Fishing in Minnesota

Fishing Regulations and Licensing - All persons 16 and older are required to have the appropriate license with them while fishing. Boats and canoes are available through the DNR License Bureau, most County Auditors, and many stores that sell alcoholic beverages. Trout fishing requires a trout stamp. For more information call the DNR Information Center at (651) 296-6157 or 1-800-657-3929.

Selective Harvest Fishing - Improved technology and increased fishing have caused the quality of fishing to decline in many lakes. Practicing "Selective Harvest" offers anglers an opportunity to take some fish home while releasing others back into the water to improve fishing for the future. Follow the steps below to help maintain good fishing for years to come.

Open Water Access

Open water access refers to all water including lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, and other bodies of water. 

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)

Laws and Requirements:

Before leaving the water access or shoreline property, you must:

- Clean off all aquatic plants and animals
- Drain all water including bilge, livewells, and bait trays
- Pull the plug and leave it out

Get into the habit of taking these three steps, and it will soon become part of your routine. Pull away from the boat ramp area. Check for plants while strapping the boat down. Pull the plug when you dock. If you have other people (especially kids) with you, have them help! Adding a few minutes will help safeguard our waters.

Cleaning water-related equipment is just as important as for your boat. If you’re cleaning your boat out, please remember to:

- Clean anchors, ropes, fishing tackle, and other objects that were in the water. Many species can be transported in the mud or on anchors and ropes.
- Drain water out of canoes, kayaks, and other watercraft before leaving.

These are YOUR waters and it’s YOUR responsibility to inspect, clean, and drain your boat!

AIS Bait Laws

- All transport lake and river water. To save your (minnows or leeches), the DNR recommends bringing bottomed or toped water home and keeping it in your vehicle or cooler. Bringing ice can be a good idea on warm days to cool down the water.
- DO NOT dump unwanted bait into water bodies or on the shoreline! Unwanted bait belongs in the trash or a designated compost bin. Unwanted worms must be disposed of in the trash.

Working Together to Protect the Waters

Watercraft Inspectors are here to ensure watercraft and equipment are “clean, clean out!” If you need assistance, have questions about the laws, or are curious about the program, please ask.

Ways you can help the Watercraft Inspectors:

- Please clean your boat and plug your boat as soon as you are safely able to. That way when the inspection comes, the inspection process will move quickly.
- If there is a Decommission Unit present, please follow all the instructions given by the inspector, for your safety and theirs. There will be plenty of time to ask questions and watch them work from a safe distance.
- Watercraft Inspectors can help you:
  - The inspectors look for swimmer’s entry points and doors, so if you are having trouble with your plug, ask!
  - If there are weeds that are hard to reach, inspectors can also help pull weeds off boats or other such tasks. They also have grabbing tools for plants.

When you see the Watercraft Inspectors, please be cooperative. The law requires compliance with inspectors, and it will help everyone to be on their way in a timely and pleasant manner.

Safe Boating

Personal Floation Devices (PFD) - On boats (except a sailboard regardless of length) there must be a readily accessible Coast Guard approved PFD for each person on board, children 12 years of age or older, except canoes and kayaks. You must also be at least one Coast Guard approved throwable device, such as a ring buoy or seat cushion.

Boating While Intoxicated (BWI) - Boating while intoxicated is illegal. For persons found to be under the influence there are many significant penalties, including fines and possible jail sentences.

Personal Watercraft - Special laws apply including wearing a PFD and operating at slow no wake speeds at certain distances from other watercraft, swimmers and other objects in the water. Operator age restrictions also apply. Consult the Boating Guide for more information. A DNR safety video is available free of charge.

DNR Information Center

DNR information can be accessed at www.wbdnr.com or by calling the DNR Information Center at (651) 296-6157 or 1-800-657-3929.

Boating Access

Public Water Access

Boating in Minnesota

The annual Minnesota Boating Guide summarizes Minnesota boating laws and regulations in an easy-to-read form. The guide supplies information about operating watercraft on the state’s lakes and rivers. Operator age restrictions apply to operators 17 years old and younger.

Licensing - All motorized and non-motorized watercraft must be licensed by the Department of Natural Resources. Please contact the DNR License Bureau for information.

Public Water Access in Minnesota:

The Minnesota DNR State Parks and Trails’s water recreation program provides approximately 1,100 boat accesses, over 200 fishing piers and shore fishing sites, and manages 24 designated Water Trails in Minnesota. The DNR, Federal Government and local communities operate boat accesses. See the table on the right for specific site information. The DNR boating programs are funded by user fees including boat licenses & gas tax related to motorized watercraft.

Public accesses are usually open 24 hours unless otherwise posted. Most sites have launch ramps but some sites, especially on smaller rivers, are carry in only. Bathrooms and docks are usually located only on the larger and busier sites.

Public Water Access Rules - The launch area must be kept clear and the following activities are unlawful: littering, camping, shooting, building fires, and consuming alcoholic beverages. See Minnesota Rules, chapter 6218 for complete information.

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