

# Zebra Mussels

## Fact Sheet | December 2019



Zebra mussels are a small, striped freshwater mussel that can block water intakes and other infrastructure.

### What are zebra mussels?

Zebra mussels are a small, destructive invasive freshwater mussel that can be transported from waterway to waterway by boats and trailers. They grow to a maximum adult size of about 1.5 inches and can be identified by their striped, zebra-like shell. Zebra mussels are prolific (one female zebra mussel can produce nearly a million eggs a year). They can pose an economic and environmental danger by attaching themselves to hard surfaces and clogging infrastructure such as water intakes or equipment such as boat motors and hulls. For more information, visit [texasinvasives.org/zebramussels](http://texasinvasives.org/zebramussels).

### Where are zebra mussels known to be in the Highland Lakes?

Zebra mussels were confirmed to be in Lake Travis in June 2017, in Lake Austin in August 2017, in Lake LBJ in July 2019 and in Lake Marble Falls in the fall of 2019.

Zebra mussels also have been confirmed to be in Lake Pflugerville, Canyon Lake, Lake Belton, Lake Waco and Stillhouse Hollow Reservoir southwest of Belton, as well as several lakes in North Texas.

### What does this mean for the Highland Lakes?

Zebra mussels can clog intakes and other infrastructure. Owners of infrastructure on the lakes should monitor their property frequently and take appropriate action to ensure the mussels do not interfere with water intakes or other operations. Recreational visitors to the lakes should take precautions to ensure they are not cut by the mussels' sharp shells, and that boats are cleaned and dried thoroughly to prevent zebra mussels from moving to other lakes.

### How did zebra mussels get into lakes LBJ, Marble Falls, Travis and Austin?

The mussels almost certainly arrived in lakes Travis or LBJ as a hitchhiker on a boat – either as an adult attached to a boat hull or as larvae in water in the bilge, live well or trailer – that entered the lakes after being in an infested lake.

Zebra mussels could have been carried downstream to lakes Marble Falls or Austin on a boat, or moved downstream through releases into the lakes from Wirtz or Mansfield dams.

### Have zebra mussels affected the region's drinking water?

No. The water in the Highland Lakes remains safe for drinking.

### Is swimming still allowed in lakes LBJ, Marble Falls, Travis, and Austin?

Yes. Some swimmers have reported stepping on sharp zebra mussels, so swimmers may want to wear water shoes to help protect their feet. As always, it is important to take appropriate safety precautions and to wear a life jacket any time you are in or around the water. **The lakes are natural bodies of water, and people who choose to swim in the lakes do so at their own risk.**

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## Is boating still allowed on lakes LBJ, Marble Falls, Travis and Austin?

Yes. The presence of zebra mussels does not interfere with boating on the lakes. However, it is critically important to clean, drain and dry your boat when removing it from the lakes, [as required by Texas law](#), to prevent the mussels and other invasive species from spreading to other Texas lakes. Just because you don't see any zebra mussels doesn't mean they're not there. Zebra mussels have microscopic larvae that can't be seen with the naked eye. [Watch this video](#) from TPWD for more on how to properly clean, drain and dry a boat.

## I have a water intake, boat, dock or marina on a lake that is infested with zebra mussels. What should I do now?

- Check your water intake, boat dock or marina regularly for zebra mussels. Conduct inspections monthly on lakes LBJ, Marble Falls, Travis and Austin, and every other month on the other Highland Lakes. You may want to consider building an inexpensive [zebra mussel sampler](#) to help in monitoring for the presence of mussels.

## What can be done to eradicate zebra mussels?

Commercial coatings are available to discourage zebra mussels from attaching to pipes and other structures, but there is no proven large-scale method to eradicate zebra mussels once they become established in a body of water. In the United States and Canada, facility managers sometimes use pesticides to control zebra mussels in closed systems such as power plant water-cooling systems, but most of the pesticides used in closed systems are not allowed for use in open water such as the Highland Lakes.

## How does LCRA monitor for zebra mussels?

LCRA conducts regular inspections at each of the Highland Lakes – lakes Buchanan, Inks, LBJ, Marble Falls, Travis and Austin – as well as lakes Fayette and Bastrop. LCRA crews also routinely inspect buoys and other LCRA water-based assets for zebra mussels.

## Can zebra mussels move through the system of dams on the Highland Lakes?

Yes, it is possible that zebra mussels can be transported downstream as water is moved through the system of dams on the Highland Lakes. Larval stages of zebra mussels are dispersed by moving water.

## Will zebra mussels spread to the other Highland Lakes?

It is possible zebra mussels will continue spreading to the other Highland Lakes, but LCRA is doing everything we can to prevent that from happening. We are ensuring our own boats follow proper cleaning procedures when moving from lake to lake, and we encourage all other boat owners to do the same.

## What should I do if I spot zebra mussels in a waterbody that currently doesn't have a known infestation ([see state listings here](#))?

1. Photograph the mussels if you can do so safely and record the GPS location.
2. Report the exact location of the sighting immediately to [texasinvasives.org](http://texasinvasives.org). Upload the photographs.

