Public Water Access in Minnesota:

The Minnesota DNR State Parks and Trails’ water recreation program provides approximately 1,600 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 license & gas tax related to marine use.

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

Public Water Access Rules - The launch area must be kept clear and the following practices are unlawful: littering, camping, shooting, building fires, and compliance with the Minnesota Rules, chapter 5218 for complete rules.

Boating in Minnesota

The annual Minnesota Boating Guide summarizes Minnesota’s 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 (DNR). Please contact the DNR License Bureau for information.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Laws and Requirements:

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

- Clean all aquatic plants and animals.
- Drain all water including bilge, keelcoolers, raw-water, ballast-water, and bilge/tank tanks.
- Pull the plug and leave it out.

Get into the habit of taking these three simple steps, and it will soon become part of your routine. Pull away from the boat ramp area. Check for plants while strapping down the boat. Pull the plug when adjusting the motor. If you have other people (especially kids) with you, there’s nothing to help. Adding a few minutes will help safeguard our waters.

Cleaning and de-watering equipment is just as important as cleaning your boat while you’re cleaning your boat, please remember to also:

- Clean anchors, ropes, fishing tackle, and other objects that were in the water. Many species can be transported in the mud or in fishing lines and rope.
- Wash your equipment before leaving.
- These are YOUR waters and it is YOUR responsibility to inspect, drain, and clean your boat!

AIS Boat Laws

It is illegal to transport lake and river water. To save your bait (minnows or leeches), the DNR recommends bringing bottled or bagged water from 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, in, clean out” if you need assistance, have questions about the laws, or are curious about the program, please ask.

How can you help the Watercraft Inspectors?

- Please clean your boat and pull your plug as soon as you are safely able to. That way when the inspector comes, the inspection process move quickly.
- If there is a Decontamination Unit present, please follow all the instructions given by the inspectors, for your safety, and theirs. There will be plenty of people around in the waiting area to ask questions and watch them work from a safe distance.
- Ways the Watercraft Inspectors can help you: 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 be on their way in a timely and pleasant manner.

Safe Boating

Personal Floatation Devices (PFDs) - All of all boats (except a sailboard regardless of length) must be a ready access to a Coast Guard approved wearable PFD for each person on board. In addition, on boats 16 feet or longer, except canoes and kayaks, there must also 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 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, watermen 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.

Fishing in Minnesota

Fishing Regulations and Licensing - All persons 15 and older are required to have the appropriate license with them when fishing. Licenses are available through the DNR License Bureau, most County Auditors and many stores that sell fishing related goods. Trout fishing requires a trout stamp. For more information call the DNR Information Center at 651-259-6177 or 1-888-646-6437. To purchase a license by phone 24 hours a day, call 1-888-MN-LICENSE (665-4236).

Selective Harvest Fishing - Improved technology and increased fish size have caused the quality of fishing to decline in many waters. Practicing "Selective Harvest Fishing" offers anglers an opportunity to take some fish home while releasing others back into the water to improve fishing quality. This is one of the only ways to ensure effective Selective Harvest fishing.

- Use barbless hooks
- Use the fish's weight to handle the fish carefully
- Never hold the fish by the gills
- Use a needle nose pliers to remove hooks or cut the line if it is too deep
- Ease the fish back into the water, do not throw it back

Sustainable Natural Environments

Practice Sustainable Water Recreation! A healthy and attractive natural environment enables people to enjoy the outdoors without negative impacts on the environment. Communities working together can improve water resources by promoting environmentally sensitive land use practices along rivers and throughout watersheds.

- Be courteous to other boaters and water users
- Keep a reasonable distance from birds, wildlife, and other boaters
- Travel at safe speeds and be aware of the effect your wake has on the shoreline and other users
- Operate your watercraft at a slow no wake speed when appropriate
- Use watercraft that is the appropriate type and size for the water resource
- Boating doesn’t require continuous movement; enjoy floating, anchoring, and beaching
- Conserve fuel by properly operating and maintaining your watercraft
- Don’t litter and do properly dispose of boat and sanitary wastes

Laws and Requirements:

Register to take a boat accessible course at www.dnr.state.mn.us/boats/boating/education/BoatingEdLink.aspx. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

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