Lake Minnetonka

SUMMER RULES 2026

Enjoying the lake safely and responsibly

LEARN MORE

Be a safer boater. Know the rules of Lake Minnetonka.

Photo credit: Vern Whitten Photography

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Greetings — 2

Summer Access Map — 3

Know Your Markers — 4

Top Summer Violations — 5

Safety Regulations — 6

Safety Regulations & Invasive Species — 7

Boating Safety — 8

Youth-Specific Regulations — 11

Agency Links & Resources — Back Cover

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

For more than 50 years, the Lake Minnetonka Conservation District (LMCD) has been managing the use of Lake Minnetonka in its mission to preserve and enhance the "Lake Minnetonka experience." The LMCD is a regional governmental agency that brings together 14 different cities, two counties, and many state and local agencies to protect, preserve and enhance Lake Minnetonka's economy and vitality. Since 1967, LMCD has worked to adopt rules, provide resources and funding, and promote lake safety.

LEARN MORE

The LMCD is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors and run by a dedicated group of staff members. Scan the QR code to learn more and contact your local board member or a staff member to share any concerns or suggestions on ways we can better serve the lake community.

A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings!

The Lake Minnetonka Conservation District (LMCD) is committed to protecting Lake Minnetonka while preserving safe and enjoyable recreational use for all.

As part of this ongoing effort, LMCD has updated its 2026–2027 Strategic Plan, with Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) recognized as a key focus within broader pollution prevention and lake protection initiatives.

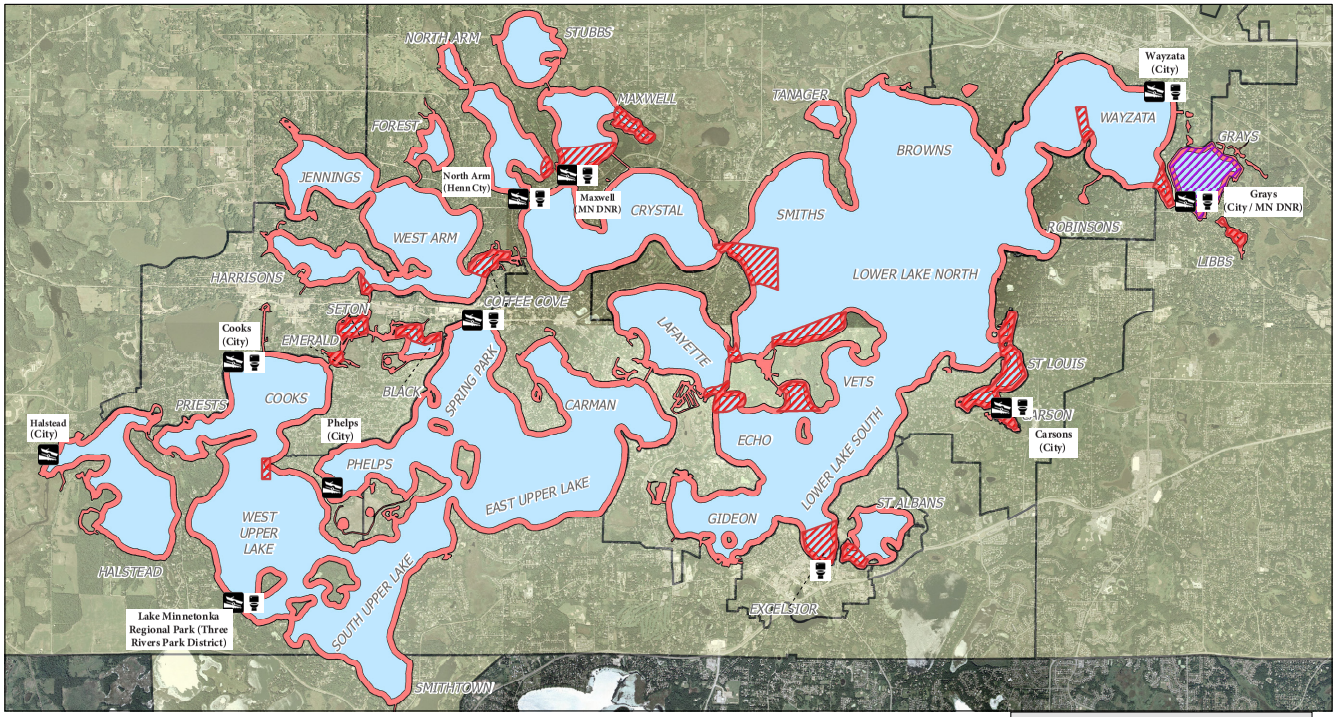
The LMCD Board will continue to evaluate and refine policies and strategies to strengthen AIS prevention and management efforts and respond to emerging environmental concerns. To learn more about best practices to address AIS, please see page 7 of this brochure.

We encourage everyone to enjoy the 2026 summer season on Lake Minnetonka and thank you for doing your part to help protect it.

DAVID KRUEGER
LMCD EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

NEW RULES FOR 2026

- Nighttime bowfishing is allowed on the entire lake this year with a Special Event Permit from April 25 through June 30. Learn more on page 6.
- The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has new education requirements for some boaters, effective July 1, 2026. Learn more on mndnr.gov/safety/boatwater.
- New state watercraft registration fees went into effect this year. Learn more at mndnr.gov/licenses/watercraft.



Lake Minnetonka 2023 Informational Map

- Minimum wake 300 feet from the shoreline of the entire lake
- Minimum wake150 feet from parked boats, swimmers, ect
- Minimum wake in quiet waters

Disclaimer: This map is based on estimates and intended for illustrative purposes only.

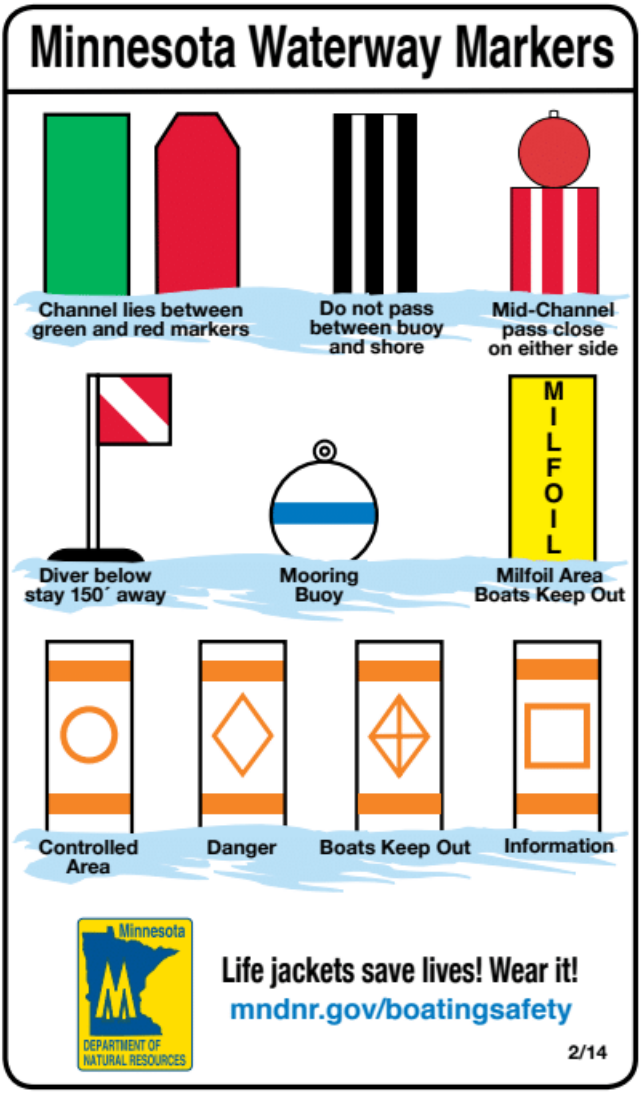
1,000 Feet
Miles 0 0.25 0.5

- Public access / Boat launch
- Public toilets
- Quiet water / Slow area (QWA)
- Weekend & Holiday quiet / Slow area
- 300 foot buffer from shore

SUMMER ACCESS MAP

KNOW YOUR MARKERS/BUOYS BEFORE YOU SET SAIL!

In land markers are used to help boaters safely navigate channels, direct traffic, control speeds, protect resources and identify dangerous waterways/areas. Thanks to the Hennepin County Water Patrol and LMCD Board Director Rich Anderson, brand-new solar lights, holders and batteries have been added.



TOP SUMMER VIOLATIONS

1. **Life jackets:** All PWC operators and passengers must wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket. Towed persons must also be wearing a life jacket or there must be one on board the PWC for the person/s being towed.

2. **Boating under the influence:** Boating while under the influence of alcohol, or any other controlled or illegal substance, is illegal. The Minnesota limit is 0.08. Underage drinking is strictly enforced. Watercraft owners or operators may be held liable.

3. **Fire extinguishers:** Fire extinguishers, horns, marine-grade carbon monoxide detectors (for specified watercraft) and lighting must be in compliance with state law.

4. **Riding on gunwales or decking:** It is illegal to ride, sit on or operate a motorboat while someone is riding or sitting on the gunwale (top edges of the hull), bow, transom, decking over the bow, side or stern while underway (unless it is equipped with an adequate railing).

5. **Quiet waters/minimum wake zones:** Motor-operated watercraft and waterborne aircraft cannot be operated in excess of 5 mph or at a speed that results in more than a minimum wake in quiet water areas.

6. **Navigational lights:** Proper navigational lights (red to port, green to starboard, white 360 degrees around watercraft) must be displayed when boating after sunset and before sunrise.

7. **Public nuisances and noise:** No person may commit or engage in any activity that constitutes a public nuisance—including excess noise, inappropriate behavior, indecent exposure, etc. Sound travels easily across the lake. Between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m., sound from any device plainly audible at a distance of 150 feet is in violation of LMCD code.

8. **Sanitation:** If bathroom facilities are not available on the watercraft, find a location with public facilities. Find a list of Lake Minnetonka amenities at lmcd.org.

9. **Wakes:** It's illegal for your watercraft's wash and wake to endanger, harass or unnecessarily interfere with any person or property. View wake safety info at dnr.state.mn.us.

10. **Channels & navigation:** No person may interfere or block navigation of watercraft, moor, or otherwise create safety hazards in channels or public passageways. Swimming, towing, jumping from bridges and overtaking boats in channels is also prohibited.

The LMCD Code and links to applicable state laws can be found on the LMCD website.

MAXIMUM WATERCRAFT SPEED LIMITS

DAYTIME
Speed limit: **40 mph**

NIGHTTIME
Speed limit: **20 mph**

AT ALL TIMES FOR ALL WATERCRAFT
Speed limit: **5 mph** within

- 300 feet of the shore
- 150 feet from dock structures, authorized bathing areas, swimmers, scuba diver's flag, anchored craft or structures

KEY DEFINITIONS

WATERCRAFT: Any vessel, boat, sailboat, canoe, raft, barge, paddleboard, sailboard, or any similar device used or usable for carrying and transporting persons on the lake.

MINIMUM WAKE: The wave moving out from a watercraft and trailing in a widening 'V' of insufficient size to affect other watercraft or be detrimental to the shoreline.

HOURS OF OPERATION: Thirty minutes before sunrise to 30 minutes after sunset—except when weather or other conditions do not provide sufficient light to see people or watercraft at a distance of 500 feet.

UNIQUE LAKE MINNETONKA REGULATIONS

BIG ISLAND PUBLIC SAFETY LANES: Public safety lanes are installed at the north end of Big Island to provide better access by the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office for emergency purposes. Buoys delineate these lanes and extend 600 feet from shore. Watercraft may not be anchored in these lanes but may use them for traveling.

BOWFISHING: The LMCD has approved a Special Event Permit authorizing nighttime bowfishing on Lake Minnetonka during a limited event period from April 25, 2026 through June 30, 2026. The permitted area has been expanded to include the entire lake, rather than being limited to four designated bays as in the previous year. Bowfishing is allowed from one-half hour after sunset until 1:00 a.m.

SPECIAL "HIGH-WATER" AND "LOW-WATER" DECLARATIONS: When the LMCD declares "High Water," minimum wake restrictions are implemented for user safety and shoreline protection. During "High Water," watercraft must maintain minimum wakes within 600 feet from shore for some bays and entirely for other bays, or as otherwise directed.

When the LMCD declares "Low Water," dock extensions may be allowed under certain conditions. Watch for updates at lmcd.org.

AUTOMATIC CUTOFF DEVICES

If a watercraft is equipped with a lanyard-type engine cutoff switch, it must be attached to the operator when underway. It may not be altered, disabled or removed. Learn more about the federal regulation.

BEWARE OF ELECTRIC SHOCK DROWNING (ESD)

ESD results from paralysis caused by electrical currents from electricity leaking into the water from faulty wiring of boats, docks and lifts. ESD kills both humans and animals. There are many ways to prevent ESD. The most important of these is to never enter water around boats and docks using electrical power. For more information, LMCD code and links to state laws, visit lmcd.org an ElectricShockDrowning.org.

CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS SAVE LIVES

State law requires functioning marine-grade CO alarms on certain motorboats. To learn more about CO alarms, stickers and when they are required, visit the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources website at dnr.state.mn.us/safety/boatwater.

MARINE TOILETS & WASTEWATER DISCHARGE

To prevent accidental or intentional discharge of sewage into the lake, any watercraft must have macerater/grinder pumps removed and discharge valves ("Y-valves") locked.

BLUE-GREEN ALGAE

Blue-green algae blooms can pose safety risks to you and your pets. Make sure to keep pets leashed around bodies of water and don't let them drink from bodies of water that appear contaminated. When in doubt, stay out!

IT'S THE LAW: KEEP AIS OUT OF LAKE MINNETONKA

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are non-native plants, animals and other organisms that live primarily in water. They can drive out and eat native plants and wildlife, and spread disease.

Clean: Clean visible aquatic plants, zebra mussels and other invasive species off watercraft, trailers and related equipment before leaving water access or shoreland.

Drain: Drain water-related equipment (boat, trailer, ballast tanks, portable bait containers, motor) and drain bilge, livewell and baitwell before leaving water access or shoreline.

Dispose: Be prepared! Transport your catch in a cooler. Dispose of unwanted bait—including minnows, leeches, worms and fish parts—in the trash. It is illegal to release bait into the water or release worms onto the ground.

PERSONAL WATERCRAFTS

All regulations for motorboats apply to personal watercrafts (PWCs or "jetskis") in addition to the following specific PWC requirements.

CARELESS OPERATION

A PWC may not be operated in a manner that unreasonably or unnecessarily endangers life, limb or property. This includes weaving through congested boat traffic or swerving at the last moment to avoid a collision if you weren't paying attention.

WAKE JUMPING

PWC operators may not jump wakes within 150 feet of another watercraft or PWC.

PROLONGED OPERATION

PWC may not be operated more than 30 consecutive minutes in a single area (defined as a small area where noise emanating from the PWC may be a nuisance or cause substantial annoyance to one or more shoreline properties).

RENTAL REQUIREMENTS

A PWC may not be rented or leased to anyone less than 18 years of age.

Businesses are required to:

1. Distribute summary of laws free of charge
2. Provide required safety equipment
3. Ensure renter has a valid permit or is an exempt operator; and is 18 years or older.

TOWING (SKIING, WAKEBOARDING, WAKESURFING, ETC.)

NUMBER TOWED

No more than three persons may be towed at one time.

OBSERVER

In addition to the watercraft or PWC operator, an observer (not a rear-facing mirror) is required to continuously observe the person(s) being towed. The observer must be at least 12 years old and able to communicate with the driver.

HOURS

Towing is prohibited 30 minutes after sunset until sunrise. For PWC, 9:30 a.m. to one hour before sunset. PWCs cannot be operated more than 30 minutes in a single area.

LENGTH OF TOW

Maximum length of 85 feet (except with written permission from the Sheriff).

EMPTY TOW

An unoccupied tow line may not be dragged behind a watercraft for an unreasonable length of time.

LIFE JACKETS
All PWC operators and passengers must wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket. Towed persons must also be wearing a life jacket or there must be one on board the PWC for the person/s being towed.

DISTANCE
Towing may not occur within 150 feet of a swim area, skin or scuba diver's flag, swimmer, watercraft, or dock or pier (except dock/pier initially operating from).

TOWING IN CHANNELS
No person shall tow or be towed into or through any marked channel connecting two bodies of water. It is unsafe.

SHARE THE LAKE

SURF IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BAY	AVOID REPETITIVE PASSES	KEEP THE SOUND DOWN

SAFETY TIPS FOR NONMOTORIZED WATERCRAFT

If you are kayaking, canoeing or paddleboarding, you can make yourself more visible to other lake users to prevent accidents by:

- Wearing vibrant clothing
- Flying a flag
- Installing a light
- Paying attention to lake conditions such as wakes, boat traffic and weather

YOUTH REGULATIONS

State regulations for operator's permits and minimum age are vigorously enforced on Lake Minnetonka. Know the rules and keep your boating experience fun and safe!

CURFEW

Youth may not be on a watercraft during the following hours unless accompanied by a parent or guardian:

- Under age 15: 10 p.m.–6 a.m.
- Ages 15–17: midnight–6 a.m.

OPERATOR'S PERMIT

Permits may be obtained by successfully completing an approved boating safety course.

OPERATOR'S PERMIT & BOATING SAFETY COURSES

LMCD BOATER SAFETY EDUCATION

Operators 21 years and younger are required to possess a valid watercraft operator's permit for motorboat and personal watercrafts. Operators younger than 13 years of age may operate motorboats with less than 75 horsepower if an accompanying operator is in the motorboat. Learn more at mndnr.gov/boatingsafety for more information.

BOAT MINNESOTA: MN DNR'S ONLINE BOATING SAFETY COURSE

The Minnesota DNR offers an online watercraft operator's permit program. Adults who want to learn more about boating safety or enhance their current knowledge can also take the course. Some insurance companies offer premium discounts for certification; check with your company for possible discounts. For more information, visit the MN DNR site at mndnr.gov/boatingcourse.

PWC-SPECIFIC AGE MINIMUMS

- Operators less than 12 years of age: Cannot operate (even with an adult on board).
- Operators 12-21 yeas old must possess a valid watercraft operator's permit for personal watercraft. Effective July 1, 2025, adults born on or after July 1, 2004, must hold a permit to operate PWC.

Lake Minnetonka Conservation District (LMCD)

5341 Maywood Road, Suite 200
Mound, MN 55364

Office: 952-745-0789
Connect with us at:
Email: lmcd@lmcd.org
Website: lmcd.org
LakeMinnetonkaConservationDistrict
@LakeMtkaCD

- Licensing and surface regulations
- Docks, structures and watercraft storage
- Solar lights program
- Some services funded by SAVE the LAKE Fund contributions

Hennepin County Sheriff's Office (HCSO)

Water Patrol Unit
4141 Shoreline Drive
Spring Park, MN 55384

Emergency: Call 911
Non-Emergency 24/7 Dispatch: 952-258-5321; Office: 612-596-9880
Website: HennepinSheriff.org/water-patrol

- Patrol and enforcement of State and LMCD laws on Lake Minnetonka
- Emergency and rescue operations
- Special events

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR)

Conservation Officers
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155

DNR Information Center: 651-296-6157 or 888-MINNDNR (646-6367)
Officer Locator: mndnr.gov/officerpatrolareas
Website: mndnr.gov

- Boating and fishing regulations and enforcement
- AIS prevention and management