Zebra Mussels

Fact Sheet | August 2017

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 more than 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.

When were zebra mussels discovered in the Highland Lakes?
In June 2017, a team from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and LCRA confirmed the presence of zebra mussels at several locations in Lake Travis. In August 2017, TPWD and the city of Austin discovered zebra mussels downstream of Lake Travis in Lake Austin.

Zebra mussels also have been discovered less than 50 miles from the Highland Lakes – in Canyon Lake in 2017, Lake Belton in 2013, Lake Waco in 2014, and Stillhouse Hollow Reservoir southwest of Belton in 2016. The mussels also have infested lakes in North Texas.

What does this mean for the Highland Lakes?
Though zebra mussels are not good news, they are not devastating either. The drinking water in the Highland Lakes remains safe, and the lakes remain a great destination for visitors from across the country.

Zebra mussels can clog intakes and other infrastructure, but no one can say with certainty how the mussels will react to conditions in lakes Travis and Austin. Some lakes with zebra mussels have seen populations remain relatively low, while others have seen the numbers grow quickly, then fall. Still others have seen zebra mussels flourish as they colonize and attach to infrastructure and property in the lake.

LCRA will closely monitor the zebra mussel population to learn more about where the mussels are and how they react to living in the Highland Lakes. LCRA also will continue working closely with TPWD as we work to manage the zebra mussel population and keep them from spreading.

How did zebra mussels get to Lake Travis and Lake Austin?
The first mussels almost certainly arrived 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 Lake Travis after being in an infested lake.

Zebra mussels could have been carried downstream to Lake Austin on a boat, or moved downstream through releases into Lake Austin from Mansfield Dam.

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 Lake Travis and Lake Austin?
Yes. 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.

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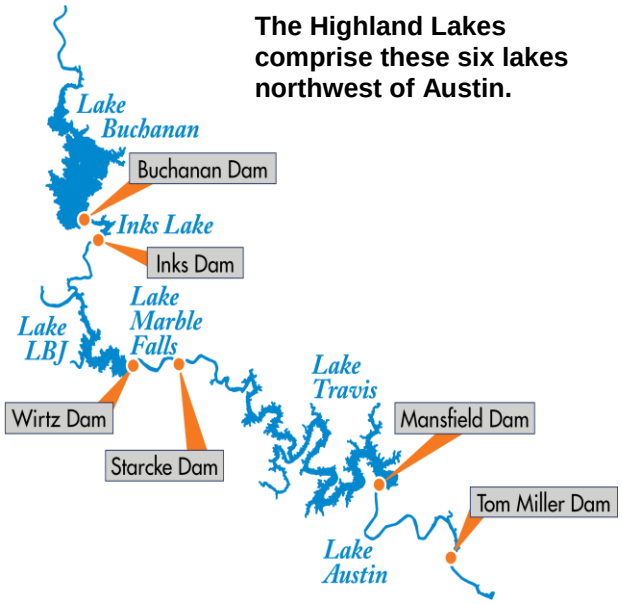
May I still boat on Lake Travis and Lake Austin?
Yes. However, it is critically important to clean, drain and dry your boat when removing it from the lakes, as required by Texas law, to prevent the mussels from spreading to other Texas lakes. Just because you don't see any zebra mussels, doesn't mean they're not there. Zebra mussels have microscopic larvae that can't be seen with the naked eye. View this video from TPWD for more on how to properly clean, drain and dry a boat.



The Highland Lakes comprise these six lakes northwest of Austin.

I have a water intake, boat, dock or marina on Lake Travis or Lake Austin. What should I do now?

- Check your water intake, boat dock or marina regularly for zebra mussels. Conduct inspections monthly on lakes 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.
- Report any zebra mussel sightings to texasinvasives.org.
- Remove any attached zebra 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 methodology 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.

Anyone who sees zebra mussels attached to an object should remove the mussels.

How does LCRA monitor for zebra mussels?
LCRA conducts twice-a-year inspections at each of the Highland Lakes – lakes Buchanan, Inks, LBJ, Marble Falls, Travis and Austin – Lake Fayette and Lake Bastrop. We also inspect 19 other sites monthly to determine if zebra mussels are present. With the 2017 confirmation of zebra mussels in the Highland Lakes, LCRA will expand and intensify monitoring to assess the distribution and intensity of colonization. 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?

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. Upload the photographs.
3. Remove the mussels.