

WATCH FOR WATER HAZARDS DURING THE ONGOING DROUGHT

The lakes and streams of the Brazos River basin are natural treasures for all to enjoy. The ongoing drought has taken a toll on water levels, but there are still plenty of opportunities to have fun.

Before you set out, you should be aware that the lower water also creates many hazards that are normally not threats during times of average rainfall. If you're unaware of the hazards, your visit can become anything but a day at the beach. With a little planning and care however, you can ensure your next trip to the water is a safe one.

Submerged trees and stumps

When the Brazos River Authority lakes were first filled, workers left in place many of the countless trees that covered the river valley. Years later, the trees are a great habitat for the many fish that make the lakes popular with anglers.

When the lakes are full, most people probably aren't aware the trees and stumps are there. But as the lake level's drop, they make an appearance.

While boaters are now seeing more of these stumps sticking up, the real risk is those that are just below the surface.

Someone on a fast-moving boat might not see a submerged stump or sandbar in time to avoid it. Even if no one is injured, when a watercraft strikes a stump, repairs for the resulting damage can be costly. The Authority recommends anyone who plans to pull a water skier when the water level is down first survey the area for hazards.

Fortunately such water hazards are mostly found along more shallow areas at the lakes' edges, areas where one should not ski or operate a boat at faster speeds anyway. Authority regulations require watercraft within 50 feet of a shoreline, boathouse, dock, other watercraft or area where people are swimming or diving to operate at a slow speed that does not create a wake. People who stick to the middle of the lake and observe buoys marking the channels should not have problems with stumps.



On the river

Texas rivers can suffer a double whammy during drought. Their flow is already low because they are not receiving runoff from rainstorms. And since lake levels are down, releases are rare – usually only to fulfill a customer's request or to balance lake levels.

For paddlers, lower flows mean they have to work harder to get downriver, and might have to get out more frequently to move their canoes or kayaks past shallow spots.

Paddling trips that previously took a couple of hours can take much longer when the river is down. This can pose a health risk for paddlers who don't prepare for longer periods on the river. Here are a few suggestions for keeping your next paddling trip a safe one:



- Keep hydrated. Be sure to account for the longer trip time in low flow conditions when planning how much water to bring.
- Check with a river guide or someone who is familiar with the river to learn about conditions and difficult areas when the water is down.
- Know your limitations.
- Let someone know when you are going and when you expect to be back.
- Watch out for submerged rocks, trees and stumps that may now be more of a hazard.
- Bring lifejackets for everyone and make sure they wear them.

By planning ahead and educating yourself about potential hazards, you can help assure your next trip to a Brazos basin lake or stream is a fun and safe one. 