

Protecting Your Lake Sundance Recreational Trout Fishery

Proper Catch and Release Methods

Written by Kevin L. Egan

Lake Sundance's Board of Directors and Lake Management Staff are committed to providing the highest quality recreation experience that is possible. To this end, we have been steadily making improvements to our recreational rainbow trout fishery. Our changes to date have been very well received.

These changes consist of selecting and stocking a larger sized rainbow trout while reducing the catch limit per household. Our experience has shown that people prefer to catch and if so chose to retain one larger trout than a few smaller trout. With the reduced household limit we are effectively delaying the harvest and retaining more trout in the lake such that more people can enjoy the added recreational angling benefits these changes can offer. The majority of people commenting on the new regulations agree that the lake's trout fishery should be managed primarily for the recreational fishing benefits for a larger number of homes as opposed to a "meat fishery" for a selected few. That being said our goal is still to manage the lake as a put and take fishery but with preventative measures and regulations against over harvest.

We are also stocking the larger sized rainbow trout to encourage the larger predaceous rainbow trout to feed on the abundant lake chub and fathead minnows inhabiting our lake as well as preying on the damaging and illegally introduced yellow perch. Perch eat the same food as trout and negatively impact their growth and survival rates. With that in mind we strongly encourage the catch and release of larger trout while still providing for households that appreciate the occasional opportunity to take a trout home. We have seen the same trout caught repeatedly over the summer, thereby providing many enjoyable outing with the children, friends or just a relaxing outing by yourself. Our records show that a large number of people are practicing catch and release and therefore it is prudent that we post the following information regarding proper catch and release methods.

Many important factors come into effect when looking to successfully release a rainbow trout. These include:

- 1) Trout need to breath - Rainbow trout, like all other animals, fish and birds, need oxygen to survive. The obvious difference between them is that fish get their oxygen from the water and not from the air. The longer a trout stays out of water the more likely brain damage will occur. If a trout is released but sinks to the bottom, wait a few minutes then try and poke the trout with a net or paddle or rod tip. Often you can get them to try and swim again which is probably their last chance to survive. They sink to the bottom because they were not revived long enough to remove lactic acid from their muscles. Their muscles are frozen and they cannot breath in this state. One rule of thumb is not to remove the trout from the water for more than 30 seconds. Another rule of thumb is to take a deep breath, remove the trout from the water, and when the average person needs to take a breath...so does the trout. Typically anything over 1 minute out of the water is really, really bad for the trout.
- 2) Trout can freeze - Another rule of thumb is to never bring the trout onto the beach or into a boat or onto the ice. Get the trout back into the water as soon as possible. During ice-over, when air temps are below freezing, rainbow trout should never be removed from water. Exposed to freezing air, their gills freeze almost instantly and are irreparably damaged. Freezing temperatures and ice can also cause frostbite or general tissue damage.
- 3) Taking a Safe Photo - When taking a photo of your prized catch before releasing, keep the trout in the water at all times with it's gills fully under water (preferably in a catch and release net) and have the camera and photographer ready to go. A photo of a trout on the shore, ice or boat is damaging to the trout prior to release. Quickly lift the trout up by holding with one hand around the narrow area in front of the tail and cradling the head with your other hand. Cradle the head by holding the trout just slightly behind the two pectoral fins (on the bottom of the trout just behind the gills). Then quickly release the trout back to the water but taking care to make sure it is properly revived before letting go. Be careful not to raise the trout off the ground or bottom of the boat to far as any falls can damage or kill the trout.

- 4) Using a Good Net Saves Trout - Always use a net and preferably a catch and release style net. These are often made of rubber coated mesh or other soft and small mesh. Both types of net should be wetted immediately prior to actually capturing the trout. This is important as trout have a slime coating that protects their skin from contracting diseases. Actually touching the trout as little as possible can go a long way to maintaining a great fishery. When using a net you can keep the trout in the water longer and have better control. You should not allow the trout to contact the bottom of a boat or the ground as impact damage can occur as well as loss of protective slime.
- 5) Don't Squeeze Trout - Never put your fingers in the fish's gills or eyes, squeeze the gills or the trout in general. Your hands can exert a lot of pressure and can easily rupture or damage the internal organs or gills. The gills are super sensitive and consist of fine filaments that filter oxygen out of the water and are essential for the trout's survival.
- 6) Never release a bleeding trout - If you have damaged a trout to the point they are bleeding noticeably from the gills or mouth, don't waste the trout. Consider that your one trout limit and finish fishing for the day. A trout does not have a lot of blood in them. Serious blood loss is almost always fatal.
- 7) Bait Kills - Seriously consider not using bait. Studies show that bait fishermen can kill upwards of 40% of the trout they release due to deep hooking in the gills and/or stomach. Also it often takes significantly longer time to remove a hook from a deeply hooked trout, which will deprive the trout of oxygen and then they will suffer brain damage. You may see many people catching and releasing trout that are not using any bait at all. Many of them will help fellow catch and release fishermen...and the added benefit is making a new friend. Fishing buddies are often friends for life!
- 8) Use Proper Gear - Consider fighting the trout quicker using the appropriate gear. Playing any trout for more than a minute or so can cause their body and muscles to become full of lactic acid. The longer you fight the trout, the more and more lactic acid builds up. This is internal poison for the trout and causes their muscles to freeze and in effect releasing a trout at this point means certain death. The trout may appear to swim away but often they will just eventually sink and die.

Make sure the trout has plenty of energy to swim away and let them go in shallow water just in case.

- 9) Practice Proper Release - Carefully release a trout by holding them for a period of time in a net or in the shallows while gently moving them back and forth to pass water over their gills. The time required is directly related to the water temperature and the length of time you fought the trout for. The warmer the water the longer you need to take to revive the trout. This holds true for the longer you take to fight the trout and also for most larger trout. In addition, newly stocked trout have less endurance after initial stocking and often require more care when releasing. When the trout is fully revived it will struggle to get free. A good rule of thumb is to let the trout go the third time it struggles to get free.

- 10) Never cull trout - This means releasing a trout from a stringer and putting a bigger trout in its place. If fishing for fun, release your trout. If fishing for a meal, stop fishing once you have retained a trout. Should you catch and seriously injure the next trout...you will feel bad and also take away the chance for yourself, a child or fellow resident to catch that trout later. Retaining a second trout regardless of reason such as serious injury is also against the regulations and would result in a suspension.

- 11) Barbless Saves Trout - Use barbless hooks and remove hooks quickly. Barbless hooks come out much more easily and will save the trout, your clothing, your hands from more serious damage should you accidentally hook yourself. If a trout swallows a hook too deep, you can quickly cut the line and release the trout. Chances are that the trout will survive. You should not try to remove a difficult to remove hook first but rather you must make this determination to cut the line first and quickly act on that. Remember not to keep trout out of the water for more than 30 seconds when removing a hook. Keeping the trout in a net under the water and using forceps or pliers to gently remove the hook is preferred.

- 12) Watch for Stress - Carefully gauge the trout's stress level and condition prior to release. Many of the above noted concerns can also be related to stress. As such one rule of thumb is to see if the trout's eyes are moving as the trout moves from side to side. If the eyes remain fixed it could be a sign of stress and more care should be taken before releasing. If the trout does not look well after 5-10

minutes and will probably die, you can exercise your right to retain your one trout a day, 6 per month, 24 per year limit. If you have caught a trout and killed it and then injured another, it is a shame as you cannot keep it. You must return it to the water. It is strongly recommended that you do not continue fishing after killing a trout. Failure to abide by the limits will result in a penalty for keeping over your limit. The penalty is a minimum of 6 months to a maximum of 1 year suspension from fishing for the first infraction, two year suspension for the second infraction and life time ban for the third infraction. Keeping over the limit is deemed theft as we have no natural spawning of trout in Lake Sundance and all members share in the cost of maintaining the lake including such things as trout stocking.

- 13) Teach by Example - Help others by directing them to this article on the website or giving polite advice. We should all be custodians of this recreational fishery and do our best to watch for improper releasing techniques and for illegal fishing such as keeping over the limit or culling. Also remember there is NO LIMIT on the great tasting perch in our lake. They can often be readily caught both in the Summer and Winter.

In summary the Board of Directors and the Lake Staff wish you the very best of fishing seasons. We trust you will value the fishery and help promote it's continued improvement through your own actions and the positive example you are setting for others in the process. One of the most exciting things a parent or grandparent can be a part of is the thrill of outdoor recreational angling. If you see any problems or issues with respect to the rules or the fishery in general, please feel free to pass your comments along to the office.

Sincerely,

Kevin L. Egan
Director, Sundance Lake Residents Association