Public Water Access in Minnesota:

The Minnesota DNR State Parks and Trails—Water recreation program provides approximately 1,450 boat access sites, over 1,400 fishing piers and shore fishing sites and manages 35 designated Water Trails in Minnesota. The DNR, Federal Government and local community 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, boat registration and marine fuel taxes.

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 clean and the following activities are unlawful: littering, parking, shooting, building fires, and consuming alcoholic beverages. See Minnesota Rules, chapter 6218 for complete rules.

Boating in Minnesota

The annual Minnesota Boating Guide summarizes 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.

Fishing Regulations and Licensing — All persons 16 years and older are required to have the appropriate license with them when fishing. Licenses are available through the DNR License Fund or by phone for 24 hours a day, call 1-888-MN-LICENSE (663-4733).

Selective Harvest Fishing — Improved technology and increased fishing have exposed the quality of fishing to decline in many places. 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. Measure the fish by the girth.
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 over a certain weight or length, the law requires a life jacket. More information on the boat access is available at www.dnr.state.mn.us.

Beating White Water Intrusion (DDW) — Boating white water is illegal. Persons found to be under the influence are subject to significant penalties, including fines and possible jail sentences.

Personal Watercraft — Special laws apply including wearing a life jacket and operating at slow no water 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.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Laws and Requirements:

The DNR lists lakes and rivers as “invaseds” with certain aquatic invasive species. If you are harvesting wild, commercial fishing, or diverting 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 or monitored. For more information about infested waters, including an up-to-date infested waters list and additional location information, visit dnr.mn.gov/waters.

Before leaving the access or shore property, you MUST:

1. Clean off aquatic plants and animals.
2. Drain water including bilge, ballast, buckets, boat motors and ballasted tanks.
3. Decontaminate anyone or any object that was in the water. Many species can be transported in the mud or in fishing lines and rope.
4. Dump water out of canoes, kayaks, and other watercraft before leaving.

These are YOUR waters and it is YOUR responsibility to inspect, clean, and drain your boats!

AIS Bait Laws

It is illegal to transport lake and river water. To save your bait and gear, please:

1. Clean, drain and dry your watercraft and gear before leaving the water.
2. DO NOT dump unwanted bait into water bodies or on the shoreline! Unwanted bait belongs in the trash or a designated baitwells, bait buckets, motor and ballast tanks.

Access to Public Water Access Sites:

Accessible Accesses

Public water access sites developed after 2012 have been designed with accessible parking spaces and accessible routes to the top of the boat ramp. Some sites have additional accessible routes to a dock or other site amenities. These sites are identified with the red, accessible symbol shown above.

Fishing piers and developed share fishing sites have been designed to meet the needs of people with disabilities. Parking is generally located within 300 feet of the site and there is a short surface path from the parking area to the facility. The DNR cooperates with a variety of local units of government to maintain the fishing piers.

Sometimes, weather or vandalism can make these designed sites to no longer accessible. If a site is found to be out of compliance, please report problems to the site administrator listed in this guide, or Contact the DNR Information Center, 651-296-6157 (888-MINNDNR) or email info.dnr@state.mn.us.