



Recreational Use Study



Legislative Objective

Assess recreational use on school trust lands to inform potential allocation of outdoor recreation fees to the Permanent School Fund.

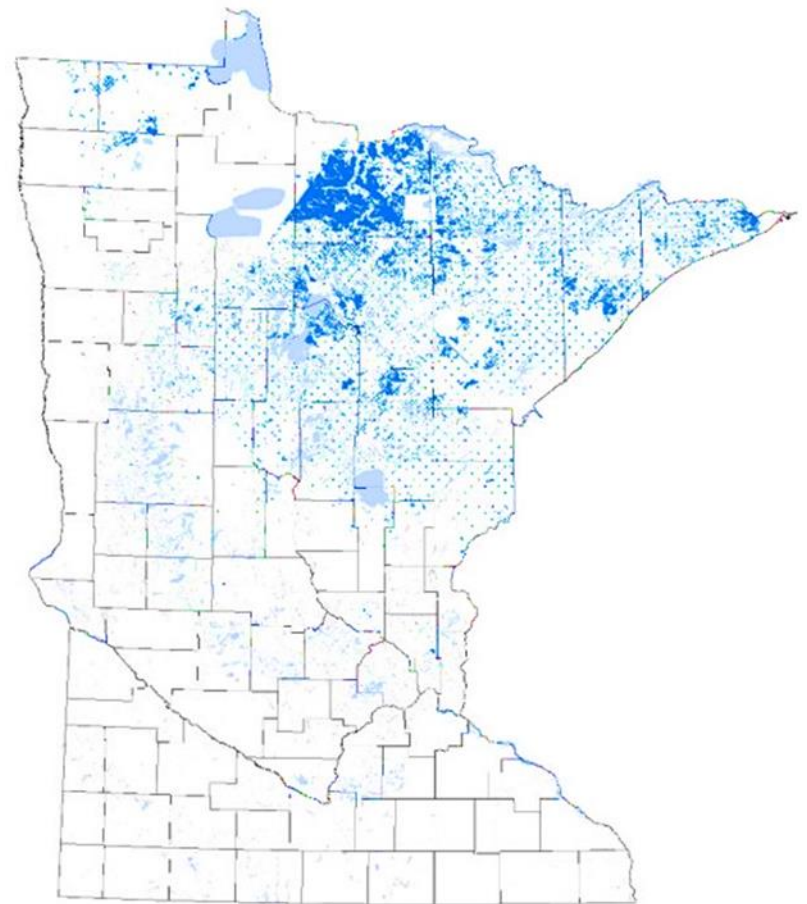
Scope and Components

1. **Quantifies recreational use** occurring on school trust lands, representing the first comprehensive statewide assessment.
2. **Examines recreational activity** during the 2020–2024 period across major categories identified in statute, including:
 - Hunting, fishing, boating, state forest camping, trail-based recreation, and the presence of school trust lands within state parks and recreation areas.
3. **Evaluates the estimated costs of:**
 - Installing entrance signage on school trust lands.
 - Updating printed and digital maps to identify school trust lands.

Findings: Scale of Recreational Use

Comprise approximately **five percent** of Minnesota's land area and account for a **comparable share** of statewide recreational use.

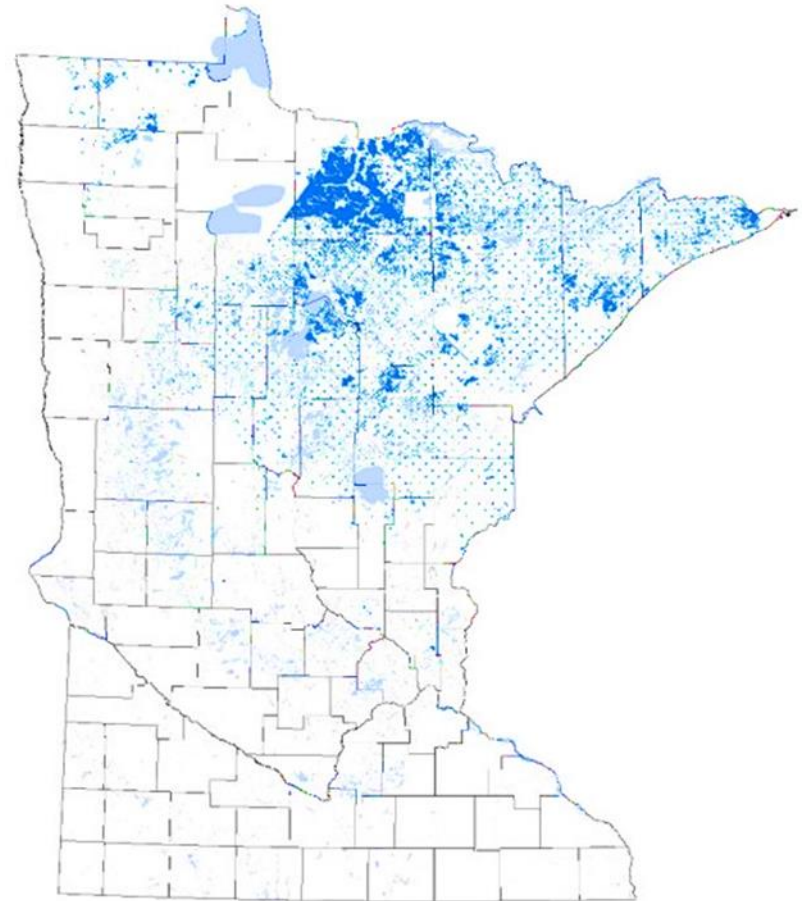
Annual use includes **hundreds of thousands** of residents and visitors.



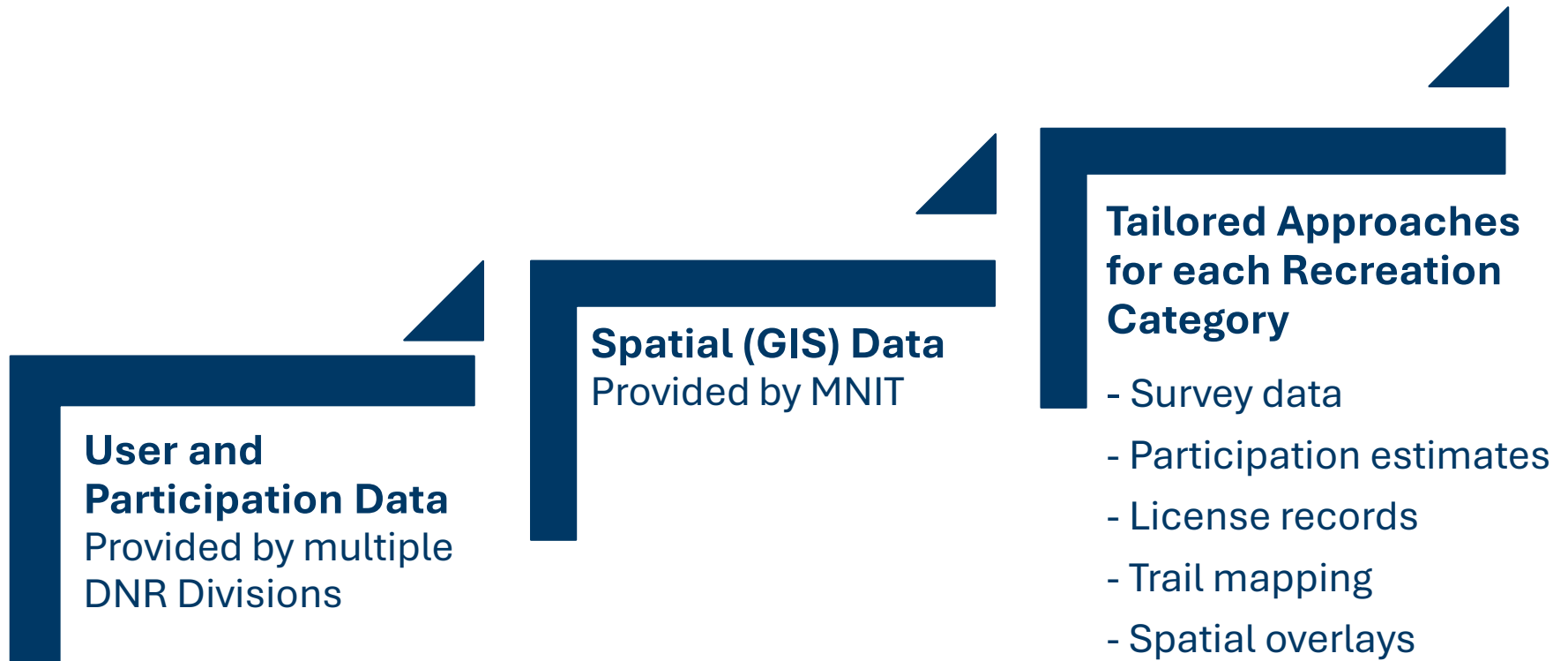
Findings: Statewide Share vs. Regional Importance

Represent a modest share of statewide recreation but **play a significant regional role**, particularly in northern Minnesota.

- Provide key public access points.
- Support trail connectivity.
- Contribute wildlife habitat.
- Offer camping opportunities.
- Underpin portions of the regional outdoor recreation economy.



Overall Methodology



Establishes defensible estimates of recreational use on school trust lands.

Legislative Requirement: Hunting



Determine the estimated annual number of daily visits by individuals with a Minnesota hunting license accessing school trust lands and as a percentage of annual days hunted by all individuals with a Minnesota hunting license.

Findings: Hunting



Hunters spent an estimated **6.6 million days** hunting each year from 2020–2024.

Of these, approximately 265,000 hunting days occurred on school trust lands, representing **4.0% of all days hunted statewide.**

Findings by Species: Hunting



White-tailed deer: 141,000 of 4.0 million total days
= **3.5 %** on STLs

Eastern wild turkey: 16,000 of 327,000 total days =
4.9% on STLs

Black bear: 5,900 of 57,200 total days = **10.3%** on
STLs

Small game: 102,000 of 2.2 million total days =
4.7% on STLs

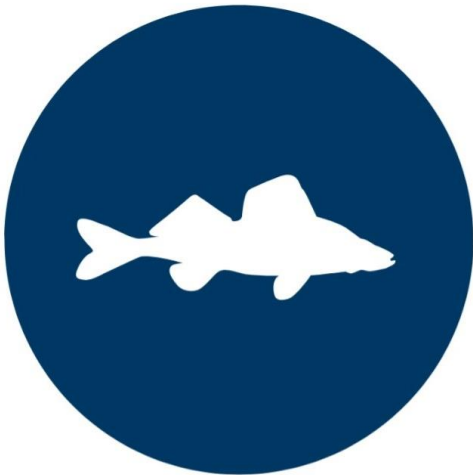
Interpretation of Findings: Hunting



School trust lands play a **meaningful but regionally variable role** in supporting hunting statewide.

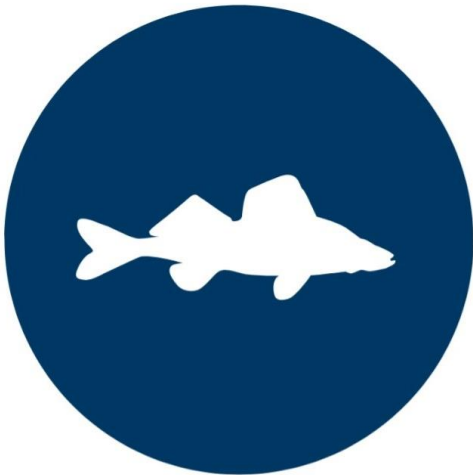
While their overall share of hunting activity is modest, reflecting land distribution and the concentration of hunting on private lands, an estimated 265,000 annual hunting visits demonstrate their **ongoing importance within Minnesota's public hunting system.**

Legislative Requirement: Fishing



Determine the estimated annual number of daily visits by individuals with a Minnesota fishing license using a public water access site that contains school trust lands and as a percentage of annual days fishing by all individuals with a Minnesota fishing license.

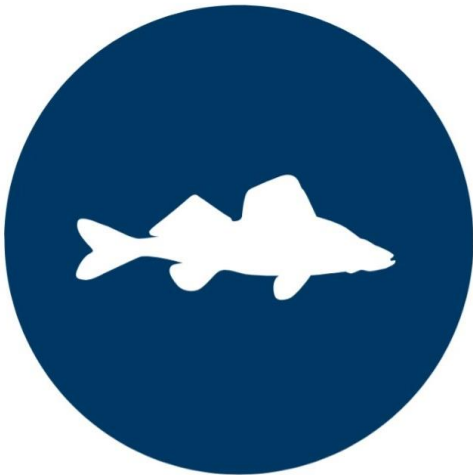
Findings: Fishing



Anglers spent an estimated **25 million days** fishing each year from 2020–2024.

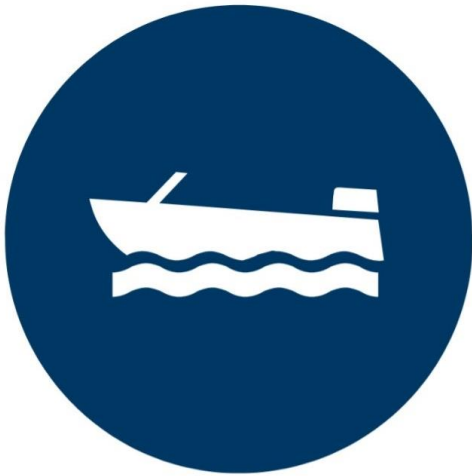
Of these, approximately 280,000 annual fishing days occurred at lakes accessed from public water accesses located on school trust lands, representing **slightly more than 1%** of all statewide fishing days.

Interpretation of Findings: Fishing



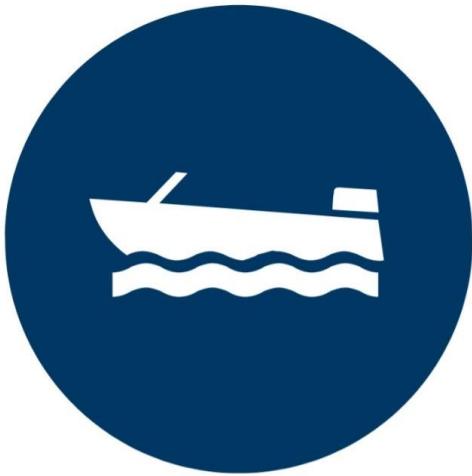
School trust lands support a **modest, regionally variable share** of statewide fishing activity. Despite a small overall share, an estimated 280,000 annual fishing days indicate that STLs remain **a measurable component** of Minnesota's public fishing access system, **especially in northern Minnesota.**

Legislative Requirement: Watercraft Use



Determine the estimated annual visits by Minnesota-licensed watercrafts to state-owned public water access sites that contain school trust lands and as a percentage of all visits by Minnesota-licensed watercrafts using public water access sites.

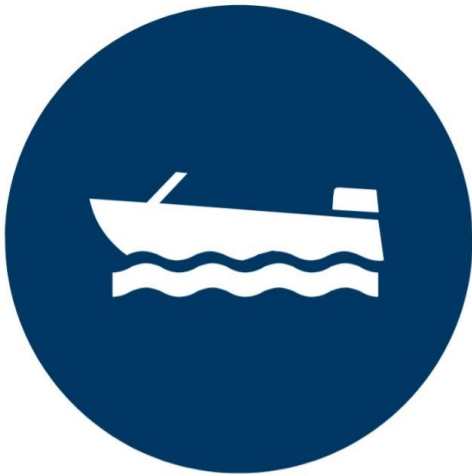
Findings: Watercraft Use



Boaters made an estimated **3.8 million launches** from public water access sites each year from 2020–2024.

Of these, approximately 168,000 launches occurred at public water access sites located on school trust lands, representing **4.4% of all annual launches** statewide.

Interpretation of Findings: Watercraft Use



School trust lands support a **modest but regionally variable share** of statewide boating activity.

An estimated 168,000 annual launches indicate that STLs remain **a measurable component** of Minnesota's public water access system, particularly in northern regions.

Legislative Requirement: Trails



Determine the total number of miles of state-maintained snowmobile trails and all-terrain vehicle trails that are on school trust lands and as a percentage of total miles of state-operated trails for each purpose.

Findings: Trails



The state-maintained trail system includes **3,930 miles** of all-terrain vehicle trails and **23,094 miles** of snowmobile trails.

Of these, approximately **9.4%** of ATV trail miles are located on school trust lands.

Approximately **3.7%** of state-maintained snowmobile trail miles are located on school trust lands.

Interpretation of Findings: Trails



School trust lands support a **modest but regionally important share** of Minnesota's state-maintained trail system.

Although their share of total statewide trail mileage is limited, STLs contribute **meaningful connectivity and access**, particularly in northern regions where these lands are more concentrated and alternative routes are fewer.

Legislative Requirement: State Parks and Recreation Areas



Determine the total amount of acres of school trust lands located within state parks and recreation areas and as a percentage of all acres of land in state parks and recreation areas.

Findings: State Parks and Recreation Areas



Minnesota's state parks and recreation areas encompass **235,870 total acres**.

Of these, approximately 848.6 acres, representing about **0.4% of total acreage**, are school trust lands.

Interpretation of Findings: State Parks and Recreation Areas



School trust lands represent a **very small share** of total park and recreation area acreage.

Despite their limited footprint, these acres **support recreation and contribute to the accessibility and ecological diversity** of Minnesota's park system, particularly in northern regions.

Legislative Requirement: Other Uses



Determine any other uses of school trust lands for outdoor recreation that include individuals purchasing a permit or paying a fee for access to school trust lands and the percentage of the total permits or fees for that purpose.

Findings: Other Uses



Twenty-seven of Minnesota's 54 **state forest campgrounds**, or **50%**, are located on school trust lands.

Of the 552 miles of state-maintained **cross-country ski trails**, 31 miles, or **5.7%**, are located on school trust lands.

Four miles, or **0.3%**, of the state's 1,211 miles of managed **horseback riding trails** occur on school trust lands.

Interpretation of Findings: Other Uses



School trust lands play a **significant role in supporting state forest campgrounds**, with 27 of 54 sites, or half of all campgrounds, located on STLs.

While their share of ski and horseback trail mileage is limited, school trust lands **contribute to dispersed recreation** within the state forest system, particularly in northern regions.

Legislative Requirement: Signage



Determine the estimated cost of posting signage near entrances to school trust lands declaring that certain portions of the public land that are being used for outdoor recreation is school trust land.

Scope and Location Criteria: Signage



Qualifying entrances include:

- Access points located directly on STL parcels (e.g., public water access sites) and
- Access points that provide entry to STL parcels through other properties (e.g., state parks or state forest roads).

Using these criteria, **474 entrances** require signage. Over half are concentrated at public water access sites (41%) and Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness boundary points (15%).

Initial Installation Costs: Signage



12" × 18" metal signs mounted on a metal post, consistent with existing DNR signage used for Wildlife Management Areas and interpretive park signage. Estimated costs:

- Design (one-time): **\$1,000**
- Printing, hardware, and posts: **\$74.18 per sign**
- Mobilization and installation: **\$200 per sign**

Total estimated cost for 474 signs:

Approximately \$155,000

Ongoing Replacement Costs: Signage



Approximately **7%** of installed signs are expected to require replacement annually, primarily due to vandalism.

Estimated replacement cost: **\$330 per sign** (hardware, labor, administrative costs).

Beginning in Year 2, the projected annual replacement cost is approximately **\$11,000**, increasing over time with inflation.

Legislative Requirement: Maps



Determine the estimated cost of updating recreational use maps and other electronic and printed documents to distinctly label school trust lands that are contained within or are part of state recreational areas, parks, and trails.

Printed Documents Findings: Maps



A total of **43 printed maps** would require revision to distinctly label school trust lands, including:

- 27 state forest campground maps
- 4 state recreation area maps
- 1 state forest day-use area map
- 11 state trail maps intersecting STL parcels.

Updating these materials is estimated to cost approximately **\$316,000**.

Digital Platform Findings: Maps



For the ***Recreation Compass*** web application, DNR estimates approximately 40 hours of developer time to revise the mapping interface and add an STL layer.

This represents a one-time cost of approximately **\$5,040.**

Recreational Use in Other States

Historically, state trust lands have generated revenue from **extractive uses** (mining, timber, grazing). As markets and public values shift, states are exploring **diversified revenue strategies**.

Recreation has emerged as a potential revenue source that can **expand income and public access**. Most states allow recreation on trust lands, but policies on access, uses, and revenue vary widely.

- Differences include authorized activities, access requirements, fee structures, and revenue distribution.
- Few states have systems that consistently capture and return recreation value to trust beneficiaries.

Recreational Use in Other States

Four Primary Recreation Management Models

- **Open public access:** Free access; limited revenue. Minnesota largely follows this model.
- **No public access:** Public entry prohibited; access limited to state personnel or lessees. Largely discontinued.
- **Recreation access permits:** Paid permits required for access; revenues flow to beneficiaries, with administrative costs retained.
- **Recreation leases:** Exclusive or semi-exclusive access granted by contract in exchange for direct payments to beneficiaries.

Recreational Use in Other States

Comparison of six states

State	Management Model	Annual Revenue
Minnesota	Open, no general fee; public benefit model (open public access)	Minimal
Colorado	Closed unless authorized; recreation leases plus agency access lease	\$3.9 million
Montana	Permit required; recreation permits plus commercial licenses	\$2.3 million
New Mexico	Permit required; recreation access permits plus long-term leases	? but growing
Utah	Not public land; agency compensation plus permits and leases	\$2.1 million
Wyoming	Partially open, no fee; access with restrictions plus limited permits and leases	Limited

Questions



Comprehensive Study and Findings



mn.gov/school-trust-lands/lands/recreation/