



An osprey hangs lifeless from a stump after being wrapped up in unretrieved fishing line.

Mind Your Line

Whenever possible, lost fishing line should be collected and disposed of properly.

When you're fishing and someone says, "Mind your line," or "You've got one on," it's exciting. But unfortunately, when we lose fishing line and it is not retrieved it catches more than we anticipated, and that can have a tragic result.

Fishing line in the environment keeps catching creatures in unintended ways. Especially where shoreline fishing is popular, many animals can be impacted. Line can become easily tangled in branches when casting near trees; on the Susquehanna I once was saddened to see a night heron caught up in filament and hanging lifeless from a limb.

When banding osprey I have had to cut monofilament line from a chick's legs. The legs were beginning to deform because their circulation was being cut off; it is common for monofilament to wrap around an appendage and cause lacerations, loss of limbs, and death. Ingestion will also cause death and it can be a drawn-out and painful affair.

A number of years ago we found an osprey or fish hawk entangled and hanging from a stump. Osprey are especially prone to this because of their propensity to amass all manner of things for their nests. Some individuals seem to specialize in particular kinds of trash. One bird has an interest in heavy rubber gloves; I suspect a nearby marina wonders where all those gloves disappear to! Another bird likes orange rope and tire treads. On more than one occasion we have found a bicycle tire innertube in one specific nest. Some of the things these birds collect are

dangerous: plastics and fishing line are prime examples. A number of years ago one bird had a plastic sample-sized detergent bottle caught on its talon for at least two days. This would surely have prevented it from catching fish and could have led to death by starvation.

An osprey's diet consists of 99% fish. And sometimes when a fisherman is reeling in his catch an osprey will seize the opportunity for an easy meal and snatch the fish, line and all. Most fishermen would rather not deal with its talons and cut the line, or often the line will break.

Not only birds but other creatures are very susceptible as well. Turtles often ingest line when searching for worms and other invertebrates. Fish gobble it up or get entangled as well. Animals are not the only ones plagued by monofilament: scuba divers and boat props suffer, too.

This is not a short-lived problem. Strands of polymer which form monofilament fishing lines will last over 600 years. A few companies produced a bioline that was thought to biodegrade in five years when exposed to the elements. This was a great choice for serious fisherman who respool their lines every year or so. But this product

was discontinued because it was rumored not to live up to its claims.

Retrieving lost fishing line is not always easy, but whenever possible it should be collected and properly disposed of. A company named Berkley that manufactures fishing line accepts used line and recycles it into materials like plastic planks. This monofilament comes from tackle stores that respool lines, from fisherman, shoreline clean-ups, and recycle bins. Boat U.S. provides simple directions and labels for making a popular PVC pipe for collecting fishing line – www.boatus.org/monofilament/build-a-bin/. These are found nationwide at many boat launches or shoreline fishing locations; there is one at the Fowser Road boat ramp in Millville, NJ. It is best to mount these near a trash can to discourage other trash from being deposited in them.

But whatever you do, mind your line or you may catch more than you bargained for—with sad results.



The Fowser Rd monofilament recycle bin. Boat US provides plans to build this bin ([click here](#)).

Fishing Line Disposal

So if you need to dispose of fishing line, what is the best thing to do?

- You can put it in a monofilament recycle bin near you.
- You can send it to Berkley Recycling, 1900 18th Street, Spirit Lake, Iowa 51360.
- If you choose to throw it out in your trash, please cut it into one-inch pieces first.