



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Council

Through: Susana Carbajal, Assistant City Manager 

From: Jorge L. Morales, P.E., CFM, Director of Austin Watershed Protection 

Date: October 22, 2026

Subject: **Update on Hydrilla in Lake Austin**

The purpose of this memorandum is to describe the status of hydrilla in Lake Austin, provide updated information from a recent Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) vegetation survey, and provide an update on City of Austin's aquatic vegetation management. Previous updates related to hydrilla and the potential for a Lake Austin drawdown are linked below:

- [Hydrilla in Lake Austin October; 3, 2025](#)
- [Staff update regarding a drawdown of Lake Austin; October 10, 2025](#)
- [Staff update regarding a drawdown of Lake Austin; November 18, 2025](#)
- [Hydrilla in Lake Austin Update: July 20, 2026](#)
- [Update regarding a drawdown of Lake Austin: August 20, 2026](#)
- [Lake Austin Drawdown – Preparations and Update: September 10, 2026](#)
- [Cancellation of Lake Austin drawdown: September 24, 2026](#)

Current Status of Hydrilla in Lake Austin

TPWD conducts lake vegetation surveys twice every year at the beginning and end of the growing seasons (spring and fall). Typically, the lake survey shows an increase in vegetation between June and September. However, in September 2026, TPWD observed no change in the lake-wide total surface area of hydrilla and a small increase of Eurasian watermilfoil since their previous survey at the beginning of the growing season in June 2026. While hydrilla continues to be a concern on Lake Austin, the lake-wide growth has plateaued in 2026. Additional management measures are anticipated to build on this improvement to achieve a lake-scale decrease in invasive species.

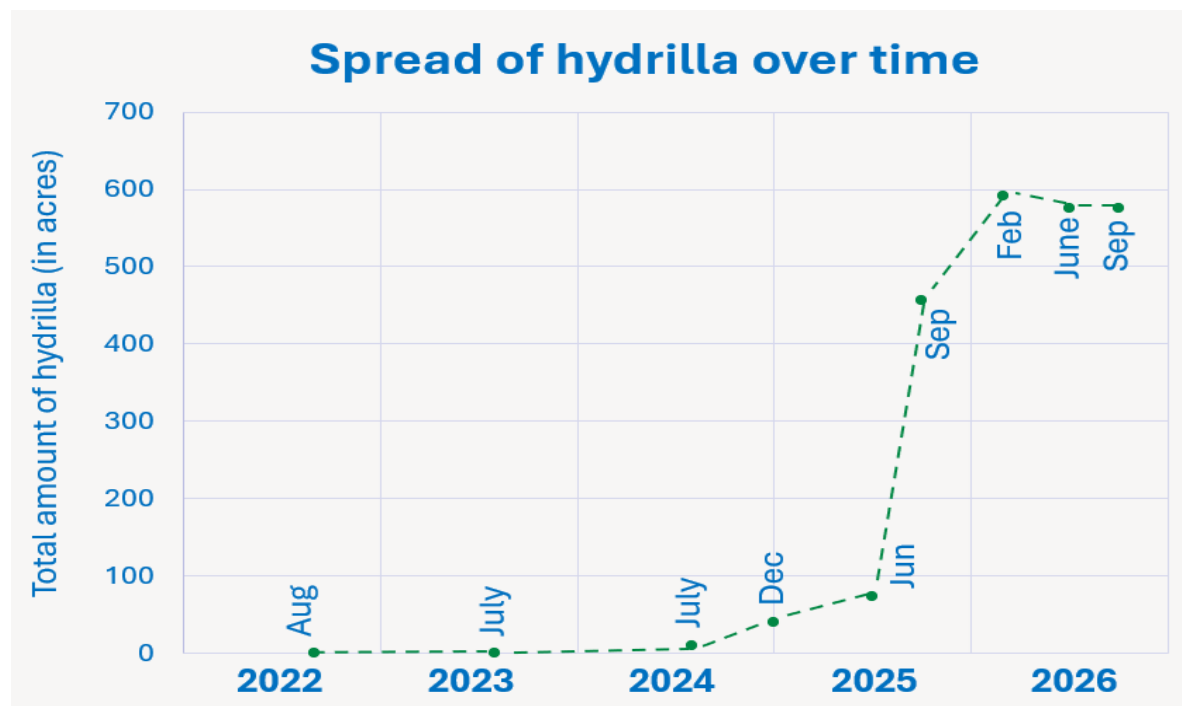
TPWD's observations from the fall survey include:

- No increase in the overall amount of hydrilla since February. This plateau in coverage is likely attributable to the stocking of grass carp and easing drought conditions.
- Eurasian watermilfoil shows a modest expansion approximately five miles downstream of Mansfield Dam. The milfoil does not appear to be causing navigational issues.

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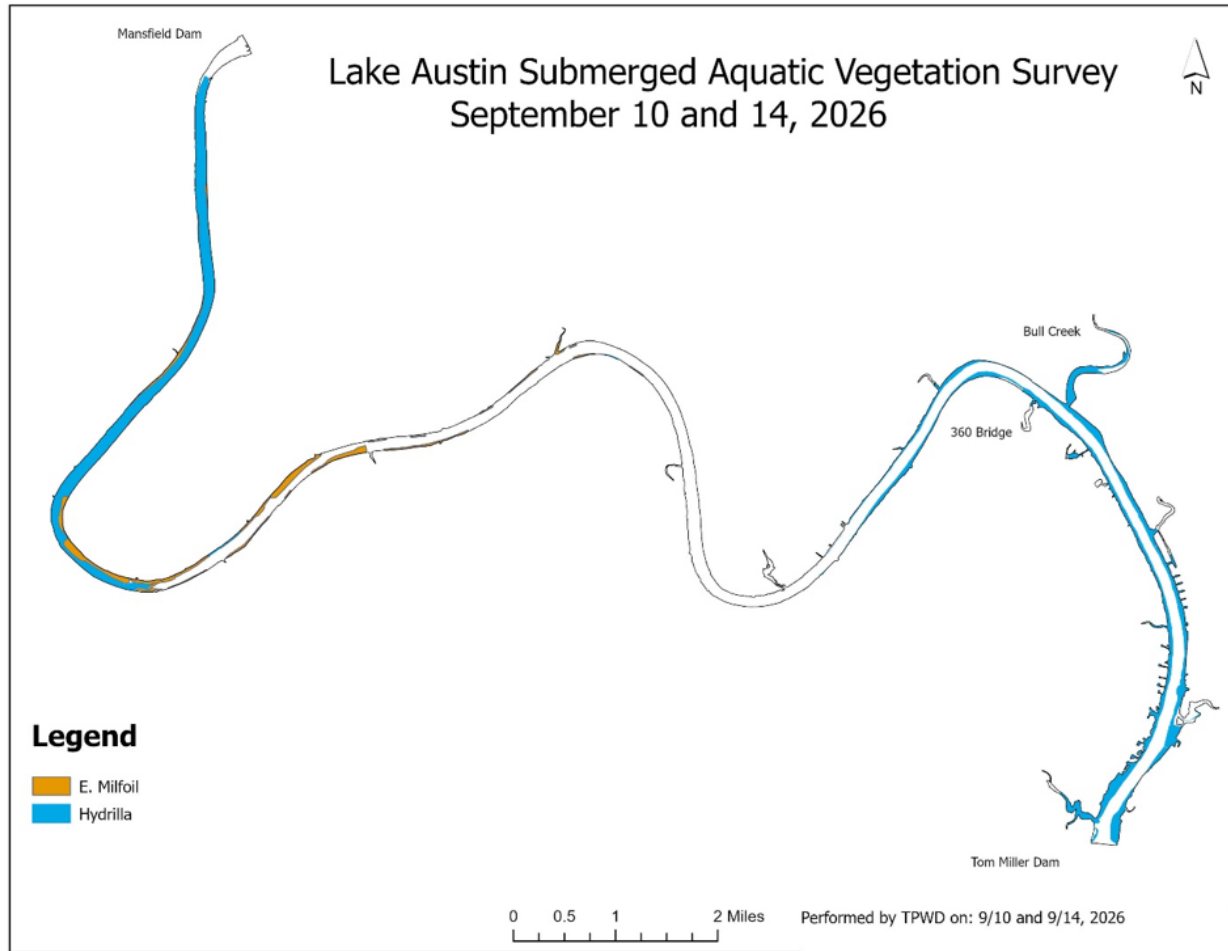
- Some spatial changes in vegetation distribution and density included localized decreases and increases. The Bee Creek, Bull Creek, and Ski Shores areas saw an increase while areas above the Pennybacker Bridge and other localized areas saw a decrease.
- Native vegetation has increased a small amount; however, it is difficult to quantify because the scope of the June TPWD survey did not include native plants.

The July floodgate operations at Mansfield Dam did not significantly reduce vegetation due to the low flow and extended duration. A more concentrated release would have reduced the amount of hydrilla and Eurasian watermilfoil.



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Most of the hydrilla is now further below the water surface, reducing some conflict with boating. However, there are still focal points of topped out dense growth that are causing navigational problems. Notable areas include Bull Creek, Bee Creek, and areas near the shoreline of the basin and upper lake.



Update on Sterile Grass Carp Stocking and Next Steps

Stocking sterile grass carp, a species that prefers to consume hydrilla over other plants, continues to be the preferred long-term method by which the City will manage hydrilla on Lake Austin. While hydrilla and other aquatic plants are often beneficial to aquatic life, including fish, hydrilla can cause navigational and recreational impediments. During the past several months, Austin Watershed Protection (WPD) scientists have worked to develop a Lake Austin-specific analytical model that will be a powerful new tool to help inform staff on the appropriate stocking rate. This tool will help optimize the number of grass carp that should be added. The model takes into account historic data in addition to current data such as the current grass carp population and most recent vegetation survey. This will allow staff to determine what stocking rate will have the highest chance of reaching the targeted level of coverage of aquatic vegetation within Lake Austin without causing a loss of aquatic vegetation below a 2 percent surface area threshold that would negatively impact aquatic life. Based on this model, staff will request that TPWD allow a higher grass carp stocking rate than would normally be allowed. This will result in an aggressive increase in grass carp from recent stocking events. Staff believe that this new model will mitigate hydrilla growth while

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maintaining optimal vegetation for healthy aquatic life. Grass carp will be added at a range of locations in upper, middle, and lower reaches of Lake Austin based on the zones of high density. A more in-depth description of WPD's approach to managing aquatic vegetation on Lake Austin will be published in the forthcoming Lake Austin Vegetation Management Plan by the end of the calendar year.

Bottom Barriers

Bottom barriers are materials placed over the lakebed substrate to suppress growth of rooted aquatic vegetation. There are several aspects of bottom barriers that negatively impact the environment and can create problems in Lake Austin. If inappropriate materials are used, installed improperly, unmaintained, or left in place for too long, these barriers can uplift, break apart, dislodge, become buried or otherwise become ineffective, hazardous trash in the lake. For these reasons, limited extent, design, and maintenance of bottom barriers is a critical component of the City's stewardship of the lake. WPD and Austin Development Services are working together to create criteria for bottom barrier approval and tracking through a simple and inexpensive site plan exemption process. Size limitations, location restrictions, temporal/maintenance limitations, and technical design elements will be included in the approval process. Coordination with TPWD is essential because landowners must apply for an [Aquatic Vegetation Treatment Proposal](#) from the State of Texas. The City's site plan exemption process will align with TPWD's requirements to avoid any potential conflict and will enable tracking and detail that would otherwise be unavailable from the state process.

If you have any questions, please contact Liz Johnston, Environmental Officer, at liz.johnston@austintexas.gov or at (512) 974-2619.

cc: T.C. Broadnax, City Manager
Erika Brady, City Clerk
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