



Under the new law, the WDNR must approve an application for an individual permit to keep an existing pier unless the WDNR can prove that the pier does one or more of the following:

- (a) Interferes with public rights in navigable waters
- (b) Interferes with rights of other riparians
- (c) Extends beyond a locally established pierhead line
- (d) Violates a local ordinance
- (e) Does not allow the free movement of water underneath

If a permit has already been obtained for an existing pier, no new permit is necessary as long as the terms and conditions of the permit are followed.

Repair and maintenance of existing piers

Owners of existing piers may repair and maintain an existing pier, but may not replace or enlarge the pier. If the pier must be replaced, the new pier must comply with the new pier requirements. The owner also may relocate or reconfigure the pier, so long as the pier does not interfere with the rights of other riparians.

Selling Your Property . . . And Pier

If you are selling your property and your pier is exempt from permitting requirements, the new owner can place the same pier without obtaining a permit. Your permit automatically transfers to the new owner of the property. If the new owner wants to install a different pier, the new owner can design it to meet the exemption standards for new piers, or obtain a permit from the WDNR. <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/waterway/piers.html>.

For more information on pier regulations in Wisconsin, please contact the WDNR at (608) 266-2621 or visit the WDNR's website at <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/waterway/piers.html>.

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Pier Regulations in Wisconsin

New laws for waterfront property owners

What Waterfront Property Owners Need to Know About Pier Regulations in Wisconsin.



A pier provides waterfront property owners with access to lakes and rivers for boating, swimming, fishing, and other forms of recreation. However, if a pier is too large, it can also create a safety hazard, interfere with recreational activities, and harm important fish habitat.

Accordingly, Wisconsin has recently enacted new laws regulating the size and placement of piers. These new laws were enacted to provide waterfront property owners with clear standards as to what size of pier is allowed without obtaining a special permit from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). These new laws apply to both new and existing piers.

In addition to these new state standards, local communities or counties also may have enacted local ordinances regulating piers. Among other things, these local ordinances may establish local pierhead lines, which determine how far a pier can extend into the water.

New Piers

Any "new" pier (placed for the first time since 2004) may be placed without obtaining a permit if it meets the following size requirements:

Width – no more than six-feet wide
Length – no longer than what is necessary to moor your boat or use a boat lift, or 3-foot water depth, whichever ever is greater

Number of boats – Two boat slips/lifts for the first 50 feet of water frontage (of your property) + one more boat slip/lift for each additional 50 feet of frontage.

Platforms – A deck/platform up to eight-feet wide may be located at the lakeward end of the pier (no limits on square footage).

If a waterfront property owner wants to place a pier that exceeds these standards, an individual permit must be obtained from the WDNR (<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/waterway/piers.html#step3>).

New multi-family and commercial developments

Piers servicing multi-family dwellings (3 or more units) or commercial facilities must meet all the requirements above in order to be exempt from obtaining a permit. However, these types of developments are eligible for additional boat slips if they are on a lake of 50 acres or more.

Specifically, they are eligible for the lesser of:

Four boat slips for the first 50 feet of shoreline frontage + no more than two additional boat slips for each additional 50 feet of shoreline frontage; or

One boat slip for each dwelling unit + additional boat slips (less than 24 hours)

Property owners who want more boat slips than allowed under the exemption requirements may apply for an individual permit (<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/waterway/piers.html#step3>).

Existing Piers

Any pier that was originally placed prior to 2004 is exempt from obtaining a permit from the WDNR if it meets the following standards and registration requirement:

Width – no more than 8-feet wide

Platforms – a deck/platform is allowed as long as it is located at the lakeward end of the pier and has a surface area of:

- 200 sq. ft. or less (may be any width), or

- Between 200 sq. ft. and 300 sq. ft., if the deck/platform is no wider than 10 feet.

Neighbors – does not interfere with the riparian rights of other riparian owners. (Generally, this means that the pier and boat hoists do not extend beyond the owner's property line.)

Registration – the pier is registered with the WDNR no later than XXXX, 2011. (Note – Registration with the WDNR is free of charge. Property owner also may choose to record the registration form with their local register of deeds.)

Existing piers that exceed permit exemption standards

An owner of an existing pier that exceeds the above standards must do one of the following:

Modify the existing pier to bring it into compliance with the standards; or

Apply for an individual permit from the WDNR (<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/waterway/piers.html#step3>). (Note – no permit fee will be imposed).