

Match Your Tackle to the Fish

For fish that are released, their survival often depends on the rod and reel used to catch them. Fish naturally don't want to have a hook in their mouth, attached to a line, being pulled in a direction they don't want to go. So, like any animal, they resist in an attempt to free themselves. The longer they fight, the more exhausted they become, and in some instances they deplete every amount of available energy in an effort to escape. The battle is over and the angler has won. Unfortunately, when it comes time to release the fish, it's too exhausted to swim away on its' own. Even if it is able to swim away, it certainly doesn't have the energy to avoid predators that may be lurking around waiting for an easy meal.

Hooking and fighting a fish is an exhilarating experience. There was a time when it was considered to be more "sporting" to catch a large fish on very light tackle. A long fight requires a degree of skill and finesse in order to successfully bring a large fish to the boat. Anglers are recognized for such achievements through acknowledgement in the record books.

However, the majority of recreational anglers don't go fishing with the sole intent of trying to break a line class record for a specific species. We go fishing simply to catch fish. Some anglers want something for the table while others just want the satisfaction of catch and release. Regardless of reason, we usually choose a rod and reel that gives us the best chance of successfully landing the species we are targeting. Most anglers wouldn't use freshwater bass tackle if they were trying to catch a billfish.

The rod and reel you choose to use when fishing for a particular species should be carefully considered when practicing catch and release. Nowadays the options for rod and reels are endless. Rods come in all lengths and are designed with different actions ranging from ultra light to heavy. Reels also range in size to match the rod, but have different gear ratios that allow an angler to retrieve the bait at a faster pace with less effort. Each combination performs differently. For this reason, many anglers carry a number of rods with them on any given trip.

While it may be more fun to use a light rod and reel for catching a big fish, it's simply not good for the fish or its' chances of survival after being released. Studies have even shown that mortality of released fish can happen several hours after being released.

There are always instances where anglers unexpectedly hook an exceptionally large fish on light tackle. But if you know beforehand that you are going to fish specifically for large fish, be sure to use appropriate tackle that reduces the fight time. I don't know of any conservation minded angler that wouldn't be heartbroken to see a large fish float away knowing that the fish was potentially older than they were or that they just killed a spawning fish that could contribute more to the population.