How to Release a Fish

To practice catch-and-release while fishing, follow these steps to ensure the fish return to the water with minimal damage. Any fish you plan to release MUST be returned to the water immediately.

**T i m e i s E s s e n t i a l** Quickly play and release fish. A fish played for too long will be too exhausted to recover.

**K e e p F i s h i n g F e e d In T h e W a t e r** as much as possible.

**R e m o v e T h e H o o k A s Q u i c k l y A s P o s s i b l e** Single barbless hooks can often be removed from the fish’s mouth with your fingers or pliers.

**G e n t l e H a n d l i n g i s E s s e n t i a l** Avoid squeezing or placing your fingers on the gills or eye sockets. It is best to hold a fish gently by its belly or by the area in front of the tail.

**R e v i v e U n c o n c i s c e N e s s i c h i f h o l d i t u p r i g h t i n t h e w a t e r.** Move the fish forward and backward so that water runs through the gills. It may take a few minutes, when it begins to struggle, release it.

**W h e n P h o t o g r a p h i n g a F i s h h o l d i t h o r i z o n t a l l y a n d d o n o t s q u e e z e t h e f i s h.** Do not put your hands in its gills or hold it vertically by its gills.

**R e m o v e T h e H o o k A s Q u i c k l y A s P o s s i b l e**

Remove the hook as quickly as possible. Often a fish can be removed with your fingers or pliers. Do not pull on the hook under the fish. To remove the hook:

1. Position the hook as close to the gill as possible.
2. Grasp the hook with pliers and twist it to free it from the fish.
3. Gently pull the hook from the fish’s mouth and be careful not to damage the fish’s mouth or jaw.

**F i g h t i n g F i s h b y H a n d**

When fighting a fish by hand, hold it gently by the belly or by the area in front of the tail. Never try to hold a fish by its gills or eye sockets. It is best to hold a fish gently by its belly or by the area in front of the tail.

**F i s h f r o m t h e w a t e r w i t h m i n i m a l d a m a g e.** Any fish you plan to release MUST be returned to the water immediately.

**T r e a t F i s h w i t h C a r e.** Do not put your hands in its gills or hold it vertically by its gills. To revitalize an unconscious fish:

1. Hold the fish upright in the water.
2. Move the fish forward and backward so that water runs through the gills.
3. It may take a few minutes, when it begins to struggle, release it.

**W h e n P h o t o g r a p h i n g a F i s h h o l d i t h o r i z o n t a l l y a n d d o n o t s q u e e z e t h e f i s h.** Do not put your hands in its gills or hold it vertically by its gills.

**R e m o v e T h e H o o k A s Q u i c k l y A s P o s s i b l e**

Remove the hook as quickly as possible. Often a fish can be removed with your fingers or pliers. Do not pull on the hook under the fish. To remove the hook:

1. Position the hook as close to the gill as possible.
2. Grasp the hook with pliers and twist it to free it from the fish.
3. Gently pull the hook from the fish’s mouth and be careful not to damage the fish’s mouth or jaw.

**F i g h t i n g F i s h b y H a n d**

When fighting a fish by hand, hold it gently by the belly or by the area in front of the tail. Never try to hold a fish by its gills or eye sockets. It is best to hold a fish gently by its belly or by the area in front of the tail.

**F i s h f r o m t h e w a t e r w i t h m i n i m a l d a m a g e.** Any fish you plan to release MUST be returned to the water immediately.

**T r e a t F i s h w i t h C a r e.** Do not put your hands in its gills or hold it vertically by its gills.

**R e m o v e T h e H o o k A s Q u i c k l y A s P o s s i b l e**

Remove the hook as quickly as possible. Often a fish can be removed with your fingers or pliers. Do not pull on the hook under the fish. To remove the hook:

1. Position the hook as close to the gill as possible.
2. Grasp the hook with pliers and twist it to free it from the fish.
3. Gently pull the hook from the fish’s mouth and be careful not to damage the fish’s mouth or jaw.

**F i g h t i n g F i s h b y H a n d**

When fighting a fish by hand, hold it gently by the belly or by the area in front of the tail. Never try to hold a fish by its gills or eye sockets. It is best to hold a fish gently by its belly or by the area in front of the tail.

**F i s h f r o m t h e w a t e r w i t h m i n i m a l d a m a g e.** Any fish you plan to release MUST be returned to the water immediately.

**T r e a t F i s h w i t h C a r e.** Do not put your hands in its gills or hold it vertically by its gills.

**R e m o v e T h e H o o k A s Q u i c k l y A s P o s s i b l e**

Remove the hook as quickly as possible. Often a fish can be removed with your fingers or pliers. Do not pull on the hook under the fish. To remove the hook:

1. Position the hook as close to the gill as possible.
2. Grasp the hook with pliers and twist it to free it from the fish.
3. Gently pull the hook from the fish’s mouth and be careful not to damage the fish’s mouth or jaw.

**F i g h t i n g F i s h b y H a n d**

When fighting a fish by hand, hold it gently by the belly or by the area in front of the tail. Never try to hold a fish by its gills or eye sockets. It is best to hold a fish gently by its belly or by the area in front of the tail.

**F i s h f r o m t h e w a t e r w i t h m i n i m a l d a m a g e.** Any fish you plan to release MUST be returned to the water immediately.

**T r e a t F i s h w i t h C a r e.** Do not put your hands in its gills or hold it vertically by its gills.
Welcome to Pagosa Springs!

Welcome to the beautiful Pagosa Springs area. We hope to make your fishing experience as wonderful as possible. In order to maximize the quality of fishing in downtown Pagosa, town merchants, along with support from local government, have joined together to stock trophy size trout in the river during spring, summer and fall. This is the closest lake fishing to town; accessible all year, it is great for ice fishing in the winter. In the summer, live to Armored Minnows may be used as bait. Camping is restricted to wake-free boating.

**San Juan River (Downtown):**
- The downtown stretch of the San Juan River can be accessed at several locations in town, including behind the River Center, Town Park, Visitor Center and Pagosa Park.
- All trout - bag and possession limit of 2.
- Downtown Pagosa Springs is regularly stocked with trout. It offers some of the best fishing in the area and a great place for children and beginners.

**Echo Canyon Reservoir (State Wildlife Area):**
- Hwy 84 South for 22 miles; right at Hwy 151 intersection. The sections of the Piedra River and San Juan River that run through the Ute Indian Reservation can be accessed at several different points. Please be respectful of private property. Visit http://www.lwma.wm.co.wy.gov/wildlife/fishing for details.

**Lake Capote:**
- Hwy 160 West for 17 miles; located at Hwy 151 intersection. The sections of the Piedra River and San Juan River that run through the Ute Indian Reservation can be accessed at several different points. Please be respectful of private property. Visit http://www.lwma.wm.co.wy.gov/wildlife/fishing for details.

Please note that fishing at Lake Capote or anywhere else on Reservation land requires a daily permit (available at Lake Capote) instead of a Colorado fishing permit.

---

### Rivers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>River</th>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>San Juan River (Downtown):</strong></td>
<td>Behind the River Center, Town Park, Visitor Center and Pagosa Park</td>
<td>All trout - bag and possession limit of 2. Downtown Pagosa Springs is regularly stocked with trout. It offers some of the best fishing in the area and a great place for children and beginners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>East Fork of the San Juan River:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Hwy 160 East for 10 miles; right on East Fork Road. Fishing is available anywhere the river can be accessed, except on private property.
- Portions of the San Juan River run through private property, particularly on this road. Please be respectful and stay off private property.
- The road goes through the East Fork Canyon passing dramatic “beehive” rock formations and offers great camping.
| **West Fork of the San Juan River:** |
- Hwy 160 East for 14 miles; left on West Fork Road. Fish by the bridges over the river, along the road in the vicinity of West Fork Campground.
- Portions of the San Juan River run through private property, particularly on this road. Please be respectful and stay off private property.
- Two nearby campgrounds. |
| **Blanco River:** |
- Hwy 84 South for 12 miles; left on Blanco River Road #406.
- River access close to the road and at the Forest Service group campground when unoccupied. |
| **Piedra River:** |
- Piedra Road North (CR 600/FS 631) for 16 miles; park at the Piedra River Trailhead. Fishing restrictions begin at the river access lake. Creek is accessible at various points along the trail.
- Piedra Road First Fork Road Access - Hwy 160 West for 22 miles; right on First Fork Road #422. Public access begins 1.5 miles north of the river access lake. Creek is accessible at various points along the trail.
- Fourmile Creek and Lakes: Take Fourmile Road (CR 400/FS 645) for 8 miles; right at junction to the trailhead. Follow Fourmile Trail. Great backcountry fishing requiring moderate to strenuous 6-7 mile one-way hike to access lake. Creek is accessible at various points near the waterfall.
| **Turkey Creek and Lake:** |
- Hwy 160 East for 6 miles; left on Jackson Mountain Road to the Trailhead. Follow Turkey Creek Trail. Great backcountry fishing requiring a strenuous 9 mile one-way hike to access lake. Creek is accessible at various points along the trail.

### Reservoirs and Lakes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reservoir/Lake</th>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Echo Canyon Reservoir (State Wildlife Area):</strong></td>
<td>Hwy 84 South for 22 miles; turn right.</td>
<td>This is the closest lake fishing to town; accessible all year, it is great for ice fishing in the winter. In the summer, live to Armored Minnows may be used as bait. Camping is restricted to wake-free boating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Piedra Reservoir:</strong></td>
<td>Piedra Road North (CR 600/FS 631) for 25 miles.</td>
<td>Portions of the Piedra River run through private property, particularly on this road. Please be respectful and stay off private property!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alerta Park Reservoir (State Wildlife Area):</strong></td>
<td>Hwy 160 East for 23 miles; right into Wolf Creek Ski Area. Follow Forest Service Road #391 approximately 1.5 miles to where the parking lot and boat ramp are located.</td>
<td>1. Artificial flies or lures only. 2. All trout are catch-and-release and must be returned to water immediately. Motorized boats are allowed but restricted to wake-free boating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Big Meadows Reservoir (State Wildlife Area):</strong></td>
<td>Hwy 160 East for 26 miles; left on County Road 410. Located on Wolf Creek Pass.</td>
<td>Largemouth Bass 12–15 inches must be returned to the water. Camping is available around Big Meadows; motorized boats are allowed, but restricted to wake-free boating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Williams Reservoir (State Wildlife Area) and Williams Creek:</strong></td>
<td>Piedra Road North (CR 600/FS 631) for 20 miles.</td>
<td>This 508-acre mountain lake is surrounded by lush forests and towering peaks, with several campgrounds nearby. Motorized boats are allowed, but restricted to wake-free boating; includes boat ramp.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Additional Notes
- **Echo Canyon Reservoir:** This 508-acre mountain lake is surrounded by lush forests and towering peaks, with several campgrounds nearby. Motorized boats are allowed, but restricted to wake-free boating; includes boat ramp.
- **Williams Reservoir:** This 508-acre mountain lake is surrounded by lush forests and towering peaks, with several campgrounds nearby. Motorized boats are allowed, but restricted to wake-free boating; includes boat ramp.