



# ARE YOU READY FOR SUMMER?

By: Joe Williard, Lake Conroe Division

As summer draws near and lake goers begin getting ready for the warm sunny weather, the San Jacinto River Authority (SJRA) wants to remind the public of a few important issues to keep in mind while boating this summer. Boating safety, which is a crucial factor for ensuring a safe and fun day on the water for everyone, should always be a top priority. Secondly, before you launch your watercraft, you should ensure that your vessel is in compliance with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's (TPWD) laws, including prohibitions on the transportation of invasive species. Compliance with both federal and state laws will not only keep you and your family safe, but it will help everyone continue to enjoy a clean and safe Lake Conroe.

One new invasive species to keep on the lookout for are zebra mussels, which have recently migrated down to north Texas. Zebra mussels were introduced into the United States in the mid 80's from the ballasts of cargo ships entering the Great Lakes region. They have quickly spread down the Mississippi River infecting bodies of water, both east and west, as they've made their way south towards Texas. Initially, it was believed that the mussels would not survive in the warmer waters of the south, but that has not been the case. The earliest reports of zebra mussels in Texas were from Lake Texoma in 2009, but they have now been reported in eight other lakes in the Lone Star state. In addition, several additional Texas lakes have experienced positive DNA "hits" for zebra mussels even though the actual mussels haven't been spotted yet. So far, Lake Conroe is not one of the infected water bodies. TPWD and river authorities around the state have diligently tried to stop or at least slow the spread of the mussels since their introduction.

## So, why should we care? What damage could they do?

Zebra mussels, although relatively small, multiply rapidly and can cause significant impact



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not only to water utilities but also to individual boat and dock owners. In their infant stage, the mussels are microscopic and can attach themselves onto almost all submerged surfaces, including boat hulls and even the smallest of cracks in pumps, intake pipes, boat motors, and any surface that remains submerged. As they mature, they grow to about the size of your pinkie nail and cover the entire surface they are attached to, clogging pipes, screens, and intakes along the way. With no natural predators, it is almost impossible to eradicate them from an infested body of water except by physical removal, which comes at a high cost.

## What can you do to help stop the spread?

First things first. Per Texas state law you must always CLEAN, DRAIN, AND DRY your boat, trailer, and equipment any time you leave a body of water. That includes any live wells, ballasts, or bilge areas in the boat. Transporting zebra mussels is illegal and can be punishable as a Class C misdemeanor with a fine up to \$500. Make sure that you



do not transport bait fish from one water body to another because that water could be contaminated. SJRA has two TPWD-certified watercraft inspectors for zebra mussels. Please contact SJRA at 936-588-1111 or TPWD for further information or to schedule an inspection of your watercraft.

Now that we are all armchair experts on zebra mussels, it's time to hit the water. Lake Conroe can be a great place to recreate, fish, or just enjoy the sights, which brings a large number of boaters to the area, especially during the summer months. It's crucial to keep boating safety as a number one priority while on the water. Law enforcement officers from the office of Montgomery County Con-

stable Precinct 1 will be working with surrounding marinas conducting pre-launch inspections on boats to ensure they have the proper safety equipment. For more information, please contact Montgomery County Precinct 1 Constable's office at (936) 539-7821 and refer to TPWD's safety requirements for vessels at <http://tpwd.texas.gov/fishboat/boat/safety/>.

## And remember these tips so that you can enjoy your day in the sun:

- We always recommend a Boater's Safety Course before operating any vessel. See TPWD website for recommendations and on-line courses.
- Make sure to have all the proper safety equipment onboard the vessel.
- Check the weather forecast and wind conditions for the day.
- Check your navigation lighting.
- File a "float plan" with the marina you launch from or with your friends. Let someone know where you are going and when you plan to return.
- Know the LAW.
- ALWAYS wear your life jacket.
- ALWAYS avoid consuming alcohol while operating your vessel.

Don't forget to keep an eye out for zebra mussels and to Clean, Drain, and Dry your boat. You CAN help stop the spread of invasives and keep Texas lakes beautiful.

For more information, visit our website at [www.sjra.net/lakeconroe](http://www.sjra.net/lakeconroe) or call 936-588-1111. ♦

