

Redfish Catch, Hold and Release Best Management Practices

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Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

The following guidelines outline voluntary and mandatory management practices for tournament anglers and organizers to use when catching, holding, and releasing redfish during tournaments. These guidelines increase chances of survival of fish caught by hook and line.

Catch and Release

- Avoid using stainless hooks. These hooks do not rust out in the event that a fish is gut hooked and you have to cut the line.

- Land your fish quickly.

- If you are not placing your fish in a live well, leave your fish in the water during release.

- Use a de-hooking device to remove hooks.

Using needle-nose pliers may injure a fish's mouth.

- If the fish is gut hooked, cut the line and do not attempt to remove the hook.

- When releasing a fish that has been held in a live well, release the fish headfirst. Revive fish by moving them in a forward direction (not back and forth) in the water to promote water flow over the gills.

Handling

Avoid picking up fish by the lip or lower jaw or holding the fish vertically.

Avoid holding a fish by its gill plate or touching its gills.

Minimize the amount of time that you handle a fish to reduce stress. Release or place your fish in a live well as quickly as possible.

Always handle fish with bare wet hands and not

gloves, towels, etc. to avoid removing a fish's slime. The slime coating protects the fish from disease.

Live Wells

Non-recirculating live wells should be aerated continuously with air (bubble) stones.

Never fill your live wells in areas of poor water quality (e.g. areas with high water temperatures, muddy areas, etc.). Avoid filling your live well near marinas and boat docks.

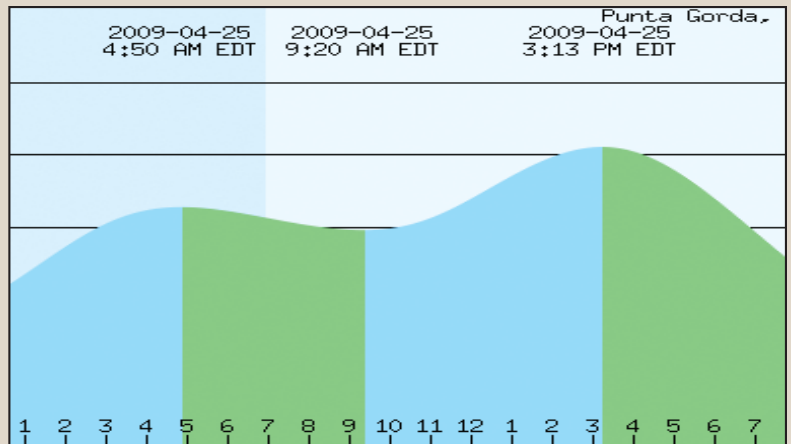
Use large live wells. State regulations require a minimum live well size of 18 gallons. However, a minimum live well size of 25 gallons is recommended. Larger live wells reduce bruising and damage to fins, allow more room for fish to move around, and have more water for the dilution of waste products.

The water temperature in the live well should be maintained as close to the temperature of the water body from where the fish was harvested. Chilling live well water or allowing live well water to overheat may cause thermal shock if the live well water temperature varies more than 5 degrees Fahrenheit from the water body that the fish was harvested from.

Catch Bags

Some tournament formats require the use of catch bags to transport redfish for measuring and weigh-in. Redfish Tournament Exemption Permits require that only one redfish may be transported in a catch bag at a time. It is important when transporting redfish with a catch bag, the bag should be opened to allow aerated water that is maintained at the appropriate temperature to flow through as much as possible.

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