

# LAKE LOWERINGS

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### 1. What is a lake lowering?

LCRA occasionally lowers one or more of the pass-through Highland Lakes as a community service to provide customers and lakeside property owners an opportunity to repair and maintain docks, retaining walls and other shoreline property, as well as to dredge, remove debris and perform other maintenance work. The drawdown also helps curb the growth of nuisance aquatic vegetation.

The drawdowns typically last about six weeks and are scheduled in January-February, when water use is low, disruption to aquatic life and recreation is minimal, and the maximum effect on vegetation is possible due to cool, dry winter weather.

LCRA only schedules drawdowns if they will not interfere with essential water supply operations.



### 2. Which of the Highland Lakes were lowered in 2019?

LCRA temporarily lowered lakes LBJ and Marble Falls beginning Dec. 30, 2018.

### 3. How much was Lake LBJ lowered?

LCRA lowered Lake LBJ about 4 feet, from its normal operating range of 824.4 to 825 feet above mean sea level (feet msl) to about 820.8 feet msl.

In addition to creating electricity through hydroelectric turbines at Wirtz Dam, Lake LBJ serves another critical function. Lake LBJ is the cooling lake for the Thomas C. Ferguson Power Plant, a 516-megawatt combined cycle plant that provides electricity to the Texas power grid. Four feet is the maximum LCRA can lower the lake without risking impacting the operation of the Ferguson power plant.

In addition, the Texas Department of Transportation asked LCRA to keep the lake at about 820.8 feet or above during the drawdown. TxDOT said lower lake levels would hinder its work replacing the RM 2900 bridge destroyed during the October flooding.

LCRA moved the water released from Lake LBJ downstream through Lake Marble Falls into Lake Travis.

### 4. How much was Lake Marble Falls lowered?

LCRA lowered Lake Marble Falls about 7 feet, from its normal operating range of 736.2 to 737 feet msl to a range of 729 to 730 feet msl.

LCRA moved the water released from Lake Marble Falls downstream into Lake Travis.

**5. When and how will lakes LBJ and Marble Falls be refilled?**

Lakes LBJ and Marble Falls will be refilled with a combination of water released from Lake Buchanan and water flowing into the Colorado River from tributaries downstream of Buchanan Dam.

**The refill on Lake LBJ is scheduled to begin on Sunday, Feb. 24, and conclude by the end of the day on Wednesday, Feb. 27.**

**The refill on Lake Marble Falls is scheduled to begin on Monday, March 18, and conclude by the end of the day on Thursday, March 21.**

The water to refill lakes LBJ and Marble Falls will total about 26,000 acre-feet and could cause Lake Buchanan to fall a maximum of about 1.1 feet. The actual impact to Lake Buchanan could be reduced by rainfall or additional inflows to lakes Buchanan, Inks, LBJ or Marble Falls.

**6. Why did the drawdown timetable change?**

In January, LCRA extended the drawdown by five days after the lowerings were paused during heavy rains that prompted floodgate operations at Tom Miller Dam.

At the request of local officials, on Feb. 1 LCRA announced the drawdown would be extended until March 18. However, officials on Lake LBJ later requested the timetable be shortened on Lake LBJ, and [LCRA announced](#) on Feb.7 the refill of Lake LBJ would begin on Feb. 24. The refill of Lake Marble Falls is still scheduled to begin on March 18.

**7. How much did Lake Travis rise because of the water moved downstream to lower lakes LBJ and Marble Falls?**

The water released from lakes LBJ and Marble Falls totaled about 26,000 acre-feet and caused Lake Travis to rise a little more than a foot. The U.S. Army of Corps of Engineers has allowed LCRA to temporarily store up to 1.3 feet of water from the drawdown in the flood pool of Lake Travis, up to a lake level of about 682.3 feet above mean sea level, from Dec. 30 through April 1.

**8. What actions is LCRA taking to further enhance public safety on Lake LBJ?**

On Feb. 14, LCRA announced it was implementing the following actions:

- Following the refill of the lake Feb. 24-27, LCRA crews will assess conditions and mark or, where possible, remove navigational hazards in the main body of the lake. Debris on the shoreline and on private property continues to be the responsibility of the property owner.
- LCRA will designate the entire lake a nighttime no-wake zone following the refill of the lake. By law, “nighttime” is defined as from 30 minutes after sundown to 30 minutes before sunrise. Violation of the no-wake requirement is a Class C misdemeanor. The nighttime no-wake speed limit will be in force until further notice.
- LCRA will mark the river channel through Lake LBJ with buoys from the confluence of the Llano and Colorado rivers downstream to Wirtz Dam, a distance of about 12 miles. The markers will include solar-powered lights to guide boaters at night.
- LCRA will post signs at public boat ramps alerting visitors to use extreme caution on the lake. LCRA also will offer free warning signs to marinas and local property owners associations with boat ramps.
- Effective immediately, the public may report unmarked hazards to [AskLCRA@lcra.org](mailto:AskLCRA@lcra.org). The report should include a detailed description of the object and the location, and a photo, if possible. LCRA’s Water Surface Management team will investigate all reports and take appropriate action to address corroborated hazards.
- LCRA will remove abandoned flood-damaged docks from the lake.

Read the [Feb. 14 news release](#).

**9. Do I need permits to perform work on my dock or marina, or to dredge or fill during the drawdown?**

A permit is not needed for dock repairs, but all work must comply with the [Safety Standards for Residential Docks on the Highland Lakes](#), which is available on [lcra.org](http://lcra.org).

A permit is not needed to perform routine maintenance on a marina, but is required if repairs exceed what may be considered routine, or if reconstruction or replacement of a portion of the facility is needed. In order to expedite repairs and replacement, LCRA will allow a permit holder to start repairs under the emergency reconstruction provision, if written notice is provided to LCRA within 72 hours of the work beginning. Within 30 business days after the work begins, the permittee is required to submit an application for a marina facility permit amendment. Contact Matt Phillips in LCRA Water Surface Management at 512-578-1578 for questions regarding marina maintenance, reconstruction or replacement.

**DREDGE AND FILL:** LCRA has secured a lakewide permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) allowing property owners to perform maintenance dredging and repair existing retaining walls on lakes LBJ and Marble Falls from Dec. 30, 2018, through about March 18, 2019, as long as the property owners register their project with LCRA. **NOTE: Property owners wanting to perform maintenance outside of this time period must obtain an individual dredge and fill permit from LCRA.**

Registration forms for work to be performed on lakes LBJ and Marble Falls during the drawdown are available:

- Online at [lcra.org/lakelowerings](http://lcra.org/lakelowerings).
- By calling LCRA Water Quality Protection at 512-578-2324.
- In person at the LCRA Western Maintenance Facility, 2643 Wirtz Dam Road, Marble Falls, from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 1:30 to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday.

**10. What activities are not allowed during the drawdown?**

- Burning in the lakebed, which is prohibited by Section 26.121 of the Texas Water Code.
- Shoreline work in excess of 500 feet or dredging more than 2,000 cubic yards unless LCRA and USACE approve the project before the work begins.
- Reclamation of land lost to erosion or flood damage.
- Disposing of dredged material on sandbars or islands in the lakebed or along the shoreline.
- New construction.

**11. What do I need to know about doing work in the lakebed during this drawdown?**

- Do not leave tools or machinery in the lakebed overnight.
- Work should be completed on Lake LBJ before the refill begins on Feb. 24. Work on Lake Marble Falls should be completed before the lake refill begins on March 18.

**12. When was the last time LCRA lowered lakes LBJ and Marble Falls?**

LCRA last lowered Lake LBJ in 2017. Under normal circumstances, the lake would not be eligible to be lowered again until 2021, but LCRA made an exception because of the October 2018 flooding and the need to allow residents to remove debris and recover property.

Lake Marble Falls was last drawn down in 2009.

Lake Austin was lowered in 2017, and Inks Lake was lowered in 2018. No drawdowns occurred in 2012-2016 because of the drought.

**13. Why are drawdowns performed in the winter?**

Drawdowns occur in the winter for several reasons, including:

- Water use and recreation is low.
- The cool, dry winter weather helps diminish aquatic vegetation and thwart its regrowth.
- The fish spawning season is not affected because it occurs later in the year.

**14. What if it floods during a drawdown? What if there is a power emergency that requires LCRA to move water into the lowered lakes through hydroelectric generation?**

Unforeseen circumstances, such as floods or power emergencies, could prompt LCRA to change or cancel the scheduled drawdown to pass water through the Highland Lakes and protect public safety. Equipment and tools should not be left in the lakebed unattended and should be removed from the shoreline when not in use.

**15. Where can I get more information about performing work in the lakebed during the drawdowns?**

Contact LCRA at [AskLCRA@lcra.org](mailto:AskLCRA@lcra.org), or call LCRA Water Quality Protection at 512-578-2324.

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