

Minnesota DNR News

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For more information:

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DNR warns that slush weighs down ice, increases risk

Last week's snowstorm that dropped heavy, wet snow across much of the state has significantly affected ice conditions, according to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Slush adds weight to the ice and its effects can be unpredictable. In some areas, slushy conditions are impacting travel on the ice, while in others — especially where ice was in the early stages of forming — the conditions are not adequate to support ice shelters and vehicles, resulting in break-throughs.

When on the ice, people should check the thickness for themselves and not rely on tracks in the snow or what they've heard second hand. When measuring the thickness of slush-covered ice, measure only the clear ice, not the slush or snow on top of it. While forecasted cold weather this week could help strengthen ice, it's vital to check ice thickness regularly. The DNR recommends at least 5 to 7 inches of ice for snowmobiles, 7 to 8 inches for side-by-side all-terrain vehicles, and at least 20 inches for heavy-duty trucks pulling wheelhouses.

"The final week of December has become the unofficial kickoff to the 'wheelhouse season,' but just because you had your wheelhouse out during that week last year doesn't necessarily mean it'll be safe this year," said Col. Rodmen Smith, director of the DNR Enforcement Division. "There are many tools to help you determine whether the ice is safe — augers, drills, spud bars and tape measures — but the calendar isn't one of them."

General ice safety guidelines

No ice can ever be considered "safe ice," but following [these guidelines](#) (mndnr.gov/safety/ice/thickness.html) can help minimize the risk:

- Always wear a life jacket or float coat on the ice (except when in a vehicle).
- Carry ice picks, rope, an ice chisel and tape measure.
- Check ice thickness often; conditions can change quickly.
- Bring a cell phone or personal locator beacon.
- Don't go out alone; let someone know about trip plans and expected return time.
- Before heading out, inquire about conditions and known hazards with local experts.

The minimum ice thickness guidelines for new, clear ice are:

- 4+ inches for ice fishing or other activities on foot.
- 5-7 inches for a snowmobile or a small ATV.
- 7-8 inches for a side-by-side ATV
- 9-12 inches for a car.
- 13-17 inches for a truck.
- 20+ inches for a large truck with a wheelhouse shelter.
- Double these minimums for white or snow-covered ice.

For more information, visit the DNR's [ice safety](#) (mndnr.gov/icesafety) or [boating safety](#) pages (mndnr.gov/boatingsafety).

Snow impacting access to state parks, trails

Check local conditions before heading out and use extreme caution

Recent significant snow events are impacting winter recreation access in state parks and trails in northern Minnesota, according to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Heavy, wet snowfall last week made many roads and trails impassable and cut power to several state parks. Additional snow and bitter cold temperatures this week further impacted conditions at some state parks and trails across Minnesota.

"We're working hard to dig out from all the winter weather," said Ann Pierce, director of the DNR Parks and Trails Division. "While we still encourage folks to get outdoors and enjoy the peace and beauty of a Minnesota winter, right now we also want visitors to know that some of our state parks and trails have limited access. In some cases, we're outright asking people not to use certain trails because of downed trees and branches that still need to be removed before trails can be used safely. Information about current conditions is on our website."

People visiting affected state parks and trails should use extreme caution until maintenance crews are able to clear trails, plow roads and remove hazards. Those planning to go to a state park should check visitor alerts on the park website for information about conditions at that location. State park pages can be found on the [DNR website](http://mndnr.gov/parks) (mndnr.gov/parks).

Before heading out, skiers and snowmobilers should check the snow depth and groomed trail conditions page of the [DNR website](http://mndnr.gov/snow) (mndnr.gov/snow) for the latest information.

For more information, contact the DNR Information Center by emailing info.dnr@state.mn.us or by calling 888-646-6367 from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday.