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 right for specific site information.

Public Access Rules - The launch area must be kept clean and the following activities are unlawful: littering, camping, shooting guns, 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 form. The guide supplies information about operating watercraft on the state’s many waterways. 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.

Fishing in Minnesota:

Fishing Regulations and Licensing: All persons 16 and older are required to have the appropriate license with them while 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) 296-6157 or 1-888-MN DNR. To purchase a license by phone 24 hours a day, call 1-888-MN LICENSE (665-2326).

Selective Harvest Fishing: Improved technology and increased fishery management have caused the quality of fishing to decline in many waters. Practicing “Selective Harvest” offers anglers an opportunity to take some fish while preserving others for future harvest by following the agent’s instructions.

AIS Bait Laws:

It is illegal to transport lake and river water. To save your bait (minnows or leeches), the DNR recommends bringing “fish safe”, treated water from home and keeping it in your vehicle or cooler. Bringing treated water can be a good idea on warm days to cool down the water.

If you are harvesting bait, commercial fishing, or diverting or taking water, you might need to follow special regulations in infested waters.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Laws and Requirements:

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

To identify an infested lake, look for invasion species Watch signs at the access. You can also use lakefinder to find out if a particular lake is listed as infested: mndnr.gov/lakefind. For more information about infested waters, including an up-to-date infested waters list and additional location information, and more go to mndnr.gov.

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

1. Clean all aquatic plants and animals
2. Drain water including bilge, livewells, boatboxes, seats, footwells, motor and baitwell tanks
3. 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 and remove plants while driving the boat down. Pull the plug when adjusting the motor. If you have other people (especially kids) with you, have them help! Adding a few minutes will help safeguard our waters.

AIS Bait Laws:

- It is illegal to transport lake and river water. To save your bait (minnows or leeches), the DNR recommends bringing “fish safe”, treated water from home and keeping it in your vehicle or cooler. Bringing treated water can be a good idea on warm days to cool down the water.
- DO NOT dump unwashed 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.

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Safe Boating:

Life Jackets: On all boats. Concept: “If a boat can go overboard, a person can too.” Always wear a life jacket! In addition, on boats 24 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 (BWI): Boating while intoxicated is illegal. For persons found to be below 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 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.