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Waterway and Wetland Permits

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Waterway & Wetland Permit Process

Placement of structures, dredging and similar activities in or adjacent to navigable waters are regulated under chapter 30 of Wisconsin Statutes, and often require permits from the Department of Natural Resources. This page explains the procedures for:

- [Exemptions](#)
- [General Permits](#)
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Exemptions

Chapter 30, Wis. Stats. provides permit exemptions for a small group of activities in navigable waters. Exemptions are not allowed in "Areas of Special Natural Resource Interest" (ASNRI). To determine if your project qualifies for an exemption, follow the steps below:

Step 1: Determine if your activity is one where a statutory exemption is available.

The list of statutory exemptions (with attached checklists) is:

- [Boat Shelters, Boat Lifts and Boat Hoists](#) (PDF, 11KB)
- [Biological Shore Erosion Control](#) (PDF, 15KB)
- [Culvert Replacement \(Previously Permitted\)](#) (PDF, 13KB)
- [Culvert Replacement \(Up to 24" in Diameter\)](#) (PDF, 29KB)
- [Dry Fire Hydrant](#) (PDF, 14KB)
- Fish Habitat Structures
 - [Fish Crib](#) (PDF, 12KB)
 - [Spawning Reef](#) (PDF, 12KB)
 - [Wing Deflector](#) (PDF, 13KB)
 - [Tree Drop](#) (PDF, 12KB)
 - [Half-Log Structure](#) (PDF, 12KB)
- [Intake or Outfall Structure](#) (PDF, 15KB)

Piers, Docks, Wharves
Pilings
Ponds
Shoreline Erosion Control-
Lakes
Streambank Erosion
Control
Stream Realignment
Swimming Rafts
Utility Waterway Crossing
Water Ski Platforms
Wetlands

- [Manual Dredging](#) (PDF, 13KB)
- [Pier or Wharf](#) (PDF, 20KB)
- [Pilings](#) (PDF, 14KB)
- [Riprap Repair](#) (PDF, 16KB)
- [Riprap Replacement](#) (PDF, 16KB)
- [Swim Rafts](#) (PDF, 17KB)
- [Wildlife Habitat Structure](#) (PDF, 10KB)

Step 2: Determine if your waterway has a special designation that might affect the permit requirements.

By law, exemptions are not allowed in "areas of special natural resource interest" (ASNRI). These areas include state natural areas, trout streams, outstanding or exceptional resource waters, and other waters designated by the department as having significant scientific value. Certain exemptions are also not allowed in locations of "public rights features" (PRF). To determine if your project site is an ASNRI or PRF, visit the search page below, enter the information about your waterway, and record any designations that it may have:

- [Designated Waters Search](#)

You may also visit a DNR office to look at a list of Designated Waters. If your project site is an ASNRI, your project is not exempt. Click on an activity in the list to your left to find more information about permit requirements.

Step 3: Design your project to meet standards to qualify for the exemption.

If your project is not in an ASNRI, you can be exempt if your project meets specific standards in Department rules. Click on the specific activity listed in Step 1 for a checklist of exemption requirements.

Step 4: If you are uncertain, ask DNR for an Exemption Determination.

If you would like assistance from the DNR to determine if an activity is eligible for an exemption, download and print the [Exemption Determination Request](#) (PDF, 64KB), or obtain the form at your local [DNR Service Center](#). Fill in all of the requested information, sign the form, and submit it by mail or FAX to the address on the

form. You will receive a response within 15 days of our receipt of your request (provided the owner of the project site has signed the form). If your project is not exempt, click on an activity in the list to your left to find more information about permit requirements

General Permits

General Permits are granted for projects that meet all of the design, construction and location specifications set by administrative rule. To qualify for a general permit, all required application items need to be submitted elements (see form and checklists for specific activities in list to the left of your screen). DNR reviews general permit applications within 30 days and notifies an applicant if any required items are missing. Once all required items have been submitted, DNR check to see that the plans and location match the general permit specifications in the rule, and if so grants the permit in 30 days. In special circumstances where the review shows that the general permit conditions are not sufficient to protect habitat, water quality, natural scenic beauty or navigation, DNR may inform an applicant that an individual permit is needed to allow detailed review.

Individual Permits

For activities in a category or location, or where a design is chosen, where no exemption or general permit is available, an individual permit is required. Individual permit application forms and checklists are available by clicking on the activity in the list at the left of your screen. Because these projects are not pre-approved designs, a more detailed application is required. DNR reviews local fishery, wildlife and water quality data and visits the site to observe navigation patterns, habitat and similar features of the site. Individual permits require a 30-day comment period of which people are notified by a newspaper notice and mailing to interested parties. During the comment period, an informational hearing may be requested. DNR staff conducts the informational hearing to gather observations and facts from others to consider in addition to its own data in making to decision. A permit is granted for projects when the DNR concludes from this process that habitat, navigation, natural beauty and similar public rights are not harmed. DNR staff routinely advise applicants on project modifications to reduce impacts and gain approval. In 2003, DNR granted permits for 92% of all applications. Permit decisions are subject to appeal for review by an administrative law judge within 30-days of the decision.

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