

Bonefish and Tarpon Catch & Release

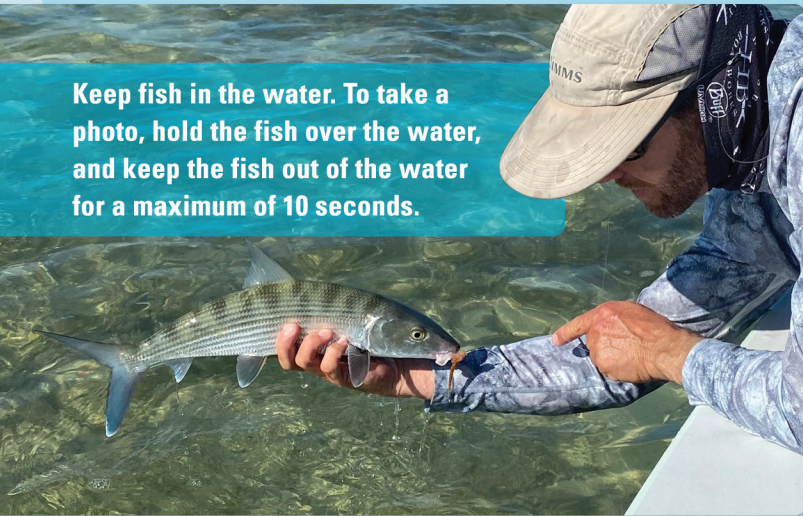


Below are catch-and-release recommendations from the Florida Keys Fishing Guides Association, Lower Keys Guides Association, and Bonefish & Tarpon Trust.

These recommendations are designed by expert guides and scientists, and increase the chances of a healthy release.

Each recommendation is based on experiences of fishing guides and peer-reviewed scientific studies.

Keep fish in the water. To take a photo, hold the fish over the water, and keep the fish out of the water for a maximum of 10 seconds.



This is the most important catch-and-release practice. Increasing air exposure significantly increases the risk of fish being eaten by sharks once they are released.

Follow FKFGA, LKGA, and BTT guidelines for properly photographing bonefish and tarpon.

Taking photographs of fish is important to our industry, but also increases air exposure. Click [here](#) to view FKFGA, BTT, and LKGA's photography guidelines.

Limit photographs to 1 fish per species, per trip. And only photograph one angle of the fish.

Photographs increase handling time and air exposure. And slows the day down. Get the right photograph of the right fish and enjoy the rest of the day.

Avoid using nets or other similar restraining devices

Nets and restraining devices increase handling time, remove slime, and damage fin tissues. Refrain from using these, unless there is an absolute need (fish is being chased by a shark).

Use dehooking devices recommended by FKFGA and LKGA to avoid handling fish.

A dehooking device enables you to avoid touching the fish all together, and reduces the time it takes to get the hook out of the fish.

The device may not be appropriate for all hook types that have large barbs, but is generally very successful and easy to use.

Never lift bonefish out of the water while using a dehooker as you would with a catfish.

Do not put your fingers in fish gills.

Touching a fish's gills causes permanent damage to its gill filaments, and reduces how much oxygen the fish can uptake for the rest of its life.

Do not use lip gripping devices.

Lip grippers break jaws, and tear holes in bonefish tissue, increasing chances of a slow death.

Do not weigh bonefish.

Weighing fish increases handling time, and often requires devices that hurt and kill bonefish. Use BTT's bonefish length-weight calculator to get an estimated weight (www.btt.org/bonefish-weight-calculator/) only if it is a fish of a lifetime. Measuring fish causes excess handling which causes poor release and increases chance of shark attack.

Do not touch fish with sun gloves or with sunscreen on your hands.

Sungloves scratch off slime, causing infections. And, sunscreen chemically burns fish, causing injury and infection. Apply sunscreen at the dock, at lunch, or when you are pulling off a flat and motoring somewhere else. Wash your hands after you apply sunscreen.

Use appropriate gear for the fish you target, and minimize fight time.

The longer we fight fish, the longer it takes for them to recover, the more exhausted they will be, and their chances of being eaten by sharks greatly increases.

Pay attention to the sharks.

If sharks are present and aggressive, skip the photograph of the fish and release it immediately.

Photographing the fish will weaken the fish and greatly increase its chances of being eaten by a predator.

It is illegal to put bonefish in live-wells. Only in extreme circumstances where an immediate release will result in certain death, should you put bonefish in the live-well and release it elsewhere. Bonefish in a livewell is also a form of handling and causes stress, bouncing around an enclosed space.