

September 2008

Fishing photos convey fun - and responsibility

By Bob Wattendorf, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

“A picture is worth a thousand words” is an aphorism that we’ve all likely heard and understood. When you see a cute photo of a child and proud parent displaying even the smallest of fish, you get a sense of the power of images to convey not only thoughts but feelings.

Unfortunately, some of those same photos we are so proud of can accidentally convey the wrong message. Especially when they are published, they can proliferate unsafe or illegal practices. In other cases, they may simply fail to reinforce important safety and conservation messages that could otherwise positively affect the future of our fisheries.

For those reasons, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has recently taken a more proactive stance by developing “Image Guidelines for Fishing and Boating Scenes,” with examples of the good, the bad and the ugly (MyFWC.com/docs/Freshwater/PhotoGuidelines.pdf). These guidelines are supported by a candid research document that cites many important studies explaining the rationale behind commonly suggested catch-and-release fish-handling suggestions (MyFWC.com/docs/Freshwater/photoguidelines_notes.pdf).



Photos can help show the fun of fishing, while conveying safe and sustainable practices. Photo Courtesy of Joe Benedict, FWC.



Since goliath grouper are illegal to harvest they should not be portrayed in boats, a fish handled like this would not survive release. Photo Courtesy of Florida Media.

The FWC realizes that promoting Florida fishing and boating includes not only an obligation to portray the fun, excitement and camaraderie in a positive fashion but also to reflect safe and sustainable use of Florida's natural resources. We are proud that so many fine publications print this Florida Fish Busters' Bulletin each month, and we

encourage them and all of their contributors to review these photo guidelines and use them when possible to strengthen both the appeal and important messages that their photography conveys.

The following photography tips and guidelines are just a summary of the full document, which we believe will be helpful to every angler. Next time you go fishing or boating bring along a camera to capture the memories, and remember these tips to help produce a great photo and remind you of what it takes to be safe around the water and to help ensure fish for tomorrow's enjoyment as well.

Subject Matter Tips

1. Photos of anglers should reflect good taste and safe, legal and conservation-minded fishing practices.
2. Emphasize the fun of fishing with big smiles and natural settings. Avoid trash in the background, excess blood and tobacco or alcohol.
3. Ensure appropriate boating safety equipment is evident in the photo. For instance, life jackets should always be on children in a boat.
4. Photos should depict safe boating practices, including avoiding overloading small vessels, use of kill switches, etc.
5. Fish that are illegal to harvest, due to creel or size limits, should be shown in the water. For instance, undersized sailfish jumping or a goliath grouper

alongside the boat about to be released. Gaffs should not be used on fish that may be released. Tarpon that are out of the water should have a “legally harvested” tag showing.

6. If you have to remove fish from the water, try holding your breath while the fish is out of the water as a reminder to release it quickly. Large fish should never be suspended by the jaw, not even to weigh them, if they are going to be released. To protect the slime layer, use wet hands to handle fish. Similarly, if a landing net is needed, use a rubber-coated net. Never touch the eyes and gills. However, holding and supporting the fish horizontally with a thumb (depending on the species; be careful of sharp teeth) or lip-grip tool in the mouth and using the other hand to help support and control the fish can keep it from thrashing around or getting loose. Properly used, hemostats, needle-nosed pliers or dehooking tools can be useful for backing the hook out, but cut the line if it is deeply embedded.

Photography Tips

1. Digital or film - Digital cameras work fine for most applications. However, if you plan to print the image, a minimum resolution of 2 megapixels (good for a 4” x 6” image) is needed.

2. ISO - ISO refers to the light-capturing quality of film, but a similar setting is available on many digital cameras. Lower numbers (25-100) require more light, but capture much greater detail.

3. The rule of thirds applies - When composing photos, it is often best not to center your subject, but place it so the focal point is about one-third of the way from an edge.

4. Closeup - For many fishing shots, you’ll want to come close to filling the frame with the fish, the angler and the fish, or a scene including the tackle and fish.

5. Smiles - When photographing anglers, it’s all about the fun of fishing that should be reflected in the anglers’ smiles and body language. Mix the direction up with anglers sometimes focusing on the fish, rather than the camera.

6. Lighting - Natural light, especially early morning and late afternoon, tends to provide the most dynamic effect. When using a flash, ensure you are close enough for the power of your flash and be aware of the redeye effect. To avoid shadows on someone’s face, for instance from their cap bill, consider using your camera’s fill flash.

If you get a great shot that you'd like to share with us and maybe see published, send it to me at Bob.Wattendorf@MyFWC.com, and include a completed photo-release form (see MyFWC.com/docs/Freshwater/PhotoRelease-08_email.pdf).

*Instant licenses are available at MyFWC.com/License or by calling 1-888-FISH-FLORIDA (347-4356). Report violators by calling *FWC or #FWC on your cell phone, or 1-888-404-3922. Visit MyFWC.com/Fishing/Updates for more Fish Busters columns.*