

FISHING & HANDLINE SURVIVAL GUIDE

Catch. Clean. Preserve. Eat.



LINE

HOOKS

RIGS

RECOVERY

KNOWLEDGE • SKILL • DISCIPLINE • SURVIVAL

Independent educational field guide • verify current laws, local conditions, and expert guidance

SYSTEM PRIORITIES

START WITH THE SYSTEM

Turn limited line and hooks into a controlled food system

A handline is simple only in appearance. Success comes from organizing line, matching hooks to bait and target size, placing presentations where fish actually travel, and recovering every reusable component.

1 Core principles

- Protect line from abrasion, knots, heat, hooks and careless storage; line is both food tool and finite inventory.
- Use the smallest practical terminal system. Extra hardware creates failure points and may violate the current rules.
- Match hook gap, wire strength, bait size and presentation depth to the water and likely species.
- Fish high-probability structures and feeding windows rather than soaking effort everywhere.
- Plan landing, dispatch, processing and storage before the first bait enters the water.

The official published Season 12 list allows 300 yards of single-filament line up to 30 lb and 25 assorted barbed hooks. Confirm the current season rules.

2 First-hour priorities

- Verify fishing regulations, permitted methods and the current challenge equipment list.
- Inventory and label line by diameter or breaking strength; isolate damaged sections.
- Sort hooks by gap, wire, eye and purpose in a dry puncture-resistant wallet.
- Tie and test the few knots you can execute with cold fingers.
- Scout safe access, current, depth transitions, cover, inlet and outlet activity, and a clean processing zone.

Never wrap a loaded handline around a finger, hand or wrist. A running fish can cut deeply before you can react.

FIELD RULE

Every rig needs four answers: where the bait will travel, how the bite will be detected, how the fish will be landed, and how the line and hook will be recovered.

PRACTICAL
25-HOOK
ASSORTMENT

CHOOSE
 DELIBERATELY

Practical
 25-hook
 assortment

The exact mix depends on local fish. This balanced planning example favors replaceable bait hooks and a smaller number of stronger hooks for larger opportunities.

Qty	Hook role	Typical use	Reason for inclusion
6	Small bait hooks	Small fish, delicate bait, shallow margins	High bite conversion when forage and mouths are small.
6	Medium bait hooks	General lake and river work	Core inventory for worms, insects, fish pieces and mixed species.
4	Strong medium hooks	Current, larger bait, tougher fish	Extra wire strength without oversized bait presentation.
3	Large strong hooks	Larger fish where lawful and realistic	Preserves a few opportunities without overloading the kit.
3	Long-shank hooks	Baits that need easier handling or tooth clearance	Useful for removal and some bait styles; verify species fit.
2	Wide-gap hooks	Bulky natural bait	Improves gap exposure when bait fills a standard bend.
1	Reserve pattern	Replacement for the most productive local hook	Hold dry until field evidence identifies the highest-value role.

Decision note: Do not treat the assortment as universal. Research legal species, common mouth size, bait, habitat and seasonal behavior before deployment.

HANDLINE FISHING WORKFLOW

REPEATABLE BEATS HEROIC

Handline fishing workflow

A repeatable sequence reduces tangles, wasted bait, lost hooks and dangerous improvisation on wet rocks.

1

SCOUT BEFORE RIGGING

Observe current seams, depth changes, submerged cover, rising fish, bait movement, safe footing and a landing route.

2

BUILD ONE CLEAN RIG

Cut only the line needed. Tie the simplest suitable knot, trim safely, test under steady load and keep spare line dry.

3

PRESENT WITH CONTROL

Lower, drift or swing bait into the target zone without throwing loose coils. Maintain contact appropriate to the method.

4

DETECT, SET AND LAND

Respond to line movement without wrapping the line around the body. Guide fish toward a prepared shallow landing point.

5

RECOVER AND RESET

Dispatch and process lawfully, recover hook and usable line, inspect abrasion, refresh bait and record place, depth and time.

WATER TYPES AND PRESENTATIONS

ADAPT BEFORE CONDITIONS FORCE IT

Water types and presentations

The best rig is the lightest legal system that reaches the feeding zone without sacrificing control or recovery.

1 Lake shore

- Target points, drop-offs, inflows, windward food lanes and shade.
- Use a clean hand spool to control coils.
- Adjust bait depth before changing location.
- Keep line off brush and sharp rocks.
- Prepare a shallow landing pocket before the bite.

2 River and stream

- Fish current seams, eddies, undercut edges and pool transitions.
- Use enough weight or bait mass to reach the lane, not anchor indiscriminately.
- Stand downstream of loose coils.
- Avoid high water, unstable banks and entanglement hazards.
- Retie after repeated rock contact.

3 Cold water or ice

- Treat ice strength as unknown unless locally verified.
- Protect line from sharp edges and freezing coils.
- Use short controlled drops and organized slack.
- Keep hands dry and restore insulation immediately.
- Never let fishing compromise cold-injury prevention.

4 Natural bait system

- Collect bait lawfully and only from uncontaminated areas.
- Match bait size to hook gap; leave the point appropriately exposed.
- Store bait cool and separate from drinking water and food.
- Rotate bait when washed out or inactive.
- Record which bait, depth and time produce results.

FAILURE MODES AND CORRECTIONS

DIAGNOSE THE SYSTEM

Failure modes and corrections

Fishing failures are often system failures: poor placement, damaged line, mismatched hook, uncontrolled coils or no landing plan.

Failure signal	Likely cause	Best correction
Frequent break-offs	Abrasion, old knot, excessive force or line too light	Cut above damage, retie, reduce sharp angles and adjust line strength or landing method.
Bait disappears without fish	Hook buried, bait too soft, small fish or delayed response	Downsize bait, expose gap, change attachment and improve bite contact.
Fish throws the hook	Slack line, poor hook penetration, mismatched hook or rough handlining	Maintain controlled tension and use a hook size and set suited to the target.
Repeated tangles	Loose coils, wind, brush, mixed wet and dry line	Use a dedicated spool, deploy only needed line and rewind under light tension.
No activity in good-looking water	Wrong depth, time, temperature, presentation or no fish present	Change one variable, move to a new structure and record results.
Hook injuries or line cuts	Exposed points, unsafe coil handling or line wrapped on skin	Stop, control the hook, use tools where available and seek medical care for serious injury.

FIELD CARD, RED FLAGS AND SOURCES

CARRY THE STANDARD

Fishing deployment and line-conservation card

Organize the kit so one wet, cold mistake cannot turn the entire line supply into a translucent bird nest.

FIELD CHECKLIST

- ☐ Current fishing license, season, species and method rules verified.
- ☐ Safe shoreline, footing, weather and water level assessed.
- ☐ Main line labeled by strength and inspected for age or abrasion.
- ☐ Hook wallet dry, counted and arranged by size and purpose.
- ☐ Known knots can be tied and tested with cold or wet hands.
- ☐ Hand spool has smooth edges and secure line retention.
- ☐ Natural bait source is lawful and uncontaminated.
- ☐ Landing area and dispatch tool prepared before fishing.
- ☐ Processing zone separated from clean water and sleeping area.
- ☐ Reusable line and hooks recovered, cleaned and dried.
- ☐ Catch, location, depth, bait, time and weather recorded.
- ☐ Food storage plan ready before a productive session.

STOP / REASSESS

Line is wrapped around fingers, wrist, body or fixed gear while under load.

Lightning, unstable ice, flooding, surf or unsafe bank conditions.

Hook is deeply embedded in the face, eye, joint, tendon area or near a major vessel.

Unknown regulation, species, size limit or prohibited method.

Fish cannot be cooled, cooked or preserved safely after capture.

AUTHORITATIVE STARTING POINTS

HISTORY - published Alone gear list
<https://www.history.com/shows/alone/articles/gear-list>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
<https://www.fws.gov/>

National Park Service - fishing
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/fishing/index.htm>

NOAA - weather and water safety
<https://www.noaa.gov/education/resource-collections/weather-atmosphere>

Fishing laws and permitted methods vary by jurisdiction and season. Water, weather, hooks and line can cause serious injury. Use lawful methods, safe access and conservative handling.