

# Guidelines for On-stream Etiquette and the Practice of Catch and Release

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A word on etiquette: Gentility and peacefulness on the stream are the hallmarks of a true fly fisher. Machismo and rudeness, on the other hand, are the antithesis—and nemesis—of a wizened fly angler. If you want to see an example of this, visit the American River sometime during Shad season. You will be mortified. There are a few simple expectations that we all should have of other anglers, and other anglers should have of us.

1. Never litter. Carry a plastic sack and carry out more than you take in.
2. Don't trespass. Ask for permission before crossing or stepping on private property. Trespassing hardens the hearts of streamside landowners against all of us.
3. Don't crowd. Fly fishing, in the last analysis, is a solitary communion with the resource. The first angler to a spot on the river has the right to be left alone. If you are uncertain, ask. You may receive a menacing growl in return, but then at least you know.
4. Anglers appreciate it when asked whether they are moving upstream or down. In other words, don't assume anything. The last thing you want to do is jump in ahead of an angler heading for her favorite pocket water.
5. If you see an angler out of the water tying on a fly or removing tangles, that spot on the river belongs to that angler. The person could even be just "resting" the water.
6. When appropriate, offer advice. This is a sensitive area, calling for great discretion in order to avoid offending another angler. At all costs, avoid the image of the "braggadocio" on the stream, crowing about how many and how big.
7. If a friend takes you to his or her world class secret spot, never utter a word to anyone else about it unless you check first with your otherwise-soon-to-be-enemy.
8. If another angler violates any of these ethical principles and you are the victim, the best practice is to remain calm, avoid conflict, and move on. Life is too short and there are too many rivers to fish to waste time and energy on an incorrigible boor. That may be too harsh a description, since there are nice people who simply don't get it and have no ill will or selfishness in them. But the advice holds.

9. Finally, as mentioned above, practice catch and release fishing on our precious streams. If you feel a compulsion to kill God's gorgeous creature that is at your mercy, look inward and examine your motives in an effort to discern why you feel compelled to do so. The days of the "hunter/gatherer syndrome" are gone, folks. While it may make sense to kill a planted fish, think of it this way: if we all practiced catch and release, there would be no need for planted fish that do no good except to befoul the gene pool. There—that's my soap box speech. But, don't ask me to apologize for it. I won't.
10. Here are some guidelines for proper handling and release of fish—please follow them carefully.
  - a. Don't overplay fish--i.e., don't "grandstand." Over-exercised fish build up lactic acid in their system, which can and often is fatal.
  - b. Use a net--preferably one with a rubberized bag.
  - c. To photograph the fish, leave it in the net, or gently cradle it with two hands in the water; when the camera is ready, lift it for the picture and quickly put it back in the water.
  - d. Use barbless hooks—or smash the barb. There are many reasons for this beyond the important one of giving fish a break.
  - e. Use a "Ketchum-Release" tool so you don't have to touch the fish.
  - f. Don't hold the fish in one hand because the tendency is to squeeze to restrain it; this damages sensitive internal organs that are accustomed to pressure from water.
  - g. Use proper revival techniques. If you are not familiar with this, do some research on the Internet, as there is a lot of excellent literature out there on the subject.
  - h. Carry a thermometer; if the water temperature exceeds 72 degrees discontinue fishing. Such temperatures are in the lethal range for trout in any event, and hooking them only increases the potential for oxygen depletion and death.
  - i. If you must handle a fish, always wet your hands first. Dry hands will remove the protective slime from a fish's body, resulting in increased potential for waterborne disease.