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## MOVIES | Make it in Minnesota? Yes you can, says the Minnesota Film and TV Board



Diving in Quarry Park, one of the locations in the Reel Scout database.  
 Photo by [Todd Murray](#) (Creative Commons).

BY [ERIK MCCLANAHAN](#), TC DAILY PLANET  
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When the [Minnesota Film and TV Board](#) (MNFilmTV) implemented new software on their website to aid filmmakers in searching for locations to shoot their projects, they knew Minnesota had become typecast. A well-known actor who came to the state for some location scouting, assuming Minnesota to be a year-round frozen tundra, packed only his warmest winter clothing—despite the fact that he was visiting in May. The MNFilmTV crew spent the first day with said actor shopping for some more weather-appropriate clothes.

"[There's] a lot of myth busting," said Christopher Grap, director of production services at MNFilmTV—an organization, also known as a film commission, dedicated since 1981 to create jobs by building and promoting the state's film industry. Grap often asks people who've never been to Minnesota what they know about it. Top three things: "Snow, Mall of America, and *A Prairie Home Companion*."

The new location scouting software is called [Reel Scout](#). It went live more than a month ago. "Several film commissions around the world use Reel Scout, but when you access it through our site it is customized and unique to us for searching Minnesota locations," said Grap. "I think it's fantastic." Right now there are more than 200 searchable locations in the state available on Reel Scout. MNFilmTV hopes to reach 350 by next year. (To learn more about how you can add to the database, click on the play button below to hear the complete audio of my interview with Grap.)

"Anything [someone would] want to shoot in this state, we can shoot within the state," said Grap. The north shore of Lake Superior has doubled for both coasts, allowing filmmakers to mimic the California shoreline—it specifically substituted for Maine in the 1993 Macaulay Culkin vehicle *The Good Son* (the movie where Culkin played the bad guy, and used said "fuck" for the first time on screen). The Quarry has doubled for New Mexico and Iraq. And then there's the metro area: "If you were to take a 30-mile radius around there, you could find so many looks that fit so many different [film, TV, commercial] projects," Grap said.

Through a variety of means, the five employees at MNFilmTV try to convince working filmmakers to make their films in Minnesota. "We have to sell ourselves to production companies to make producers, location managers, directors, writers—whoever has any influence over decisions—aware of what we have to offer as a state that might set us apart from other potential filming locations," said Grap.

That's where the aforementioned myth busting comes in to play. Many people outside of the Minnesota market aren't aware of the "vibrant creative culture that's here, but [also] the diversity of locations and seasons too," according to Grap.

According to its website, MNFilmTV is one of the few film commissions in the U.S. that "functions as a public/private partnership, meaning that our state appropriation must be matched by private contributions. A volunteer board of directors comprised of professionals from all segments of the Minnesota production industry supports our efforts and oversees our work, setting policy and approving our annual budget."

Grap elaborated further: "[We are] funded by a grant through [Explore Minnesota](#) tourism. Our annual operating funds of \$325,000 are released on a 3-to-1 match. For every dollar we raise privately, whether cash or in-kind donation, we get three from the state up to that \$325,000."

Having recently been saved from a threatened budget cut in the last state congressional session, MNFilmTV's operation funds are covered through July 1, 2011—but it's impossible to guess where the film commission will be next year. "We work for you, the community...we need your support," said Grap. "This can't just be five people in an office every day."

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