

The case for requiring barbless hooks in Catch & Release waters

With the intent of C & R rules to maintain and build quality fisheries, I question why a barbless hook only rule is not also in place to achieve this goal. I don't think anybody who believes in and practices C & R would be against barbless only. All of the fly fishers I have spoke with agree that barbed hooks do little to help the intent of C & R rules. Most have made it a habit to pinch the barbs on all their flies.

Over the years many studies have shown the increased mortality rates in the use of barbed hooks [https://doi.org/10.1577/1548-8675\(1992\)012<0760:AMAOHM>2.3.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1577/1548-8675(1992)012<0760:AMAOHM>2.3.CO;2) and the increased handling during the release <http://www.outsidebozeman.com/magazine/archives/spring-2016/fish-out-water>. In most cases the death rate increases with young or stressed fish. The State has done a good job emphasizing the importance and the procedure for releasing a fish. Requiring barbless hooks in C & R waters would only reinforce the States commitment to our fisheries.

Many biologist and industry experts also believe a barbless hook, if left in the mouth of a fish can self extract in as little as a day, whereas the barbed hook can be days, weeks if ever, depending on the area of the mouth. During this time their ability to forage will most likely be reduced, and put under increased stress and possible death.

One of the arguments against barbless hooks I've read and been told to expect in this process is the increased chance of losing a fighting fish without a barb. While in some cases this is true, I think most experienced fisherman would argue that technique and skills are a larger part to a landed trout than a barb. On the other side of this argument, many industry experts believe an extended barb can make the initial set more difficult, causing more lost fish.

I've also heard the argument that it's tough to find barbless hooks. I think this used to be a problem, but many of the top hook manufactures now have a good assortment of barbless hooks (especially dedicated to fly fisherman). I'm not suggesting barbed hooks need to be replaced, just pinched down. Fishing in B C years ago that's all that was required, if a Game Warden checked your equipment he ran his finger along the barb area to determine if you were in compliance. But again, many of us pinch our barbs down as a habit.

Many areas of the country have enacted barbless only rules including our Rocky Mountain National Park. When we look at the amount of fisheries Colorado has, the C & R portion is very small, and I imagine the people that love these waters and practice C & R, required or not, would be in favor of a rule that would only enhance their waters. Any questions let me know.

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References:

American Fisheries Society

Julie Meka : USGS Biologist

NMFS, 2008 Barbed hooks effect on Salmon and Steelhead.