

THE BENEFIT OF CATCH & RELEASE FISHERIES

The validity of “Catch & Release” fisheries has been debated for some time with varied opinions on the social and economic value of the practice and concerns regarding the impact on threatened fish stocks. C&R has been practiced, particularly in the Recreational steelhead fishery for many years, even prior to mandatory release of wild fish. Many anglers revere steelhead as the premier B.C. game fish deserving of special treatment including careful release to ensure survival.

Critics may suggest this practice puts additional stress on the fish despite documented studies demonstrating a mortality rate of less than 5% on released fish. The critical factor is proper C&R technique, including keeping the fish in the water and minimizing handling. Many organizations continue to promote safe handling and release of non-targeted stocks.

With increasing concerns for conservation of many salmon and steelhead stocks, resulting in total Public fisheries closures, calls for selective fishing methods combined with careful release of any non-targeted species has been extensively promoted through various advisory processes including the Sports Fish Advisory Board. Science based documented evidence has demonstrated that specific gear types combined with proper C&R has extremely low mortality compared to other fisheries while providing critical recreational opportunity.

Many groups are asking for increased enhancement and instituting “Marked Selective Fisheries” which is currently under review by DFO as an option providing opportunity for a severely depressed Public fishery. Obviously careful release of wild fish is a crucial part of this initiative, demonstrating the requirement of angler buy in toward correct catch & release technique.

The tremendous social and economic loss of Public fisheries demands that consideration of all options for retaining some opportunity must be a priority. We cannot accept total closures when other viable alternatives such as C&R are available. The documented closures of fishery dependent businesses is a sad reality. The Public Fishery generates 1.1 billion dollars a year in revenues & provides 9,000 jobs province wide. The social value is priceless, highlighted this year by the recognition of the safe healthy benefit of fishing in these current Covid-19 restrictions.

The Public Fishery remains committed to Conservation as the #1 priority. We will continue to support all science based efforts to rebuild stocks but demand that total closures be a last resort after all other options such as “Catch & Release” are carefully considered.

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