

VA DWR - Catch and Release Best Practices

Whether you are fishing for inland reservoir striped bass or the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries for anadromous striped bass, following these best practices can help to conserve our striped bass fisheries for the future when practicing catch and release.

- Avoid fighting striped bass to exhaustion. Make sure you have a heavy enough rod and associated tackle to land the fish relatively quickly, especially if you are targeting trophy-sized striped bass.
- A large rubber net can be beneficial when landing striped bass. This will allow you to keep the fish wet while you prepare to remove the lure, fly, or hook. This also allows you to keep the fish wet if you're preparing to take photos.



Using a soft rubber net will help keep striped bass wet when preparing to remove the hook or fly.

Photo by Meghan Marchetti/DWR

- Always wet your hands before handling striped bass and never handle them with dry hands. Handling any fish with dry hands can take the protective slime coating off, making them more susceptible to bacteria, parasites, and other pathogens.
- When photographing the fish out of the water, keep it quick to minimize air exposure and get the fish back into the water as soon as you can. Always support the weight of the fish with two hands and avoid a vertical hold on striped bass. Gripping the fish by the lower jaw while supporting the weight of the fish by holding it under the belly is best

It's best to support the weight of a striped bass with two hands when photographing before releasing.

VMRC's Josh McGilly with a striped bass he caught in the surf.



- You don't have to take photos of every single striped bass you catch. Consider taking photos of particularly memorable fish on each trip in order to release the majority of the fish you land quickly.
- Avoid having striped bass make contact with boat surfaces such as carpet and metal when handling. When bank fishing on rivers or beaches, avoid having striped bass make contact with rocks and sand along the bank. If the fish has to be on the ground for a brief period of time, make sure its on a wet surface such as wet sand instead of dry sand.
- Make sure you have a pair of long pliers, such as needle nose, for unhooking fish, especially for those fish that are hooked in hard-to-reach places. Dehooking devices can also be beneficial in these scenarios.
- If the hook is too deep, it is best to cut the line as close to the hook eye as you can. Most non-stainless hooks will rust out and dissolve over time, which will give the fish a much better chance of survival than the stress that comes with attempting to remove the hook with pliers.
- When handling striped bass out of the water, make sure to keep your hands and fingers away from the gills and gill arches. Don't hold the fish too tightly and never hold a fish by the eyeball sockets.
- When releasing striped bass, it's important to let the fish recover on its own terms; the fish will swim out of your hands when it's ready. Avoid tossing the fish back into the water as lactic acid builds up in the muscles during the fight, especially for larger fish. To help revive the fish, it is best to hold the fish upright and move the fish gently forward so water runs over the gills. When fishing in tidal water, rivers, and moving water, always face a fish upstream or against the current during a release.



When releasing striped bass, it's best to face them against the current and let them recover on their own terms.

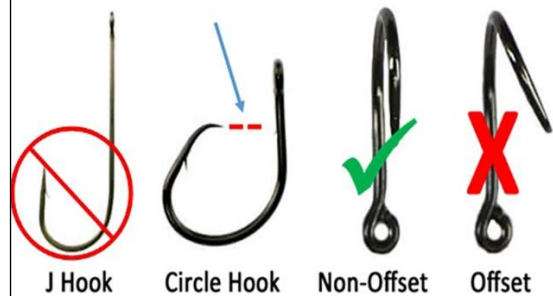
They will swim out of your hands when they are revived and ready.

Photo by Meghan Marchetti/DWR

- Consider using barbless hooks and single-point hooks instead of treble hooks.

Use inline circle hooks when fishing for striped bass with bait. DWR strongly encourages the use of circle hooks for striped bass in Virginia's inland reservoirs.

Studies show that circle hooks prevent gut hooking and improve your chances of a successful release.



J Hook

Circle Hook

Non-Offset

Offset

For questions concerning marine striped bass in Virginia you can contact Josh McGilly, fisheries management scientist for the Virginia Marine Resources Commission.

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For questions concerning inland striped bass in Virginia you can contact the Department of Wildlife Resources

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- 804-367-1000

The bulletin above can be found at the DWR site online at

<https://dwr.virginia.gov/blog/catch-and-release-best-practices-to-serve-striped-bass/>