

## **Recycled Fish: *We Are Stewards***

As thrilling as it is to have a fishing rod come to life in your hands with a fish at the other end, it's even better when you're hooked up to a really big one. And the only thing better than that is to catch a bunch of nice fish!

If we want to catch more and bigger fish, it takes the right fly or lure with the right presentation in the right location at the right time. But it also takes more and bigger fish actually being there, swimming in our waters!

That's why there is Recycled Fish, the non-profit organization of anglers "living a lifestyle of stewardship both on and off the water, because our lifestyle runs downstream." *We Are Stewards*.

On the water, we're talking about things like catch and release, selective harvest, and switching to non-toxic tackle. Catch and release has caught on. More than 80 percent of anglers now release most or all of their catch, most or all of the time. Yet our waters are still in trouble.

Why? Because our lifestyle runs downstream. Our choices *off* the water actually matter as much as what we do *on* the water.

Don't get me wrong. *On the water* stuff matters, too. Catch and Release may have caught on, but it doesn't work if the fish dies a day or two later because improper handling.

Lip gripping tools, for example, are hard on fish. So are cotton nets. Fish pulled up from more than 25 or 30 feet of water – especially hot, summer water with low dissolved oxygen – many of those fish die, even if released. When we hold them by the gills for a photo, when we extend the photo shoot to a two- or three-minute ordeal... those fish don't make it. They might swim away, but most will die.

We know how to improve survival rates. Catch those fish shallow – less than 20 feet. Land them quick, and use the right tackle for the job. Let them go while they're still in the water if you can. If you remove them from the water, do so with wet hands, and hold them horizontally for the photo – even bass – even though that's not how you originally were taught. And let them go again in under a minute.

If you're fishing single barbless hooks, using a knotless, rubber mesh net, harvesting selectively, using lead-free non-toxic tackle, and cleaning up trash that you find on the shoreline, you're really doing your part on the water. But that's just the *starting point* for a growing number of us who believe in living a *lifestyle of stewardship*.

Back at home, saving water matters -- fish need it! Reducing energy usage also helps, because the way we generate most of our energy in this country is harmful to fisheries. Recycling and buying recycled, changing the way we take care of our lawns, even cleaning up dog poop has a direct positive impact on our waters.

Together, we can make a big difference. More people fish in America than play golf and tennis combined. And making a difference we are! Recycled Fish surveyed its members and found that 92 percent of the people who have taken our Sportsman's Stewardship Pledge have learned more about living a lifestyle of stewardship within the first year after taking the Pledge. More than 65 percent say that they actually changed the way they live. Will you?

Visit [www.RecycledFish.org](http://www.RecycledFish.org) and take the Sportsman's Stewardship Pledge. It's free. (Or you can pony up a few bucks and become a Supporting Steward – you get cool swag, and you help us fund the mission.) At the same time, register for our weekly Stewardship Tip. It's a once a week e-mail that gives you one easy way to help live as a steward of our waters.

You'll find a wealth of other information at [RecycledFish.org](http://RecycledFish.org) – a massive archive of Stewardship Tips, artists for providing reproductions of your trophy fish, calculators for your released fish, and many ways for you to be involved with the cause.

Our lakes, streams and seas need not just sportsmen, but stewards – like you.