

LAKE TROUT – Catch and Release Techniques

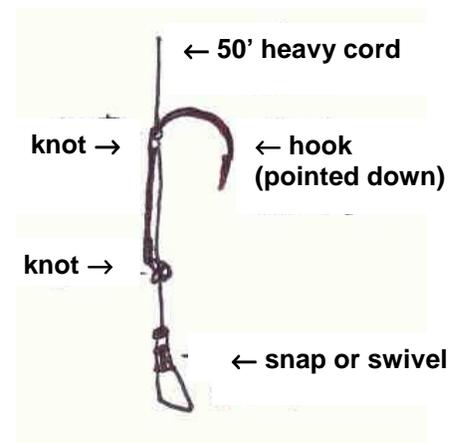
- Plan ahead. Have pliers, cameras, etc. ready to release fish quickly.
- Do not fight fish to exhaustion.
- Bring fish up more slowly the last 30 feet to let them “burp”.
- Protect the fish’s slime coating and fins. Use soft nylon or rubber mesh nets. Do not let the fish bounce on carpeting, etc. Wet your hands. Avoid squeezing the gills or soft organs behind the gills.
- Consider using single hooks and barbless hooks to make it easier to unhook fish.
- If you take a picture, hold the fish horizontally with both hands to support internal organs.
- Hold exhausted fish upright in the water until they start to struggle. Gently move them forwards and backwards to help them breathe.
- If a fish is bleeding and is legal, keep it. If it is bleeding and is not legal, turn it loose, many of them will survive. On deeply hooked fish, clip the leader and leave the hook in the fish.

“Bloated” Fish Release Techniques (In Order of Preference)

A small percentage of lake trout (and other fish) from deep water can’t vent their air bladder and they “bloat” so they have trouble diving back to depth. Following are some techniques to successfully release these fish and improve their chance of survival.

1. Leave the fish in the water. Grab the shank of the hook with pliers, reverse the angle and pop the hook out. Let the fish dive on its own. Barbless hooks will help with the removal.
2. Hold the fish vertically with both hands and vigorously plunge it headfirst into the water.
3. Hold the fish horizontally and gently squeeze from the vent forward. Only go halfway up the belly and do not force if the fish can’t “burp”.
4. Use a 50-foot length of heavy cord or Mason line. An old reel on a sawed-off reel handle will help control and retrieve the line. Tie a large snap swivel on the end to change weights; a large fish may take 2-3 pounds of weight to sink. Tie in several sized hooks inline just above the weights; the rounded bend of an octopus hook fits a fish jaw well. Tie knots at the eye and bend of the hook with the hook pointing down. Blunt the point and pinch the barb down.

To use, fit a hook over the lower jaw of the fish and release, letting the weight of the fish freefall to the end of the cord. The change in water pressure will recompress the fish. Let the fish shake free or give a tug to pop the hook free.



The materials described only cost a few dollars and are easy to obtain and store. It is essential to perform this procedure quickly to avoid damage to internal organs. We do not recommend “fizzing” a fish by puncturing the air bladder. Although this method might work, there is too much danger of puncturing internal organs and causing infection. The hook method is quick, effective, and safest for fish. If you must fizz as an emergency measure, come in from the side rather than the belly where the gut is.

Trout released by the above methods have survived for years to grow larger and provide more thrills for anglers. Please do your part to conserve these precious trophy trout. Thank you.