What do you do with the fish guts while camping?

It seems what you do with fish guts depends on where you are. The surprising consensus among biologists, ecologists and other authorities is to throw the guts into deep water, where they decompose to provide essential nutrients and don’t attract animals. Throwing entrails into shallows where they are an eyesore is a no no. Puncturing the air sac and disposing in deep water, or packing out, is the way to go.

**Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife**
http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/high_lakes/

"Although fish entrails are biodegradable, a respectful alpine angler will never discard them in lake shallows where they can be seen by others. Pack out viscera (the intestines) in a zip-lock bag, or dispose of them in water at least 25’ deep. Never bury or try to burn fish parts near the lake; the remains may attract sharp-nosed bears. Burial at least 100 yards away from the lake, trail or camps is an acceptable alternative. Pack out the offal (the entrails and internal organs of an animal used as food) from any fish kept, or dispose of it in a manner that will not attract wildlife or harm the aesthetics of the area."

**Department of Ministry in British Columbia**
http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/fish/safety/

**Angling in Bear Country**

Bears are found throughout B.C., frequently near streams. Black bears and grizzlies have a keen sense of smell, which may attract them to freshly-caught fish, fish guts, spawning grounds and bait such as fish eggs. Here are some simple precautions to help you avoid bear encounters and conflicts:

- Clean your fish a good distance away from camp.
- Dispose of fish guts by puncturing the bladder and dropping in deep or rushing water, well away from heavily used shoreline areas. Avoid disposal in shallow water or where likely to wash up on the beach, bank or boat launch. Burial or burning is not recommended, and please, do not place in garbage receptacles!
- Remember not to wipe your hands on your clothing after cleaning fish or handling fish or bait such as fish eggs.
- Bears can be drawn to many types of food – not only fish and bait, but also groceries or garbage. Take precautions both while fishing and at your camp. Keep fish eggs in well-sealed and secure containers.
- Make your presence known by talking loudly or making noise, particularly along streams and in areas where there is bear sign such as droppings, tracks, or claw or bite marks on trees.
- While fishing, if a bear approaches within 50 metres (or 100 m for a female with cubs), reel in your line or cut the line and leave the area immediately

Many agencies recommend putting fish entrails back into the lake. Why? Well if the fish entrails are at the bottom of the lake, they can’t attract bears and putting them in the lake returns much needed nutrients. In general, most mountain lakes have limited food resources. When you put the fish entrails back into the lake, you are returning some of those nutrients to the lake for its entire biota. It’s a bit like salmon dying after spawning and returning nutrients to the river system.

Hopefully this information will help you and others to properly dispose of fish entrails and help maintain the nutrients in the mountain lakes.
As a final note, please be aware of different regulations in different states. While biologists in Washington recommend putting fish entrails back into the water of high lakes, this may not be the case in other states; for instance, it is not permitted in Illinois, Wisconsin, or Minnesota.

**In Illinois,**

**Cleaning Fish on Waters**
No fish entrails or carcass may be disposed of into the waters of Illinois after cleaning. No fish species may be dressed (filleted or head and tail removed) on any waters to which length limits are applicable.

**Fish Disposal – Fish Abandonment**
It is unlawful for any person at any time to take or possess any fish in Illinois waters by sportfishing methods and then intentionally leave or abandon such fish or portions thereof resulting in wanton or needless waste. It is also unlawful for any person to intentionally allow the fish or a portion thereof to be wantonly or needlessly wasted or to fail to dispose thereof in a reasonable and sanitary manner.

No disposal of fish or fish portions shall be allowed on State owned or leased properties except at designated fish cleaning stations.

**In Wisconsin,**

**What is chumming, and is it legal in Wisconsin?**
Chumming refers to the process of scattering ground up fish (known as chum) in the water as bait, and is illegal in Wisconsin, since it would result in waste being deposited on a stream or lake bed.

However, chumming is acceptable if the angler can retrieve the fish attractant/bait after he or she is done fishing (such as fish parts in a mesh bag). Remember that depositing any sort of fish entrails into the water is illegal! All waste should be thrown into the trash, not the water.

**In Minnesota,**

**Disposal of unused portions:**
Unused or uneaten portions of fish should be buried or disposed of with household waste. Fish entrails should never be discarded back into the lake.

Dispose of unwanted bait, including minnows, leeches and worms, in the trash. It is illegal to release bait into a waterbody or release aquatic animals from one waterbody to another. If you want to keep your live bait, you must refill the bait container with bottled or tap water.

**Some of the rules that govern the Boundary Waters Canoe Area related to fish remains:**
- Fish remains are to be buried away from shore and away from camps, trails, and portages. Previously, it was recommended that fish remains be put on rocks on the shorelines for consumption by birds and other wildlife, however, this is no longer the case.
- A latrine is available for each campsite. Do not dump any garbage (or fish remains) in the latrines. If you are not near a latrine, then dig a hole 6 to 8 inches deep at least 150 feet from shore and then cover when finished.