

BEST PRACTICES FOR FLORIDA FRIENDLY FISHING GUIDES

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FLORIDA FRIENDLY
FISHING GUIDE

CERTIFIED FLORIDA FRIENDLY FISHING GUIDES FOLLOW BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES TO HELP ENSURE FLORIDA'S FISHING FUTURE

Recreational fishing is an important economic driver in Florida, considered the fishing capital of the world. In 2017-2018, a whopping 4 million people held fishing licenses and the saltwater recreational fishing industry drove \$11.5 billion in economic impact¹. This large amount of boating and angling activity can have negative impacts on Florida's habitats and fisheries. This fact is being increasingly recognized by the angling community, especially charter captains and recreational fishing guides. The Florida Friendly Fishing Guide certification program was founded in 2019 to recognize fishing guides who are committed to preserving the future of Florida's fisheries through sustainable boating and fishing techniques, collectively called best management practices (or BMPs). This list of BMPs summarizes those presented in the Florida Friendly Fishing Guide certification course but they can be applied by any angler with an interest in reducing their footprint through ethical angling.

CLIENT INTERACTION

1. Environmental sensitivity briefing that covers at least a few of the best practices below and the reasoning behind them.

SOLID WASTE

2. Recycle unwanted monofilament in designated receptacles.
3. Discard of unwanted braided line by either a) re-using as utility twine or b) cutting into small pieces (less than 12 inches) and disposing of in the regular trash (not recyclable).
4. Have a plan for stowing garbage and other solid waste so it cannot blow out of the vessel.
5. Avoid single-use plastics whenever possible.
 - a. Provide water in coolers with non-coated paper cups or provide water in another reusable option.
 - b. Provide compostable (fully biodegradable) options, such as paper or bamboo, for on-board food service materials.
6. Buy in bulk and avoid plastic packaging when possible when buying bait, tackle, and other equipment.
7. Properly recycle plastic packaging that cannot be avoided. Understand what can and cannot be recycled in your locality.

8. Dispose of expired, unwanted flares safely (not in regular landfill trash). Local contacts for flare disposal include fire departments, USCG Auxiliary, or county hazardous waste facilities.
9. Dispose of old marine batteries at designated facilities, such as the store where you plan to purchase your next battery (possibly for a core charge savings) or the county hazardous waste facility.

BAIT AND FISH SCRAPS

10. Ensure you never use juvenile sportfish (regulated species) as bait.
11. Minimize live bait waste by only collecting/buying what you plan to use and by managing temperature, oxygen, and stress levels.
12. Discard of unwanted dead bait in the trash or in open/deep water (do not dump into the water at boat ramps or marinas).
13. Release leftover live bait where it was collected or in suitable nearby habitat.
14. Hold unwanted artificial/soft plastic lures on board to dispose of with other garbage.
15. Do not feed fish scraps or leftover bait to pelicans, other seabirds, marine mammals (dolphins), or other wildlife.

FUEL AND OIL

16. Fuel vessels on dry land when possible.
17. Attend the fuel line at all times, listening for gurgling and keeping hand on the nozzle, to prevent fuel spills from tank overflow.
18. Keep an absorbent pad or bilge sock handy to catch small drips or spills.
19. Clean up any fuel or oil spills with rags or absorbent pads. Never hose down or apply soaps or detergents to a fuel/oil spill.
20. Notify marina manager/dock attendant of any spills that enter the water.
21. Collect all oil in a sealable container and dispose of properly (e.g., at your marina's used oil container or by taking to a local garage/auto service center).
22. Prevent formation of bad gas/gas contaminated with water by storing vessels that will sit for long periods of time with a full tank.
23. Collect bad/contaminated gas in gasoline safe containers and dispose of properly (by asking marina attendant or locating a disposal facility, usually municipal waste facility).
24. Wear protective equipment and use a siphon or transfer pump away from the water if possible when collecting bad gas for disposal.

CLEANING AND OTHER CHEMICALS

25. Use non-toxic cleaners (e.g., EPA Safer Choice, Green-Seal, EcoLogo, homemade options) on board your vessel.
26. Wash your boat over dry land whenever possible instead of washing in the water.
27. Clean the bilge on a regular schedule without using detergents. Dispose of soiled bilge rags and bilge socks in the garbage and do not discharge oily bilge water into the waterways.
28. Use 100% cotton rags instead of synthetic microfiber rags to reduce the release of microplastic fibers into the waterways.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

29. Understand the basics of how fisheries decisions are made.
30. Participate in state or federal stakeholder meetings or public hearings.
31. Learn more about the federal fisheries management process by participating in the Marine Resource Education Program.

COASTAL ECOLOGY

32. Be able to discuss the basics of watersheds, water quality, and estuaries with your clients.
33. Know the correct names for at least a few key representatives of the plants/habitats, birds, and other wildlife in your area. Be able to point them out to your clients and explain their role in the ecosystem.

FISH HANDLING

34. Remind your clients of best fish handling practices when necessary.
35. Be prepared to carefully land, handle, and release fish your clients will not keep. This includes having handy tools like a knotless, rubber-coated net, a venting tool/descending gear, and dehooking tools that allow you to limit direct handling and remove less slime.
36. Reduce bycatch/non-keepers by rigging bait and tackle suited to your target species.
37. Use circle hooks when appropriate and consider flattening barbs and removing extra hooks on artificial lures, especially for trips that are primarily catch-and-release.
38. Opt for non-stainless steel hooks.
39. Use tackle and rods that will allow rapid landing and reduce fish fight times.
40. Land fish alongside the boat when possible and try to avoid removing the fish from the water, especially if you plan to release it.
41. Do not use a gaff or jaw-locking grips that can puncture the fish's throat to land the fish if you plan to release it.
42. If you must remove the fish from the water, use bare, wet hands (never gloves or towels) to hold them horizontally and support the belly of larger fish.
43. Keep the fish out of the water for the minimum amount of time and do not touch the gills or depress the eyes.
44. Dehook fish over the water using tools (without direct handling) whenever possible.
45. Apply best handling practices even in photographs of fish that are going to be harvested. Photos shared on social media with best handling practices can help create a better angling culture across the board.
46. If a fish is exhausted, revive the fish using a figure 8 motion until it can swim away on its own.
47. When fishing in depths over 30 ft, keep an eye out for barotrauma and be prepared to assist fish with barotrauma with returning to depth by either venting or descending the fish.

SEAFOOD SAFETY

48. Ice fish at a ratio of 2 lbs. ice to 1 lb. of fish to ensure quality and safety of catch.
49. Drain fish cooler meltwater frequently.
50. Discourage clients from consuming their catch raw and consider the risks of clients eating very large, old fish (e.g., mercury, ciguatera).
51. If you guide shellfish charters, be familiar with shellfish harvesting closures and shellfish allergy risks.

BOATING AND ANGLING ETHICS

52. Encourage catch-and-release angling and/or keeping less than the legal limit to your clients when appropriate.
53. Follow the law regarding the so-called "guide limit", as well as other rules and regulations outlined in Florida Sea Grant's *Basic Requirements for Florida Fishing Guides* fact sheet.
54. Broaden the number of fish species you target with clients through the Catch a Florida Memory program.
55. Protect sensitive bottom habitats, such as seagrasses and coral reefs, by applying bottom-friendly boating (avoid scarring seagrass, never anchor on corals, etc.).
56. Do not transport plants, live bait or catch, bilge water, or other materials that could harbor live organisms between water bodies.
57. Never cut a hooked bird loose, reel in to remove the hook and line.

58. Follow proper procedures to report (877-942-5343) and respond to a hooked sea turtle or marine mammal.
59. Avoid approaching seabird nesting areas and avoid flushing resting birds off of beaches, islands, or intertidal shoals/bars.

GIVING BACK TO FISHERIES SCIENCE AND MANAGEMENT

60. Participate in cooperative research or citizen science programs focused on fisheries or water quality. These include web or app-based reporting, individual logbooks, fin clip programs, and a wide variety of other opportunities.
61. Fill out and return fisheries survey mailers and participate in boat ramp surveys when you can.
62. Communicate with scientists, extension agents, or managers about fisheries issues that are important to you. This could be through in-person conversations, participation in a guide association to submit group comments, or online through open comment forums.
63. Volunteer for programs such as fishing clinics, coastal cleanups, and other programs that help improve the environment or engage new anglers.
64. Report abnormal events like fish kills, suspected non-native species, stranded or injured wildlife, etc. to the FWC using the hotline (800-636-0511), FWC Reporter, or other widely available apps.

SOURCES

1. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2018. American Sportfishing Association and Southwick Associates reports using USFWS 2011 survey data updated to 2018 using FWC's Office of Licensing and Permitting license trend data plus inflation data. <https://myfwc.com/conservation/value/saltwater-fishing/> Accessed 9-20-2019



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