

Vermont Fishing Guide

*Where, When and How to
Enjoy Vermont's Fishing*



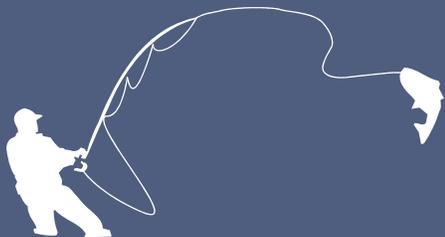
 VERMONT

FISH & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

www.vtfishandwildlife.com • 802-828-1000

The great outdoors are truly great here in Vermont, but we can easily become too busy to enjoy them. If you live in, or visit, Vermont why not enjoy the best the state has to offer? Fishing is a great way to escape, relax, and be refreshed while reconnecting with the wonderful natural world in which we live. Fishing is also a great way to spend quality time with family and friends. Chances are your children won't remember their best day of watching television, but take them fishing and you'll make memories you can share for a lifetime.

Fishing is a very affordable hobby. A fishing license costs only half as much as a tank of gas or about the same as a few movie tickets. Children under 15 years of age can fish for free! Perhaps the best part of your fishing license purchase is that it helps support the work of the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department, which exists to protect and conserve the fish, wildlife, plants, and habitats of Vermont. The department employs several fisheries biologists, who study and manage the state's fisheries resources. They have developed this guide to help you learn what fish to target as well as where, when, and how to enjoy fishing in Vermont. For more information about fishing regulations in general, see the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Regulations or visit www.vtfishandwildlife.com.



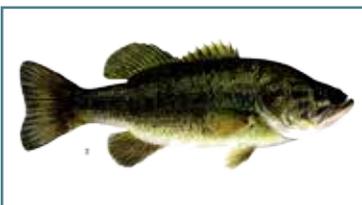
This guide will help you learn what fish to target as well as where, when and how to enjoy fishing in Vermont.



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Excise taxes paid by hunters and anglers have led to some of the greatest conservation gains in history. Along with license sales, these funds have been used for fish and wildlife restoration, fishing access areas, and to provide opportunities for hunting, fishing and other wildlife-based recreation throughout Vermont.



Trout

TROUT are the most popular target of Vermont's anglers and for good reason. Nearly every small, cold stream throughout the state supports wild brook trout. Trout are considered "coldwater" fish, which means that they need cold water to survive.

Where to Fish:

Small streams that are shaded by forested stream banks are generally cold enough to support trout, whether these streams drain the Green Mountains or flow through the Northeast Kingdom highlands. Cold, clean water and diverse habitat in many of Vermont's rivers and streams allow trout to survive and reproduce naturally.

Development and other activities along our waterways have left many of our larger streams too warm in the summer to support wild trout, so the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department stocks them with brook, brown, and rainbow trout for anglers to enjoy. Many of the state's lakes and ponds are also stocked with trout to enhance fishing opportunities in these waters. For the beginner angler the easiest fishing is usually in the smaller ponds.

The department publishes on their website what waters will be stocked. To determine which waters in your area are stocked with trout, check out the stocking schedule at: www.vtfishandwildlife.com.

When to Fish:

The best fishing for stocked trout is in the spring and early summer, shortly after the fish have been stocked. Trout season opens on the second Saturday of April, but most of the rivers that are stocked do not receive fish until the month of May. Lakes and ponds are often stocked before the season opener or shortly thereafter. You can determine whether your favorite water has been stocked by visiting www.vtfishandwildlife.com.

As noted above, trout need cold water to survive, so as water temperatures increase in the summer, trout in rivers and ponds become harder to catch. In contrast, wild brook trout in the small, cold streams can be caught all summer long and even into the fall. Regardless of the season, fishing is usually best around dawn or dusk, when trout are most active.



BROOK TROUT

Brook trout have light spots on a dark background, with worm-like markings against a greenish back. Their flanks are covered with light yellowish spots, with small bright red spots surrounded by blue halos along the lateral mid-section.



BROWN TROUT

Brown trout have a yellowish-brown overall color, especially in streams, with dark spots intermixed with reddish-orange spots along their flanks, with each spot surrounded by a light halo.



RAINBOW TROUT

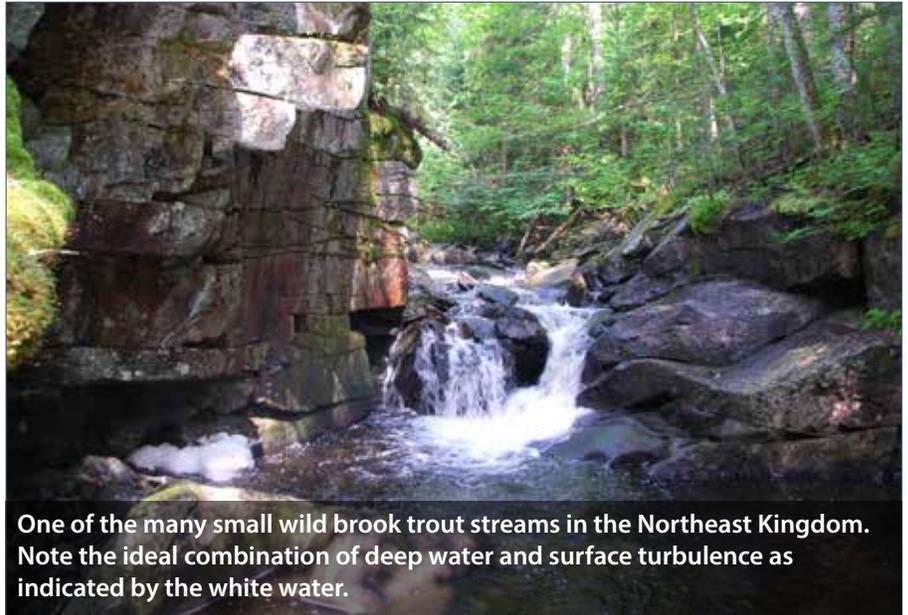
The tail and flanks of Rainbow trout are heavily spotted with small, well-defined black spots, and their flank usually has a pink or reddish stripe, for which they are named.

Trout

How to Fish:

The first challenge in trout fishing is to find the right place to fish. A good way to choose a fishing spot is to think like a trout. A trout needs to eat, but it also wants to avoid being eaten by birds, otters, or anglers. Try to imagine where a bird or otter would have the hardest time seeing and catching a trout, such as areas with deep water or where the water's surface is so turbulent that you can't see what is underneath. If you find deep water and surface turbulence, you have probably found a good place to fish.

Stocked trout in the larger rivers and in ponds can be caught with a variety of baits and lures. A live worm with a sinker for weight is a great choice. In areas with current, you can cast across the current or slightly upstream, and let the bait drift downstream. At the end of the drift, reel in and cast again.



One of the many small wild brook trout streams in the Northeast Kingdom. Note the ideal combination of deep water and surface turbulence as indicated by the white water.



The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department stocks trout in the spring.

In areas with slow or no current, you can simply cast the worm out and let it sink to the bottom. Because trout are typically not “bottom feeders”, the worm will be even more effective if you use a “worm blower” to inject an air bubble into it so that it will hover just off the bottom.



Lures like spoons and spinners can also be very effective at catching stocked trout. Always use small-diameter fishing line, six pound test or lighter, to avoid spooking wary trout.



Spoons are metal lures designed to look like a swimming baitfish or minnow. Spinners have one or more blades that spin, or revolve, around a straight wire shaft. Some spinners have tails made of soft plastic or animal hair.

Wild brook trout in the smaller streams are often eager to feed, but fishing smaller streams can be challenging. These fish can be easily spooked. Keep a low profile so they don't see you.

Casting can be a real challenge in smaller streams. Use a short rod and/or make short, underhand tosses. Worms are the bait of choice in small streams because there is usually not enough room to effectively fish an artificial lure.

Panfish

Bullheads, crappie, perch, rock bass, and sunfish are often referred to as “panfish” because they are easy to catch, abundant, and taste delicious, making them a good choice for the frying pan. Many of Vermont’s lakes and ponds and some of the larger rivers host one or all of these species. The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Regulations booklet includes lists of water bodies in different parts of the state and the fish species that are present in them. Here, we only highlight a few of the better fishing opportunities for the shore-based angler.

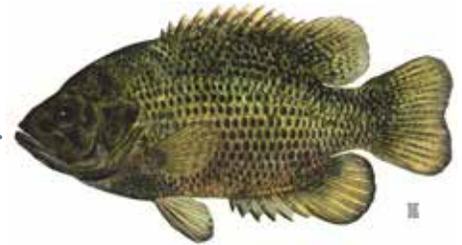
BROWN BULLHEAD

Brown bullhead have smooth, olive-brown to dark-brown flanks with a sharp, stout spine on the leading edge of their dorsal and pectoral fins. They have a broad, flat mouth surrounded by six whisker-like barbels.



ROCK BASS

Rock bass are a large and robust sunfish with a black spot at the edge of the gill cover and red eyes.



YELLOW PERCH

Yellow perch have golden-yellow flanks with 6 to 8 dark vertical bars. In the late winter and early spring, spawning males develop bright orange lower fins.

WHITE PERCH

White perch have silvery white sides. Despite its common name, the white perch is actually a bass.



PUMPKINSEED SUNFISH

Pumpkinseed sunfish range in color from olive-green to brown, yellow, green and blue on the top and sides. The breast and belly are usually a light color such as cream, white or yellow and occasionally orange.



BLACK CRAPPIE

Black crappie have silvery flanks and a dark olive or black back. Spots occur along their sides in a more or less irregular and scattered pattern.



Panfish

Where to Fish:

The **lower Missisquoi River** downstream of Swanton offers excellent public access and fishing in the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge. Anglers can launch boats or fish from shore at Louie's Landing, a fishing access area maintained by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Shore fishing is also permitted along the river bank downstream of Louie's Landing to Mac's Bend.

Bullheads, yellow perch, and white perch are the panfish species anglers are most likely to find here, but you could catch just about any species of fish that calls Lake Champlain home, including largemouth bass, northern pike, channel catfish, and the occasional walleye. The best action is in the spring and early summer when both perch species, bullheads and walleyes ascend the river on their annual spawning runs, but perch and bullheads can be caught here all summer long. Avoid fishing after heavy rains, which can increase flows and muddy the water, making fishing difficult.

Gardner Park, located on **Lake Memphremagog** in Newport City, provides fishing opportunities for bullheads, rock bass, sunfish, and yellow perch. These species can be caught here spring through fall, but the fishing can be especially good in the spring when these species congregate to spawn in the Clyde River or near its mouth. Much of the Gardner Park waterfront can be fished easily. A good location to try is where the Clyde River enters the lake. A footbridge just to the west of the US-5 bridge also provides good fishing opportunities. Canoes and kayaks can be rented from the local livery. In case the kids get bored, the park also has a very nice playground.

Island Pond, in Brighton, has bullheads, rock bass, sunfish, and yellow perch. A good place to fish from shore is the town park at the very north end of the pond. This park also has a playground and a beach. The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department owns and maintains an access area at the south end of the pond, where you can launch a boat. The pond is also stocked with trout.

Newark Pond, in Newark, has abundant populations of yellow perch and smallmouth bass. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department owns an access area near the north end of the pond. You can either cast from the access area or from the shoulder of the road, which travels right along the north end of the pond. You can also fish from the road shoulder at the dry hydrant, further south. If you have a boat, you can launch at the access area. This pond is also stocked with trout.



Panfish



The lower **Lamoille River**, located in Milton, drains into Lake Champlain. Two Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department access areas provide fishing opportunities on this stretch of the river. Closest to Lake Champlain is the Lamoille River Access Area. The second, Sears Access Area, is located just upstream. Both access areas have fishing platforms and the fishing is often good right from the platforms. The lower Lamoille River offers excellent fishing from mid-May through the fall. Yellow and white perch are the two panfish species that you are most likely to encounter. Anglers can also expect to encounter bass, walleye, and northern pike in this area. Water levels can fluctuate following heavy rains, which can make fishing difficult until flows subside.



There are two public access areas on the lower **Winooski River**, which is located in Colchester and Burlington and drains into Lake Champlain. Both access areas have fishing platforms, and the fishing is often good right from the platforms. At Windermere Way you can walk down the bike path and get near the mouth of the river. The Heineburg Bridge access area is further upstream, where VT Route 127 crosses the river. The lower Winooski River has a diverse fish population, primarily because it has a direct connection to Lake Champlain. Any species found in Lake Champlain can be found in the lower river. Some common panfish species you should expect to encounter are: bullheads, yellow perch, and white perch, but smallmouth and largemouth bass and northern pike are also common. In general, mid-May through fall offers excellent fishing in the lower river, however the variety and abundance of species will change through the season. Avoid fishing after heavy rains, which can increase flows and muddy the water, making fishing difficult.



Shelburne Bay is a large bay on Lake Champlain, located in the town of Shelburne, south of Burlington. You can fish along the shoreline at the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department's access area, with best fishing from the bridge on Bay Road to the point. You can also access the La Platte River, where the best fishing is usually found closer to the bridge. As part of Lake Champlain, this location has an incredibly diverse fish community. Lake Champlain has over 90 species of fish, many of which are highly-prized recreational sport fish. This access area offers excellent fishing both in Shelburne Bay and in the La Platte River for panfish species such as bullheads, rock bass, sunfish, yellow perch, and white perch. Late spring and early summer offers excellent fishing for panfish and bass, as well as northern pike. If you fish at the right time of year (early spring and late fall), you may even encounter lake trout or rainbow trout. If the fishing is slow, there are a number of fun

Panfish

things to do nearby. Just west of the access area is Shelburne Bay Park which has a beautiful one-mile walking trail along Lake Champlain. If you head into the town of Shelburne you can find more trails at La Platte Nature Park, just off Shelburne Falls Road.

Marshfield Reservoir (a.k.a. **Molly's Falls Reservoir**) is located along US Route 2 roughly midway between St. Johnsbury and Montpelier. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department access area offers plenty of opportunity to fish from shore, including two fishing platforms. You can also launch a boat here if you like. Yellow perch is the panfish species you would be most likely to encounter here. Trout are stocked here, but the best trout fishing will be in the spring before the water gets too warm and they move to deeper areas.

Baker Pond in Brookfield is owned by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department and offers plenty of places to fish from shore. You can also launch a small boat at the access area. Largemouth bass and pumpkinseed sunfish are abundant in this pond. The pond is also stocked with brook trout, but your best chances of catching them will be in the spring before the water gets too warm for them.

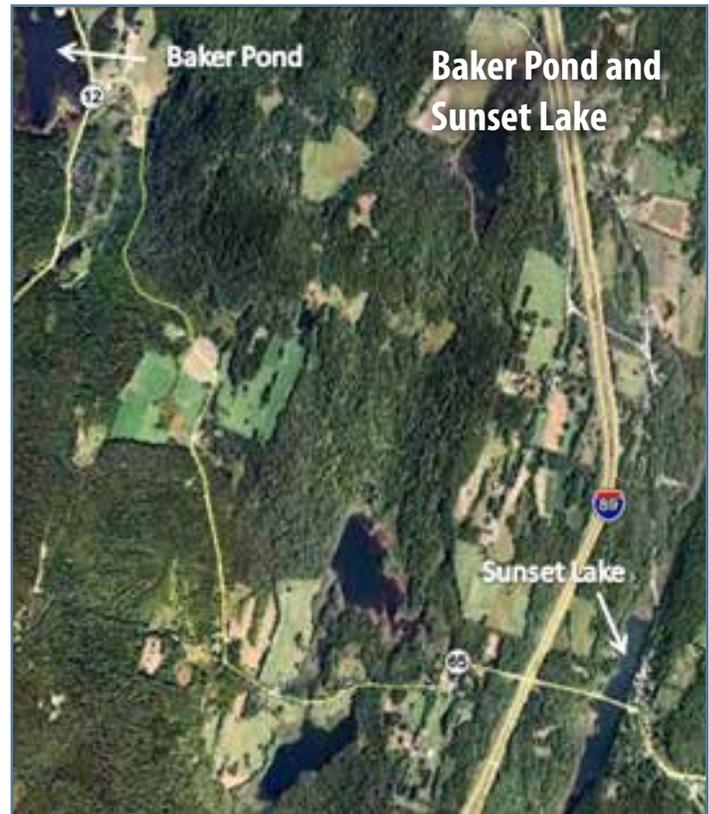
Sunset Lake is also in Brookfield and very close to Baker Pond. Children that have difficulty casting may find it easier to fish from the floating bridge that crosses this pond. Yellow perch are present here, along with largemouth and smallmouth bass. Trout are also stocked here.

Kent Pond and **Colton Pond** are separated by less than a mile in the town of Killington. There is a Vermont Fish & Wildlife access area at each pond. At Kent Pond, the best place to fish is along the dam breast. Gifford Woods State Park is just across the road from Kent Pond and offers camping and hiking opportunities. Kent Pond has a very abundant largemouth bass population. It also has pumpkinseed sunfish, and you can catch trout there in the spring.

Colton Pond offers largemouth bass, yellow perch, and early season brook trout fishing. Both ponds can be easily accessed from VT Route 100, just north of the junction with US Route 4.

The state park day-use area is a good place to fish **Lake Bomoseen** (Castleton) from shore, or you could rent a boat. If the fishing is slow, you can go swimming at the beach or play at the playground. You will need to pay an entrance fee to access the state park. Panfish species include crappie, rock bass, sunfish, and yellow perch.

Lake St. Catherine in Putney can also be fished from the state park. With the purchase of an entrance fee, the state park offers shoreline fishing, camping, swimming, and a playground. Panfish species include bullheads, crappie, rock bass, sunfish, and yellow perch. Mid-April through mid-May is the best time to catch panfish, but they can be caught all year. Target panfish around the weeds by casting a bobber



Panfish

with a split shot, single hook and bait such as a worm or minnow to the edges of weeds or to open pockets within the weeds. If you have a boat, try Cones Point and Cones Bay along Route 30.

The US Army Corps of Engineers' day-use area offers shoreline fishing access, picnic facilities, and restrooms at **Stoughton Pond** in Weathersfield. Bullheads, sunfish, and yellow perch can be found in Stoughton Pond. Trout are also stocked there, but your best fishing for them will be in the spring.

Lowell Lake in Londonderry can be fished from the state park. It is free to access this undeveloped state park, which offers shoreline fishing, picnic facilities, and portable toilets. If you have your own canoe, you can launch it here. Motorized boats are not allowed. Panfish species include bullheads, sunfish, and yellow perch.

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department land around **Bullhead Pond** in Manchester provides good opportunities for fishing from shore. There is no entrance fee. Bullheads and yellow perch call this pond home. Brook trout are stocked here, but if your preference is for trout, you will have to go in the spring before the water gets too warm.

Sadawga Pond in Whitingham is just north of the Massachusetts border. The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department's access area offers shoreline fishing opportunities, or you could launch your own boat. Bullheads, sunfish, and yellow perch live here.

When to Fish:

Most of these species spawn in the late spring (May to June), and fishing can often be good just before or during the spawning period, when they form large schools in shallow water. Unlike trout, panfish prefer warm water, so fishing can be good all summer. Panfish species can be caught at any time of the day, but morning and evening is often best. The best fishing for bullheads is usually at night.

How to Fish:

The best way to catch panfish is usually to fish a worm on or near the bottom of the pond or suspended under a bobber. Again, remember that these fish want to avoid predators, so look for them near deep water or some type of cover like aquatic vegetation or a fallen tree. A fun and effective way to fish for bullheads is to fish after dark with a worm on the bottom of the pond

Any lake or pond that has perch can be a good place to try ice fishing (if it is open to ice fishing, refer to Vermont Fish & Wildlife Regulations). Try small jiggling lures tipped with a live maggot or a perch eye. Maggots (a.k.a "spikes") are available at most bait shops in the winter.



Small jigs tipped with maggots are a great way to catch panfish through the ice.

While using maggots or perch eyes may sound gross, they are some of the best types of live bait you can use for panfish. Fortunately, there are artificial alternatives that work almost as well. Try using small plastic "micro jigs" that you can buy at most tackle shops catering to ice fishing. These can be found in the shape of maggots, minnow heads, small fish, and even insects like mayflies. Many are even scented with an attractant.



Bass and Toothy Critters

Bass have been growing in popularity with Vermont's anglers, and this is no surprise given the many great options for catching largemouth and smallmouth bass throughout the state. Northern pike are also growing in popularity among Vermont's anglers, especially with ice fishermen. While chain pickerel are much less popular with Vermont's anglers, they are widespread, abundant, easy to catch, and taste delicious (if prepared properly, as they are very bony). Some of the better options for the shore-based angler are listed below. See the "Panfish" section for more detailed descriptions of these locations.

Where to Fish:

The lower **Missisquoi River** offers fishing opportunities for largemouth bass, northern pike, and the occasional walleye. Walleye are more abundant during their spring spawning run. The rare and elusive muskellunge can also be found here.

Gardner Park on **Lake Memphremagog** is a great place to fish for both species of bass and for chain pickerel and northern pike. Large numbers of smallmouth bass enter the Clyde River in late-May and June to feed and spawn.

Island Pond has both species of bass and chain pickerel.

The **Newark Pond** smallmouth bass population is very abundant.

Both species of bass can be caught in the lower **Lamoille River**. Fishing for smallmouth bass can be especially good in the fall when these fish gorge themselves on minnows in preparation for the coming winter. Northern pike and walleye are also present.

Both species of bass can be caught in the lower **Winooski River**, along with walleye and northern pike.

Shelburne Bay offers fishing for both species of bass, northern pike, and chain pickerel. Fishing is best in the late spring and early summer.

Marshfield Reservoir has smallmouth bass, chain pickerel, and northern pike.

Largemouth bass are especially abundant in **Baker Pond**.

Sunset Lake has both species of bass and chain pickerel.

Colton Pond and **Kent Pond** both have largemouth bass, and the population in Kent Pond is very abundant.

Lake St. Catherine has both species of bass and northern pike. Fishing is best for these species from mid-May through September. Casting in-line spinners, spoons, and crankbaits



LARGEMOUTH BASS

True to their name, Largemouth Bass have a large, round mouth when open, and when it's closed, the upper jaw extends well past the eye. Their flanks are light green to golden green, with a pronounced horizontal stripe.



SMALLMOUTH BASS

Closely related to the Largemouth Bass, when a Smallmouth Bass closes its mouth, its upper jaw extends only to just below the eye. Their flanks are golden green to brownish bronze, often with 8 to 15 dark, thin vertical bars.



NORTHERN PIKE

Northern Pike are long, slender fish with large mouths, and dorsal and anal fins placed far to the rear. Their flanks are greenish gray with several rows of irregular, yellowish-white bean shaped spots. Their gill covers only have scales on the top half, and their tail, dorsal, and anal fins have dark spots or blotches.



CHAIN PICKEREL

Although similar in appearance to the Northern Pike, Chain Pickerel have fully scaled gill covers, and their tail, dorsal and anal fins have no conspicuous spots or blotches. Their flanks are a light, golden green, with dark, chain-like markings.

Bass and Chain Pickerel

around the mouth of Endless Brook can be an effective way to target these fish.

Lake Bomoseen has both species of bass and northern pike.

Stoughton Pond has an abundant population of largemouth bass.

Lowell Lake has largemouth bass and chain pickerel.

Bullhead Pond and **Shaftsbury Pond** have largemouth bass.

When to Fish:

Bass spawn in May and June. From December 1 to the Friday before the second Saturday in June, anglers fishing lakes and ponds can only target bass with artificial flies and lures, and they must be immediately released. From the Second Saturday in June until November 30, anglers can use live or artificial baits and they can keep some bass if they choose to do so. Refer to Vermont Fish & Wildlife Regulations book for more information on regulations for bass, chain pickerel and northern pike.

Like panfish, bass and pickerel prefer warm water, so they can be caught all summer long. Best fishing is often at dawn and dusk, when these predatory species are most active.

Chain pickerel and northern pike are very active under the ice, so any pond that has them and is open to ice fishing can be a good option for ice fishing for these species. Refer to the species lists in the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Regulations book to determine where pickerel and pike can be found near you.

How to Fish:

These fish are commonly caught while using worms to fish for panfish. Live minnows are even more effective for bass, pike, and pickerel. These species also respond well to artificial lures such as soft plastic worms, crankbaits, spoons, and spinners.

Spoons and spinners are especially effective for pike and pickerel because they can be cast a long distance, and their bright flash and vibration often trigger vicious strikes from these “water wolves.”

Pike and pickerel have sharp teeth that can bite through many fishing lines. Use an abrasion-resistant fishing line or a wire leader to avoid having your lures bitten off.



There are two main methods for catching pike and pickerel during the ice fishing season. Pickerel can be caught on jigging lures that are tipped with maggots, perch eyes, or small pieces of perch meat. However, the most effective method for both pike and pickerel is often to fish a minnow or small perch under a tip-up. If perch are present in the pond where you want to fish, you can often catch your own bait with little effort.

Handling and Releasing Fish



While harvesting and eating freshly caught fish is an enjoyable part of the angling experience, catch and release angling can also be a rewarding past time. In certain instances, regulations may actually require you to release your catch (see Vermont Fish and Wildlife Regulations). Using the proper techniques when releasing fish will help to ensure that the fish will survive to be caught again. Here are some tips:

- Don't play the fish to complete exhaustion.
- Minimize the fish's time out of the water. If at all possible, keep the fish in the water while you remove the hook.
- Consider pinching down the barbs on your hooks to make hook removal much easier.
- If the fish is hooked deep in the throat, gills, or stomach, simply cut the line close to the fish's mouth. The fish may have a good chance of surviving, and the hook will eventually rust out.

Now that you know a little about Vermont's fish and where to go find them, we hope you'll take the time to explore all the fishing opportunities that this great state has to offer. Tight lines!