Public Access In Minnesota: The Minnesota DNR State and Trail’s 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 overseen by 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 sites, especially on smaller rivers, are open in only. Bathrooms and docks are usually located only on the larger and better sites.

Public Water Access Rules - The launch area must be kept clear and the following activities are unlawful: littering, camping, hunting, fishing, 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.

Licenseing - All registered and non-registered 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 when fishing. Licenses are available through the DNR License Bureau, most County Auditor’s and many stores that sell fishing related goods. Those fishing requires a trout stamp. For more information call the DNR Information Center at (651) 296-6157 or 1-888-MN-LICENSE (665-4236).

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

- Use barbless hooks
- Play the fish quickly and handle the fish carefully
- Never hold the fish by the eyes
- 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.

Safe Boating: Life Jackets - On all boats except a sailboard regardless of length there must be a readily accessible Coast Guard approved waterworthy life jacket for each person on board. In addition, on boats 45 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 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 or 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 for free.

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 drowning 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. More information about infested waters, including an up-to-date list of infested waters and additional location information, visit mindnr.gov/invasives.

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

- Clean off all aquatic plants and animals
- Drain water including bike, canoes, kayaks, boats, bait buckets, motor and ballast tanks
- Decontaminate your boat and make it clean

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 cropping 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.

Cleaning water-related equipment is just as important as cleaning boats, so while you’re cleaning your boat, please remember to also:

- Clean anchors, ropes, fishing tackle, and other objects that are in the water. Many species can be transported in the mud or in fishing lines and rope.
- Pump 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 (minnows, leeches, etc.), the DNR recommends bringing “fish safe”, treated water from home and keeping it in your vehicle or cooler. Slopping can be a good idea on very warm days to cool down the water.

DO NOT dump untreated bait water into bodies of water or onto the shore! Unwanted bait 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.

Ways you can help the Watercraft Inspectors:

- Please check 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.
- If there is a Decontamination Unit present, please follow all of the instructions given by the inspectors, for your safety and theirs. There will be plenty of time to ask questions and when they work from the same distance.
- Ways the Watercraft Inspectors can help you:

- They inspection have tools, wrenches and pliers, if you are having trouble with your plug, ask! If there are weeds that are hard to reach, the Watercraft Inspectors can also help pull weeds off boats and other such tools. They also have grabbing tools for plants.
- When you see the Watercraft Inspectors, please be cooperative. The boar requires compliance with inspectors, and it will help everyone to be on their way in a timely and pleasant manner.

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 an accessible route to a dock or other site amenities. These sites are identified with the red, accessible symbol shown above.

Fishing piers and developed shore 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 hard 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 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-MN-DNR) or email info.dnr@state.mn.us.

 Minnesota State Parks and Trails-Bemidji
(218) 755-3995

The DNR Information Center
The DNR’s Information Center is available to provide free publications of facilities and services as well as answers questions pertaining to DNR recreational opportunities in Minnesota.

SDF Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-4040 651-296-6157 (local) or 1-888-MINNDNR
mndnr.gov

Photos: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, unless otherwise noted. Persons with disabilities may request this information in an alternative format.