

Press Release

The Somervell County Water District (SCWD) completed construction of the Wheeler Branch Reservoir in 2008 for the sole purpose of providing a surface water supply to Somervell County Residents. The Reservoir was completed with 100% local county tax dollars. As an added benefit, SCWD opened the Wheeler Branch Reservoir Park in August 2010. Just prior to the park opening to fishing, zebra mussels were discovered at Lake Texoma and quickly spread to several north Texas reservoirs. Recently zebra mussels have been found south of Somervell County in Lake Belton and Lake Waco. Zebra mussel DNA has been found in Lake Granbury and Lake Whitney. The past six years SCWD has actively tried to promote awareness to the seriousness of the zebra mussel threat to the Wheeler Branch Reservoir. The District has distributed fliers to fisherman, posted signs at the boat ramp and park gate, spot checked boats and verbally informed boaters of the existing laws requiring all boats entering the reservoir to be clean and dry prior to entering the park. Despite all the District's and local law enforcement officials efforts to enforce the laws regarding transporting water from one lake to another, recent boat surveys have found that over one third of all boats with bilges and live wells continue to attempt to bring outside water into the Wheeler Branch Reservoir within their bilges or live wells. It will only take one boat from one of the seven infested reservoirs in Texas to infest Wheeler Branch Reservoir with zebra mussels.

It is estimated the District could spend up to \$250,000 annually to control the effects of the zebra mussel at our water works and treatment plant facilities if the Wheeler Branch Reservoir gets infested. This amount represents over 15% of the District's annual operating budget and would have to be accounted for through either higher SCWD taxes, loss of existing services or higher water rates for Somervell County residents.

The SCWD Board of Directors has determined this to be too high of a risk to the reservoir for the relatively few amount of bass boats that use the reservoir. Bass boats that contain bilges and live wells present the highest risk for transporting water from one reservoir to another. Since the District has only one monitored boat ramp we have an option that is not available to most reservoirs with multiple free public ramps. On June 13, 2016 the Board of Directors passed a resolution that only allows canoes, kayaks and open hull john boats without bilges, live wells or raised floors that can conceal water. Trolling motors will be allowed but no boats with gas powered motors will be allowed at the reservoir. The entire Wheeler Branch Reservoir Boat policy can be found at the SCWD website at scwd.com. This policy will become effective Monday, June 20, 2016.