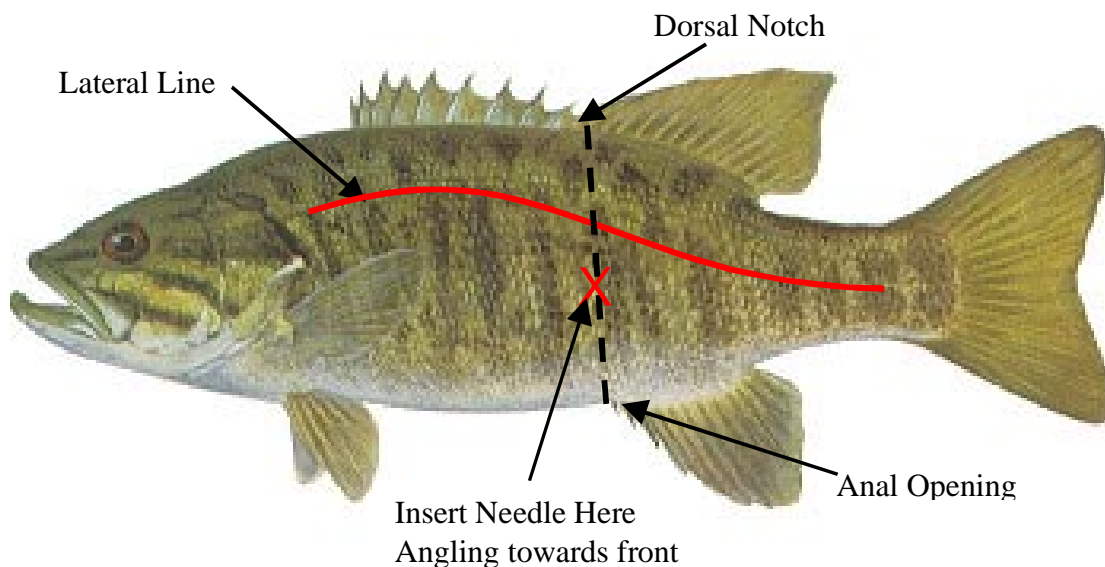


Deflating Deep-Caught Bass

Bass caught in water 35 feet or deeper may have an over-inflated gas bladder (swim bladder). If released immediately, the fish can usually swim back down to the proper depth. However, if held for a period of time in a live well (for example in a bass tournament), the fish tires and its muscles can no longer compensate for the pressure. One indicator of this condition is that the bass appears to be bloated with an extended belly; another, and probably the best, is that the bass floats in the livewell or on the surface of the lake without being able to swim down below the surface. An over-inflated swim bladder should be deflated to assist in the healthy release of the bass. Remember to keep the bass in water as much as possible during this procedure. Deflating a bass in a livewell or holding tank is much easier than trying to do it while leaning out of a boat.



To deflate a swim bladder, you will need a 2-inch hypodermic needle. These needles are sharp, so use caution when using them. Use the above picture as a reference to the correct location to insert the needle. Imagine a line from the notch in the dorsal fin to the anal opening. The insertion point will be on that line at a point about 1 inch below where the imaginary line crosses the lateral line. When inserting the needle, lift a scale and go under it rather than through the scale. Angle the needle towards the front of the fish and carefully insert the needle until the point should be close to the center of the fish. The distance that you have to insert the needle will vary with the size and thickness of the bass. You should hold the bass under water after getting the needle started. When you hit the swim bladder, air bubbles should come out of the back of the needle. Very gently squeezing the bass will assist the swim bladder in deflating. When the air bubbles slow down and the bass no longer appears bloated, carefully withdraw the needle. The bass should now be deflated and able to swim down below the surface of the water.