

Catch/Photo/Release (C.P.R.) Guide - 2026

>> Best Practices for SML Striper Survival <<



Best Practice	Explanation
>Land Fish Quickly	Survival rates are higher with shorter fight time
>Use Rubber Landing Net	Fish may die from infection if slime coat is rubbed off by net
>Leave Fish in Net in Water	Better to unhook fish in water if it can be done quickly.
>Wet Your Hands Before Touching Fish	Use 'boca' grip to hold lower jaw; support fish's belly
>Use Needle-Nose Pliers To Remove Hooks Quickly	If fish is deeply hooked, cut line and release fish with hook
>Quickly Take Fish Pics	Lower jaw against vertical end, tail in clear focus against measurement markers
>Use straight-shank circle hook for bait, single point hook for jigs	Survival is higher with single point hooks vs treble hooks. Survival is higher with jigs vs live bait. On lures with three treble hooks, one treble can be removed.
>Use "Descender Tool" For Fish Unable to Descend Deeper on Their Own.	Tool is most effective in cold water. Click HERE for full details.
Seasonal Factors	Smaller Fish vs Larger Fish
<p>Cold & Medium Water Temps (38-69 degrees, usually Nov - June) <i>Cold water = maximum dissolved oxygen</i></p> <p>>Catch & Release IS Recommended IF best practices are followed.</p>	<p>Smaller/younger fish (under 20") released in cold water generally survive well</p> <p>Older/larger fish (over 21" inches) released in cold water generally survive well</p> <p>Descending Tool can be used to return fish to deeper water if it struggles to descend on its own.</p>
<p>Warm Water Temp (over 70 degrees, usually July-Oct) <i>Warm water = minimum dissolved oxygen</i></p> <p>>Catch & Release NOT RECOMMENDED for fish over 21"</p> <p><u>Consider keeping all stripers caught until 2 fish/day/angler limit is reached.</u></p>	<p>Smaller/younger fish (under 20") released in warm water MAY Survive IF best practices used AND fish descends on its own.</p> <p>Older/larger fish (over 21" inches) released in warm water often DO NOT survive*</p> <p>Descending Tool should NOT be used to return fish to deeper water if it struggles to descend on its own; will not survive the warm temp & stress.</p>

Related Resources (double-click to open links below online)

- [DWR Striper Catch & Release Best Practices Article](#)
 - [Make Your Own Descender Tool for Deep Caught Stripers](#)
- Coastal Carolina Univ. research on SML warmwater release survival is currently in progress; results available in 2026.

Questions? Send us a note: smsc@smithmountainstriperclub.com. Thank You for your support!