

Circle Hooks, Plugs, and Maximizing Safe Release

Why fish circle hooks?

To conserve fisheries, whether you practice catch-and-release fishing or, by law, you are required to release a non-legal fish. Using a circle hook instead of a J-hook substantially decreases the mortality rate.

How are circle hooks different from J-hooks?

A circle hook point is turned inward. This design often hooks fish in the lip or jaw, rather than the gills, throat or stomach where dehooking is more problematic and increases the chance of fatal injury.

Are circle hooks harder to fish?

Not harder, just different. Because of the design, you do **not** need to “set” a circle hook, as you would a J-hook. You simply let the fish take the bait, and then reel in. Use circle hooks without offset points and that are sized to the type of bait you are using. Ask your tackle shop for guidance. Have a pair of long nose pliers available to remove the hook.

What about plugs?

Adequately sized plugs are seldom swallowed, so switching to circle hooks is not an issue. But, you might consider replacing the treble hooks with singles. You may miss some fish, but dehooking will be easier and safer.

How do I maximize the survival of a fish if I choose to release it?

Warm conditions, how long a fish is played, and the length of time a fish is out of water are all survival factors. If it takes you longer to release a fish than the amount of time that you can hold your breath, the fish is in trouble. Dropping them off high bridges, jetties, and rocks, potentially causing internal damage, does not help. If possible, support and hold the fish in the water until it swims away. Better yet, leave it in the water when removing the hook. Filing or pinching barbs will certainly reduce the amount of time that is required to release a fish. Check out the CCA NH brochure for more information on mortality rates. (insert link)