



CHAPTER 11

Fish On! (Catch-and-release or catch-and-keep)

Now you know the equipment needed to go ice fishing, the habitat in the lake preferred by the fish you're seeking, how to identify your catch and, of course, how to fish safely. However, we still need to talk about what to do once you have reeled in your catch.

The first decision you need to make is whether or not you are going to keep your catch. If you decide to release your fish so that one day you might come back and catch it again, you need to know some basic catch-and-release principles.

To Release A Fish:

- 1) Get the fish up to the edge of your hole as soon as possible. That fish is fighting for its life and you do not want to wear it down too much.
- 2) Keep the fish in the water.
- 3) Remove any gloves and wet your hands. Fish are covered with slime which protects them from infections, aids them in escaping from predators, and helps them slide through the water easier. Your gloves or dry hand can harm fish by removing the slime layer.

- 4) When holding the fish keep your hands away from the gills. Fish use their gills to breath and cannot get oxygen from the air. Gills are bright red because their cell walls are so thin, and any contact with the gills can harm the fish.
- 5) Handle the fish gently. If you want to hold the fish up for a picture or to show your friend, support the entire fish with wet hands.
- 6) Return the fish to the water as soon as possible. As a rule of thumb, you should hold your breath when you pull the fish out of the water – this is what the fish is having to do – then breathe again when you return the fish to the water. This way you realize what the fish is going through.
- 7) Back the hook out of the fish's mouth. Do not just pull on the hook, this will only rip the mouth, scarring the fish forever. Be gentle as possible, and back the hook out.
- 8) Cut your line if the fish is deeply hooked and the hook cannot be safely removed.
- 9) Support the fish upright in the water gently moving the fish back and forth, allowing water to flow across the gills until the fish swims away under its own power.

What if you want to release a fish, but it is the biggest fish you have ever caught and you want to have a replica made? What should you do?

Most **taxidermists** no longer require the actual fish to make a replica. They will want you to take many pictures of the fish, and collect many measurements. This is why many anglers keep a

camera, flexible tape measure, pen or pencil, and log or journal to record this information. You will want to record the overall length and girth in multiple spots on the fish. You may have to put the fish back into the water in-between taking pictures and recording length and girths to keep the fish alive and healthy.

To encourage anglers to release the trophies they catch, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Sport Fish, has created the **Alaska Trophy Angler Catch and Release Program**.

Information on this program can be found in the Alaska Sport Fishing Regulations Summary.



Whether you decide to practice catch-and-release or catch-and-keep, hopefully you will enjoy getting outside and ice fishing.

Possible extension activities:

- 1) (Skill Exercise) Take a fake fish and practice proper holding and catch-and-release techniques.
- 2) (Final Exercise) Go ice fishing and put together all the skills learned.