

PARCO REGIONALE DEL NERA

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Region: **Umbria**

Area: **2,120 hectares**

Established in: **1995**

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“No-Kill” Fishing

Also called *catch and release fishing*, it was experimented for the first time – in 1954 – in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, United States. It has been also used in Slovenia, Austria, and Switzerland. Recently, the concept has become very popular, both as a fishing management instrument and as anglers’ personal philosophy.

In Italy, its most famous implementation regards a stretch of the river Nera and its tributaries (in particular, the river Fersinone) where, according to a project of Legambiente Umbria, in 1994 the Province of Perugia established a “No-Kill” *Specific Regulation Stretch*. The kilometers involved are nine, from location Piedipaterno in the Municipality of Vallo di Nera to location Ponte, in the Municipality of Cerreto di Spoleto.

This area lies in the north of the stretch belonging to the Umbrian regional park; however, territorial adjacency and the continuity of the fluvial environment suggest to enhance this experience, extending and reproducing it to other river sections.

The river Nera is one of the most beautiful rivers of Central Italy. Rich in water and with several springs, it is a paradise for trout, blue bream, bullhead, and stickleback. And, as a consequence, it is a paradise for anglers. An experimental but sustainable management of the aquatic ecosystem needed a solution avoiding the general ban on sport fishing, introducing at the same time more efficient rules which should be shared by the anglers themselves. Like *no-kill* fishing.

It works like this. Once caught, fish cannot be detained, but must be immediately released, in order to cause it the least possible damage. Therefore, specific rules must be followed:

- use fishing techniques reducing fish damage as much as possible, such as flies with hooks without barb (a device preventing the fortuitous escape of the fish: it has been demonstrated that its damages double the fish death rate);
- take as little time as possible to catch the fish, avoiding “fighting” too long with the fish that has taken the bait, since it would weaken it;
- get one’s hands wet before touching the fish to unhook and release it into the water;
- if the fish, once unhooked, seems to suffer from asphyxia, keep it for some minutes in the current to favor its recovery.

As far as more general angling procedures are concerned, the Province has passed specific rules for the area involved. First of all, it is necessary to buy a pass: in 2004, its cost was of 15 Euros for one day and 80 Euros for ten outings. At the beginning of the day, the angler must record on the pass the date and the river section he has chosen: in the so-called “A” section the angler can only use fly lines (a particularly tapered fishing line), while in “B” section fishermen can also use the so-called “spinner” (a rotating artificial bait) provided that it has a single hook and not a multiple hook. Angling is not admitted on Tuesdays, and a maximum number of twenty-five anglers per day is fixed (there is a booking system at Legambiente Valnerina in Borgo Cerreto managing the *no-kill* stretch, you can contact by calling the number 0743 91221: by calling the same telephone number you can also book naturalistic visits along the river).

How much does such a sensible management of the angling pressure affect the health of fish populations? In order to give an appropriate answer to this question, between 1998 and 1999 a monitoring activity has been carried out by the Department of Animal Biology and Ecology of the University of Perugia, by order of the Province of Perugia. The research activity dealt with seven fluvial sections, out of which two outside the *no-kill* stretch, and therefore traditionally managed, with both natural and artificial baits, legal size of 20-22 centimeters, possibility of catching up to eight brown trout, etc. Various ecological parameters have been analyzed, such as density, biomass, growth, structure per age, mortality, conduction factor, with the aim to differentiate the results as much as possible according to the different regulations that have been adopted. Research has provided the expected results. According to these results, the sections within the no-kill stretch have trout populations consisting of older and bigger individuals than the outer sections. They are also characterized by a high quantity of fish exceeding the average quantity of the stretches with salmonids of the Tiber basin, and even higher in the areas where angling is not admitted (protection zone). On the contrary, the sections outside the no-kill stretch are not very different from the stretches with salmonids in the Tiber basin.