

Permit Guide: Buoys on the Highland Lakes

Buoys and markers are water traffic signs offering direction and information. They also help identify dangerous areas and restricted zones on waterways. The Lower Colorado River Authority installs and maintains channel markers and hazard buoys, and issues permits for regulatory buoys on the Highland Lakes: Buchanan, Inks, LBJ, Marble Falls and Travis.

Who can place a buoy on the Highland Lakes

Waterfront property owners may place no-wake buoys within 50 feet of the shoreline or a structure on the Highland Lakes without a permit under LCRA's Lakewide Authorization.

Homeowners associations or property owners associations, governmental entities, organized groups or clubs, marinas permitted under the Highland Lakes Marina Ordinance, and corporations, businesses or organizations providing public access to or public services on the Highland Lakes must apply for a Restricted Area Permit from LCRA in order to place buoys on the lakes.

Installation and enforcement of buoys

- The entity or person requesting a permit to place buoys or placing them under LCRA's Lakewide Authorization is responsible for purchasing, installing and maintaining the buoys.
- If buoys are to be anchored over property owned by a third party, the entity or person placing the buoys is responsible for obtaining permission to use that property. LCRA does not assume any responsibility for the use of property owned by a third party.
- Buoys, hardware and installation may be purchased from any vendor.
- Buoys and associated anchorages must not create a hazard to navigation.
- LCRA will mark an illegal buoy or buoy placed on the Highland Lakes without a permit, and require its removal from the water surface within 30 days. If the buoy is not removed, LCRA may confiscate it.
- Per the Texas Water Safety Act, it is unlawful to moor or attach a vessel to any buoy or marker, or to move, remove, displace, tamper with, damage or destroy any buoy or marker.

To report problems with mile or channel markers or buoys, call LCRA Water Surface Management at 800-776-5272, ext. 4625 or 3980.

Restricted Area Permit

A restricted area is enforceable by law and must be marked with regulatory buoys. Law enforcement can enforce the restricted area only if it is adequately marked. Once a restricted area has been established, the buoys cannot be reconfigured to significantly increase or decrease the area without obtaining an additional permit from LCRA. The most common restricted areas on the Highland Lakes are no-wake areas and swim areas. In addition to regulatory buoys, LCRA also recommends installing barrier floats in swim areas to enhance swimmer safety.

LCRA provides a copy of restricted area permits to the LCRA Rangers, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the sheriff's department with jurisdiction.

Lakewide Authorization

LCRA's Land and Water Use Regulations prohibit the operation of watercraft within 50 feet of the shoreline, structures or swimmers at a speed greater than headway speed. This is known as the 50-foot Rule and is similar to a Texas Water Safety Act rule for the operation of personal watercraft. Neither rule requires the placement of buoys to be enforceable.

Under the Lakewide Authorization, waterfront property owners may install no-wake buoys to help identify 50 feet from the shoreline or docks and to assist with enforcement of the 50-foot Rule.

How to Apply for a Restricted Area Permit

To request a permit, complete the Restricted Area Permit application available at www.lcra.org/hlmo and submit it to april.nye@lcra.org along with:

- A vicinity map showing both lake and land areas surrounding the proposed restricted area. The vicinity depicted on the map should include enough of the surrounding area so the proposed restricted area can easily be located on any map of the lake.
- A detailed plan (to approximate scale) relative to the shoreline, showing the proposed restricted area and including the specific location, configuration and type of all buoys and floats that will be used to mark the proposed restricted area.

A Restricted Area Permit will not specify the number of buoys needed to adequately mark the area. At least two regulatory buoys must be deployed to mark any restricted area, but the exact number of buoys will depend on the site. Boaters and law enforcement must see a "line of buoys" to determine the location of the area. All buoys must be no less than 9 inches in diameter and spaced no more than 150 feet apart.

LCRA will assign an identification number that must be placed on each buoy above the waterline. If a buoy is found adrift or ashore, LCRA will use the identification number to attempt to notify the permittee.

LCRA does not charge a permit fee. If you have questions about the permitting process, contact LCRA Water Surface Management at 800-776-5272, ext. 3147.

Public Notice

Public notice may be required to obtain a Restricted Area Permit. Contact LCRA Water Surface Management at 800-776-5272, ext. 3147, for guidance on meeting public notice requirements.

Public notice includes:

- Notice by publication in two newspapers.
- Notice by mail to waterfront property owners in the area.

At a minimum, public notice includes all waterfront property owners within 500 feet of the proposed area.

Public notice requirements do not apply to:

- Requests from a governmental entity.
- Regulatory buoys within 75 feet of a marina permitted under the Highland Lakes Marina Ordinance.
- Temporary buoys that will be on the water less than 72 hours.
- Restricted areas associated with public parks.
- Buoys associated with raw water intakes for public water supply.
- No-wake buoys installed under LCRA's Lakewide Authorization.



Buoy Installation

Buoys, floats and markers must be U.S. Coast Guard approved as per the Uniform State Waterway Marking System. Buoys should:

- Have, at a minimum, a 3-inch wide white or silver reflective band as close to the top of the buoy as possible without covering any other information required to be displayed.
- Have the LCRA-assigned buoy identification number on the white or silver reflective band in black letters and numerals that are not less than 1 inch in height. (Not required for buoys placed under LCRA's Lakewide Authorization.)
- Be moored to the lake bottom by an iron, steel or concrete anchor that weighs enough to keep the buoy in its intended location. In general, concrete weighs half as much when submerged as it does on dry land.
- Be attached to its anchor using thimbles and, at a minimum, 3/16-inch steel cable or 1/2-inch polypropylene rope. At the point where the cable or rope attaches to the buoy, the buoy should have a shackle and swivel to accommodate the thimble. Anchor cables should be fastened with at least two cable clamps. Thimbles should be used on all cable eyes.

The cable or polypropylene rope attaching the buoy to its anchor should be long enough to prevent the buoy from being submerged at these contour elevations:

- Lake Buchanan – 1020 feet msl
- Inks Lake – 890 feet msl
- Lake LBJ – 827 feet msl
- Lake Marble Falls – 740 feet msl
- Lake Travis – 685 feet msl

