Public Water Access in Minnesota:

The Minnesota DNR State Parks and Trails water recreation program provides approximately 1,650 boat accesses, over 365 fishing piers and shore fishing sites and manages 35 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 and gas tax related to marine use.

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

Public Water Access Rules: The launch areas must be kept clear and the following activities are unlawful: littering, camping, using a motor to aid in loading, or consuming alcoholic beverages. See Minnesota Rules, chapter 623 for complete rules.

Boating in Minnesota

The annual Minnesota Boating Guide summaries Minnesota’s boating laws and regulations in an easy-to-read format. 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.

Disposing of unused bait. All persons 16 years of age or 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) 286-6157 or 1-888-646-6877. To purchase a license by phone 24 hours a day, call 1-888-MN-LICENSE (665-4736).

Selective Harvest Fishing: Improved technology and more selective fishing have caused the quality of fishing to decline in many waters. Practicing Selective Harvest offers anglers an opportunity to take some fish home while releasing others back into the water to improve fishing quality. Here are some tips to use for effective Selective Harvest fishing:

1. Use barbless hooks.
2. Play the fish quickly and handle the fish carefully.
3. Never hold the fish by the gills.
4. Use a needle nose pliers to remove hooks or cut the line if it is too deep.
5. Ease the fish back into the water, do not throw it back.

Safe Boating

Life Jackets: On all boats (except a sailboat) regardless of length there must be a readily available Coast Guard approved wearable life jacket for each person on board. In addition, on boats 16 feet or longer, except canoes and kayaks, there must also be at least one Coast Guard approved throwable device, such as a ring buoy or seat cushion.

Boating While Intoxicated (DWI): 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 life jacket and operating at slow no wake speed 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.

AIS Bait Laws

It is illegal to transport lake and river water. To save your bait (especially live bait), the DNR recommends bringing “fish safe” treated water from home and keeping it in your vehicle or cooler. Bringing can create a bad day so warm days to cool down the water.

DO NOT dump unwanted bait into water bodies or on the shoreline. Unwanted bait locations 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 law, or are curious about the program, please visit:

Ways you can help the Watercraft Inspectors:

1. 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 will move quickly.
2. If there is a Decantation (drain) 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 your boat.

Ways the Watercraft Inspectors can help you:

1. The inspectors’ how-to tools, wrenches and pliers, so you are helping with your plug, ask if there are needs that are hard to reach, inspections 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 use their way in a timely and pleasant manner.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Laws and Requirements:

The DNR lists lakes and rivers as “infested” with certain aquatic invasive species. If you are harvesting bait, commercial fishing, or cleaning or taking water, you might need to follow special regulations in infested waters.

To identify an infested water, look for orange invasive Species Alert signs at the access. You can also use lakefinder. To find out if a particular lake is listed as infested: mndnr.gov/dnr/infested. For more information about infested waters, including up-to-date information on fish and wildlife locations, visit mndnr.gov/game/infestations.

Before leaving the water access or shoreline property, you MUST:
1. Clean off AIS aquatic plants and animals
2. Drain water including bilge, freshwater, ballast, bottom, bucket, motor and ballast tanks
3. Pull the plug and leave it out

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

Cleaning water-related equipment is just as important as cleaning boats, so while you’re cleaning your boat, please remember to:
1. 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.
2. Dump water out of canoes, kayaks, and other watercraft before leaving.
3. These are YOUR waters and it is YOUR responsibility to inspect, clean, and drain your boats!

AIS Bait Laws

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Public Water Access in Brown & Redwood Counties

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