the fish's gills. Damaged gills make it very hard for a fish to breathe.

Keep tarpon over 40" fork length in the water. Research has shown that fish over 40" are susceptible to handling, which is why Florida passed a law that they must remain in the water.

Always use barbless hooks. This reduces the amount of handling needed to remove the hook, and makes it less likely the hook will get stuck.

When fishing with bait, use circle hooks.

If the fish swallows the hook or fly, cut the line as close to the hook as possible. This causes less damage than removing a deeply set hook. Most fish are able to reject the hook.

II. FIGHT TIME

Keep the fight short, but not TOO short. Long fight times result in exhausted fish, which are more vulnerable to predators. A fish reeled in too quickly is more likely to thrash around and potentially injure itself.

Use tackle that matches the fish and conditions. If you use too light a rod, you will have a hard time landing fish in an appropriate amount of time.

If a fish loses equilibrium (rolls over or goes nose down) revive it until it can swim upright. Reduce the fight time on future fish.

When reviving a fish, be sure water passes over the gills from front to back. Moving a fish backwards doesn't allow it to breathe. Always move fish forward (moving them in circles works well).

High water temperatures may negatively impact post-release survival. Reduce fight and handling time in warmer water.

III. PREDATORS

If predators are abundant in an area, move to another fishing location. If you have caught a fish and potential predators are nearby, consider using a circulating live-well to move fish to a safer release location.