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.

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. In July 2019, TPWD confirmed zebra mussels had infested Lake LBJ. Zebra mussels also have been discovered less than 50 miles from the Highland Lakes – in Canyon Lake, Lake Belton, Lake Waco and Stillhouse Hollow Reservoir southwest of Belton. 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. Owners of infrastructure on the lakes should monitor their property frequently to ensure the mussels do not interfere with water intakes or other operations. LCRA is working closely with TPWD to monitor the zebra mussel population and keep them from spreading.

How did zebra mussels get into lakes LBJ, Travis and Austin?
The 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 the lakes 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 lakes LBJ, 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.
Zebra Mussels

May I still boat on lakes LBJ, Travis and 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, 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 Lake LBJ, 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 LBJ, 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 regular inspections at each of the Highland Lakes – lakes Buchanan, Inks, LBJ, Marble Falls, Travis and Austin – as well as lakes Fayette and Bastrop. We also inspect 19 other sites monthly to determine if zebra mussels are present. 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?
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.