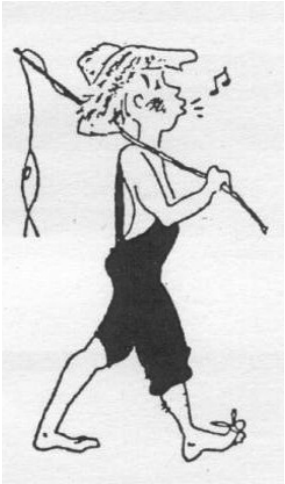
No. 475

OKLAHOMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
4-H Youth Development

# Fishing Safety and Sportsmanship

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service • Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources

## Introduction



Fishing is one of the most popular sports in America. Most sections of our country have many streams, lakes, and ponds with a variety of fish, so some "fishing hole" is probably somewhere nearby. There are few people who don't get a thrill from the feel of a fish on the end of their line. So let's go fishing!

When you fish, you can practice conservation just by enjoying your sport. It takes a great deal of fishing to keep fish from being wasted. Many waters are not fished enough. Some species, like bluegill, crappie, and bullheads, reproduce so fast that they overcrowd the water. Fishermen must remove large numbers of these fish so that the fish left in the water will have enough food and space for good growth.

Fish like bass, pike, and catfish help control the number of *prey* species-bluegill, crappie, bullheads, minnows and other species. They are called *predators* because they feed on smaller prey fish. If fishermen remove too many predator fish, there will almost surely be too many prey fish left to grow and multiply. When there are too many fish for the available food supply, the fish grow to very small sizes. This is why limits are often placed on the number of bass or pike that you can legally catch.

The conservationist will learn how to catch and use all kinds of fish. Don't throw back those small bluegill or crappie. There are probably enough of them, or even too many, in the lake or pond already; so use them. Even very small fish are good to eat.

Several different methods are used to catch fish. Separate Oklahoma 4-H fact sheets offer basic instruction on three fishing methods--bait-casting (#319), spin-casting (#318), and fly-casting (#317). If you are a "serious" fisher, you will surely want to read other books and magazines on fishing and share ideas with older, more experienced fishermen. Perhaps you simply enjoy the beauty, peace, and feeling of oneness with nature that fishing a quiet spot can afford. If so, this booklet was written for you, too.

## Care of Equipment

Care for your equipment so it can provide dependable service. Keep the hooks sharp and the lures bright and shiny. Replace worn and weakened lines or leaders. Watch for rough guides on your rod. Rough spots in the guides will cause extra wear on your line. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's direction sheet for operation, care, and cleaning of your equipment.

## Successful Fishing

The really skilled fisherman must know more than how to use his or her equipment. They certainly should have a good idea of where, when, and how to fish. You must gain some understanding of the fish, their habitat, preferred food, and feeding habits if you wish to become a really good fisherman.

Fish spend most of their lives doing five things: (1) locating water temperature that is comfortable, (2) feeding, (3) resting, (4) hiding from their enemies and (5) spawning.

The temperature of the water is very important to fish. They must move to various depths to locate the most comfortable temperature. Since the surface water is warmed by the sunshine, cooler water temperatures are often found at lower depths.

Below is a suggested guide to surface water temperature preferred by fish:

Walleye – 55° to 70° Fahrenheit
Trout – 58° to 68° Fahrenheit
Bass – 60° to 73° Fahrenheit
Catfish, Pike and Pan fish – 60° to 80° Fahrenheit.

Fish seem to have favorite places they like to be during feeding, resting, or hiding periods. As a general rule, most fish do the greatest amount of feeding at dawn and dusk. Riffles in shallow water make a good place to find large fish feeding, especially in the twilight hours and sometimes through the night. At dusk, many

fish feed on insects at the top. This is a favorite time for the fisherman to use top water lures.

Pan fish commonly hide in brush piles and weed beds, and larger predator fish often come to these spots for food.

On hot days, fish may be found where the cool water of a spring flows into a pond, lake, or stream. Overhanging banks, where the water is shaded from the sun also provide cool spots. Other resting spots for bigger fish are close to tree stumps or big boulders.

Catfish and carp are considered bottom feeders. They will be found hiding in deep holes, but they often move to the shallows to feed, especially when run-off from rainfall is carrying fresh food supplies into a stream.

## Fishing and Boat Safety

Remember that accidents often happen on the water. It is the individual responsibility of each of us to see that an accident does not happen. A wise fisherman will never go fishing without first letting someone know where they are going and when they expect to return. Fish with a friend or in the company of others. If a hazardous situation arises, you will have help.

If you don't know how to swim well, it is important that you learn. It could very well save your life. American Red Cross, YMCA, or another local organization may offer swimming lessons, a course in First Aid, or rescue breathing techniques. If this type of course is available to you, take advantage of it. Many lives could be saved every year if more people knew how to use these simple techniques.

Equip your tackle box with a simple first aid kit. A more complete first aid kit should be carried on a motor boat. Adhesive bandages, gauze bandages, an antiseptic, and an ointment for insect stings are basic to a first aid kit. Check with your local Red Cross office or hospital for suggestions for kit content.

No one should ever push, shove, or engage in other horseplay whether they were on the bank or in a boat. The most serious accidents are caused by thoughtlessness or carelessness. When boating, make sure that the boat is well-balanced and never overloaded. Everyone in the boat must have a life preserver. Sometimes even excellent swimmers can drown.

Always be considerate of other fishermen, swimmers, or skiers and keep a polite and safe distance away from them. There is a great deal more to being a true sportsman than just knowing how to fish.

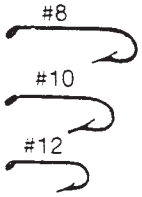
## Sportsmanship

The true sportsman is a gentle person. He or she knows and obeys the laws regarding hunting, fishing, boating and other outdoor activities. In addition, he or she knows and obeys the safety rules for each sport. He or she also expects and insists that his or her companions do likewise. Many hunting and fishing trips are spoiled by someone who behaves in an unsportsmanlike manner.

The good sportsman is courteous. They show others the same courtesy that they would like to be given themselves. All too often, private hunting and fishing areas have been closed because people did not treat the landowner's property with the same care they would treat their own. This kind of behavior often results in a loss of hunting and fishing privileges for all.

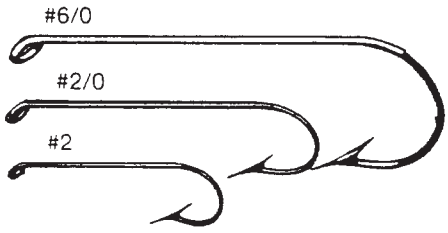
Public property should also be used carefully and with consideration. You should treat all property as if it were your own. Remember, public lands belong to all of us. Courtesy should be given not only to landowners and property, but to other hunters and fishermen as well. Fishing and hunting are your sports – it is your responsibility as a sportsman to maintain or improve the lands and waters for game animals, fish, and future use by others. It must also be your responsibility to avoid accidents and injury to yourself or other sportsmen.

One fishing tip worth mentioning now is the size hook to use when fishing with live bait. Many times people are bothered by "bait stealers" because they are using a hook too large for the fish" mouth.




**BLUEGILL**

**BASS**




Use the right size hook.

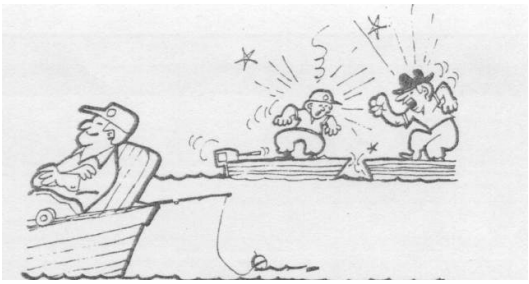
*(Courtesy USDA)*

In this fact sheet you will learn something of the qualities and behavior befitting a true sportsman. You will find that sportsmanship basically involves using your common sense and treating others as you would like to be treated yourself.

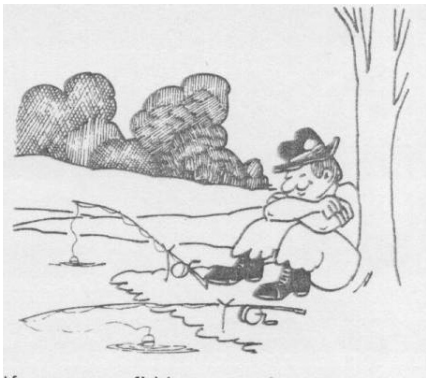
## Fishing Sportsmanship and the Landowner

1. The landowner has the right to give permission for the use of his or her land or to restrict the use of it. Remember, the farm is the farmer's home and business. You are their guest – act like one. The more considerate the guests are, the fewer restrictions they will place on them.
2. Your permission to use property is not transferable unless specifically stated. An invitation to you to hunt or fish does not mean that you can invite all your friends unless they are specifically included in the invitation. Neither you, nor they, should get angry if they are asked to leave.
3. Pastures, cultivated fields, or dirt roads (in the woods) are no places to be driving in wet weather. Try walking. The exercise will do you good and will make the landowner less nervous.
4. It takes hundreds of years to add an inch of top soil, but only a few minutes to destroy it. Carelessly starting a fire can hurt relationships, decrease game, lose money for the farmer, and put property and lives at risk. It costs so little to be careful.
5. Even the smallest plants, bushes, or trees are the possession of the farmer or landowner. The dogwood, mulberry, or sumac are also valuable to the landowner as beautiful plants and as wildlife food or cover. What would happen if several people helped themselves to the farmer's plants or destroyed crops including grass and woods?
6. To protect the fences of the landowner, always go through gates or gaps whenever possible. Cross woven-wire fences only at strong posts.
7. Protect the beauty of your fishing spot and leave the habitat clean for the fish and other animals. Take your bait containers and trash home with you or put it in a trash container. Remember the stretch of crops, pasture, woods, or pond are the farmer/rancher/landowners's front yard. Would you be happy if someone spread their trash on your front lawn?

8. The fish hog is a person who has no respect for nature's resources or other fishermen. Fishing ethics are rules which the fisherman establishes for him or herself. Educate others on proper ethics. Rules and guidelines are designed to make fishing a sport. Never violate fishing size, day, and seasonal limits. Don't take away more fish than you use or the legal limit. Meanwhile, report those who abuse property, violate laws, and those who are not good stewards of our natural resources. "Fishing hogs" and poor sportsman or sportswomen are stealing wildlife from other citizens.
9. A gate left open is not a way to win friends and influence people. Make sure to close all gates behind you. If you damage something as you cross a fence or move about the property contact the landowner and offer to repair it or make restitution (pay for repairs).
10. Keep a courteous distance away from another fisherman's "spot" unless you ask for his permission or he invites you over. Some fishermen enjoy being alone for awhile, and others will be afraid that you will ruin their fishing by getting too close.
11. Avoid crossing or tangling your line with that of another fisherman. Know where your back-cast is going. It's bad enough to have your cast to wrap around a tree branch, but it is much worse to hit someone with it.
12. Horseplay on the bank or in a boat is not only dangerous, but unsportsmanlike. When boating or moving you should never run close to another boat or cause waves that wash too strongly into another's fishing spot. No one appreciates a water "show-off" nearby when they are fishing.



13. Loud noise is often disagreeable to other fishermen. After all, they may be enjoying the quiet and beauty of nature as much as the fishing.
14. If you are fishing on private property, be sure that you have the landowner's permission and treat his land with even greater care than you would your own. Don't try to catch all the fish out of the pond.



Check to see if it is okay to take the fish. They may want you to catch and release certain size fish or species. Offer the landowner a part of your catch.

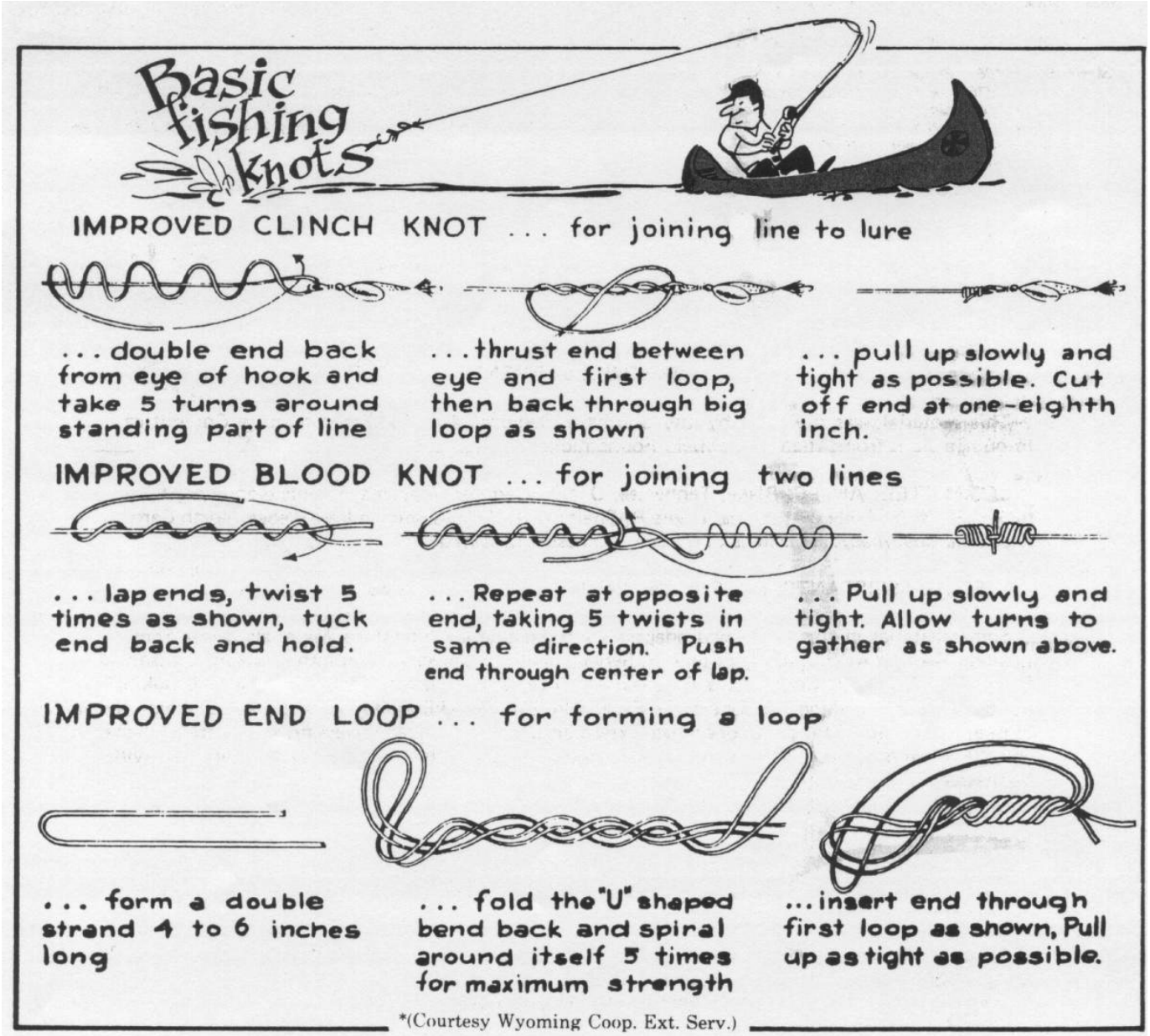
## Things to Do

1. Learn how to cross fences without damaging them, and practice the technique. Incorporate into a related 4-H presentation.
2. As a club activity, demonstrate before the group how to properly ask permission to hunt or fish on a farmer's land.
3. Make several posters which show how a true sportsman should act while hunting or fishing. Exhibit these posters at a 4-H meeting or in your school. Your work should be neat, colorful, and easy to see.
4. A good sportsman should understand the reasons for wildlife laws and why they are necessary. Interview your local game warden and prepare a report which includes the following: Who is responsible for the management and harvesting of fish? What kinds of protection should be given wildlife? Why are there laws that limit total number of fish and sizes that can be harvested? Present this report to your 4-H group or in a 4-H speech or illustrated presentation.
5. Help the landowner to improve hunting or fishing on his land. You might establish a quail food plot or help renovate a pond. Information on these projects can be obtained from your local County Extension Educator.
6. Interview several farmers or landowners and find out how they feel about their land being used for hunting or fishing. After talking with them, set up your own personal code of sportsman's ethics. On the basis of your interviews, list 10 rules that, if followed, will gain the respect of the landowner and permission to use his land. This will be your code of ethics.
7. Research boating and water safety laws and guidelines and share findings with your club through a speech or illustrated presentation. (The U. S. Corps of Engineers or Red Cross are good resources)
8. Demonstrate at least one of three types of casting.
9. Have a target casting contest. There should be separate divisions for bait, spin, and fly casting. You will need an old bicycle tire, automobile tire, or a piece of rope laid in a circle about 3 feet in diameter for a target. The target should be placed 25 to 35 feet away. Remember that the goal is accuracy, not distance.
10. Develop a presentation on the advantages and disadvantages of each type of fishing equipment. State which type of equipment you feel is most suitable for various fish or fishing situations.
11. Develop a presentation on the advantages and disadvantages of various line weights and of various rod weights or "action."
12. Tell how you would select your rods for different fishing situations. This should include a discussion of rod lengths, weights, and size of line guides.
13. Make a display of several lures. Label each one and tell for what kind of fish they are used. Check State Fair exhibit guidelines.
14. Mount and label a collection of flies. These could be flies that you have tied yourself or bought. You should state whether each is the wet or dry type and for what kind of fishing it would be used.
15. Make a display of several fishing knots. Label each and tell its use. Check State Fair exhibit guidelines.
16. Display your tackle box. Give an oral presentation naming each item in the box and stating its use.
17. Develop a talk on fish habits that fishermen should know.
18. Develop a presentation on the topic of the proper cleaning and storage of various kinds of fishing equipment – rods, reels, line, flies, and lures.
19. Display six natural baits in jars or other containers. Name each and tell where you found them. Tell how a hook would be baited with each. What kind of fish would you expect to catch with them? (You may want to consult an experienced fisherman).
20. Demonstrate how to sharpen or remove hooks.
21. Obtain a copy of boating and water safety rules from an Oklahoma Game Warden, a Park Ranger, Lake Patrol Officer, U. S. Corp of Engineers staff, or local sporting goods dealer. Discuss the value of these rules.
22. Obtain a copy of Oklahoma's fishing rules and regulations. Discuss and share.
23. Make a list of practices that have to do with safety on or around the water. Think in terms of preventing specific accidents.
24. Develop a speech or illustrated presentation on what being a good sportsman means to you or why you feel that a good fisherman is practicing conservation.
25. Write a story about one of your fishing experiences. What kinds of fish did you catch? What baits or lures worked well for you? What kind of tackle did you use? What do you enjoy most about fishing?

## Words to Know

*Backlash* – Line tangled about the spool of a casting reel.

*Braided line* – Line that is intertwined with strands of cotton, silk, or nylon; it is sometimes heavier than monofilament line and is used mostly for bait-casting; the cotton and silk lines are subject to rotting and should be washed and dried periodically.




*(Courtesy Wyoming Coop. Ext. Serv.)

*Breaking test of the line* – The strength of the line; an eight-pound test line may break when an eight-pound fish pulls on it.

*Conservation* – Preserving the environment by preventing loss or waste – wise use of a resource.

*Leader* – A short piece of line that is usually relatively invisible to fish; it is attached to the end of your regular line. To catch fish that have large, sharp teeth you may need a strong wire leader; otherwise you may not need a leader for monofilament line.

*Monofilament line* – A long, single strand of nylon available in test of 2 to 20 pounds or more. The lighter the line, the easier and farther it will cast. Many monofilament lines will tend to dry out and become stiff or brittle; many fishermen recommend that you put new line on your reel every year.

*Predator* – an animal which kills and eats the flesh of other animals.

*Prey* – An animal which serves as food for another animal.

*Rod line guides* – The rings on the rod through which the line is placed.

**Acknowledgements**

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Some material in this guide was adapted from existing 4-H literature. Materials taken from: Leaflets, YA-5, YA-12, YA-14, Extension Service, Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama, "Fish and Fishing," IV, V, VI. Cooperative Extension Service, South Dakota State University, Brookings, South Dakota; "Fishing," Cooperative Extension Service, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska; "Let's Go Fishing," Cooperative Extension Service, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana, and "Fish and Fishing," Agricultural Extension Service, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee; "10 Hunting Courtesies That Win Friends & Influence People," Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, Mississippi State University.

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The Cooperative Extension Service is the largest, most successful informal educational organization in the world. It is a nationwide system funded and guided by a partnership of federal, state, and local governments that delivers information to help people help themselves through the land-grant university system.

Extension carries out programs in the broad categories of agriculture, natural resources and environment; family and consumer sciences; 4-H and other youth; and community resource development. Extension staff members live and work among the people they serve to help stimulate and educate Americans to plan ahead and cope with their problems.

Some characteristics of the Cooperative Extension system are:

- The federal, state, and local governments cooperatively share in its financial support and program direction.
- It is administered by the land-grant university as designated by the state legislature through an Extension director.
- Extension programs are nonpolitical, objective, and research-based information.
- It provides practical, problem-oriented education for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.
- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
- More than a million volunteers help multiply the impact of the Extension professional staff.
- It dispenses no funds to the public.
- It is not a regulatory agency, but it does inform people of regulations and of their options in meeting them.
- Local programs are developed and carried out in full recognition of national problems and goals.
- The Extension staff educates people through personal contacts, meetings, demonstrations, and the mass media.
- Extension has the built-in flexibility to adjust its programs and subject matter to meet new needs. Activities shift from year to year as citizen groups and Extension workers close to the problems advise changes.

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