

# Docks and Access in Public Waters



## Do I need a permit for my dock?\*

No permit is needed to install, construct, or reconstruct your dock on shoreline property you own if you comply with the following:

- A dock is a narrow platform or structure extending toward the water from the shoreline. A dock may provide access to moored watercraft or deeper water for swimming, fishing, and other recreation.
- The structure, other than a watercraft lift or watercraft canopy, is **not more than 8 feet wide** and is not combined with other similar structures so as to create a larger structure.
- The dock is no longer than needed to achieve its intended use, including reaching navigable water depth.
- The structure is not a hazard to navigation, health, or safety.
- The structure will allow the free flow of water beneath it.
- The structure is not used or intended as a marina.
- The structure is consistent with the guidelines of the local unit of government.
- Docks placed on rock-filled cribs are located only on waters where the bed is predominantly bedrock.

## Restrictions on docks and other structures

You may not place a dock or other structure in public waters if the structure:

- obstructs navigation or creates a hazard;
- is detrimental to fish or wildlife habitat or is placed in a posted fish spawning area;
- is intended to be used for human habitation;
- includes walls, a roof, or sewage facilities; or
- is located on property you do not own or have rights to use.

If you have questions concerning the contents of this brochure, contact your DNR Area Hydrologist. See contact information on reverse side.

*\*Based on Minnesota Rules, Chapter 6115.0210 and 6115.0211.*

## What you should know about docks and other water access structures

Docks and watercraft lifts are commonly used access structures on Minnesota lakes and rivers. If you own waterfront property, a temporary structure that provides access to a lake or river is preferred to a permanent structure. Permanent structures are more likely to sustain ice damage, and a snow-covered structure over the ice poses a hazard to recreational vehicle users.



The blue box to the left lists installation guidelines for docks and access structures like boat lifts. These guidelines are intended to minimize impacts on water resources and shoreline habitat. If you follow these guidelines, no permit is needed from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Local units of government may have additional dock rules related to public safety and other local issues and should be contacted.

A shoreline owner may request a permit to install a dock wider than 8 feet. The permit applicant must show a specific need and show that the wider dock represents the minimal impact solution to that need. Docks serving single-family homes or residential planned unit developments generally will not need a dock wider than 8 feet. Public docks and mooring structures that are otherwise not serving as a marina may need to be a wider structure and will be reviewed individually. Docks that have no permit and that exceed the 8-foot-wide limit are subject to enforcement action, including a citation, an order to remove the dock, and fines for both the landowner and the dock installer.

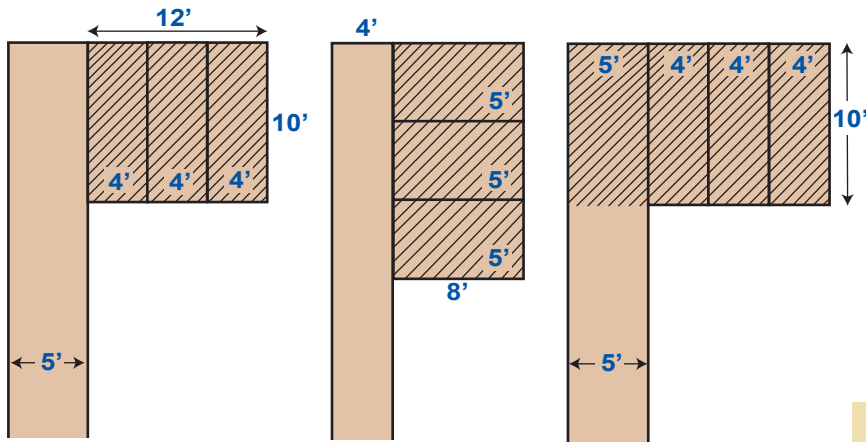
Design and locate your dock and boat lift to avoid interfering with your neighbor's use of the water. Docks and boat lifts should be placed so that mooring and maneuvering of watercraft can normally be confined within the property lines if they were extended into the water.

## General Permit 2008-0401

A general permit was issued in 2008 to allow a modest platform at the lake end of a dock under certain conditions. This general permit allows a single, temporary platform up to 120 square feet measured separately from the access dock, or 170 square feet including the area of the adjacent access dock, if the following conditions exist: the access dock must be 5 feet or less in width and the dock must be on a lake with a shoreland classification of General Development or Recreational Development. See typical dock configurations on the next page. Refer to General Permit 2008-0401 at [www.mndnr.gov/waters](http://www.mndnr.gov/waters) for more details.

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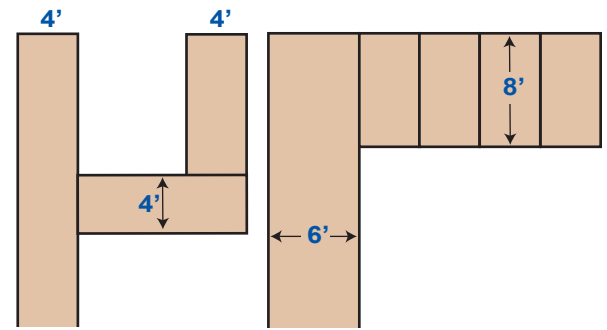
## Authorized by General Permit 2008-0401



Platform area (not including walkway) up to 120 square feet.

Platform area (including walkway) up to 170 square feet.

## No Permit Required



No area of the dock is wider than 8 feet.

If buying, selling or moving a dock from one body of water to another, owners should make sure all zebra mussels, vegetation or other invasive species are removed and let dry for a minimum of 2 weeks (longer in spring and fall). When using a business to place or remove your dock, make sure that they have a valid Lake Service Provider permit and the staff have an aquatic invasive species training certificate. For more information see [www.mndnr.gov/invasives](http://www.mndnr.gov/invasives).

## Purpose of the dock rules

Intensive shoreland development causes deterioration of a lake's ecosystem. Dock installations and their associated uses are factors in this deterioration. Studies of lakes in the Midwest show that docks and boat lifts may shade out important aquatic plants and eliminate critical habitat where fish spawn, feed, grow, and find shelter from predators. Shoreline views may also suffer when large dock systems are installed. Also, there is a growing concern about the private use of the water surface if docks and associated structures extend too far, cover too much surface area, or span the entire owned frontage. The proliferation of dock configurations and dimensions is a concern to the DNR, lake associations, anglers, lakehome owners, and others. Finding the appropriate balance between reasonable access and resource protection requires collaboration by all interests.

Another issue of concern is any attempt to control access to a lake bed or water surface. Even when land ownership extends into the lake bed, all who own land abutting the water or gain legal access have the right to use the entire surface of the water. For this reason, a dock configuration should never close off part of the lake to other users.

If the dock is designed and used for access to navigable water depth, a DNR permit will rarely be needed. A dock does not need a permit if it is no more than 8 feet wide, is designed to simply meet the need of reaching navigable depths, and follows the other guidelines on the front of this brochure.



*The removal or destruction of aquatic plants is a regulated activity under the DNR Aquatic Plant Management Program. If your shoreline plans include removal of aquatic vegetation, please contact a regional DNR Fisheries office because a permit may be required. Removal of native plants may provide open space for invasive species to take hold.*

## DNR Contact Information



DNR Ecological and Water Resources website and a listing of Area Hydrologists: <http://mndnr.gov/waters>

DNR Ecological and Water Resources  
500 Lafayette Road, Box 32  
St. Paul, MN 55155  
(651) 259-5100

For information about aquatic plant management permits: [www.mndnr.gov/eco](http://www.mndnr.gov/eco)

## DNR Information Center

Twin Cities: (651) 296-6157  
Minnesota toll free: 1-888-646-6367  
Telecommunication device for the deaf (TDD): (651) 296-5484  
TDD toll free: 1-800-657-3929

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*This information is available in an alternative format on request.*