



Buying Lakefront on Lake Livingston: Bulkheads, Docks and TRA Permits

polktx.com/real-estate/rural/lakefront-and-bulkheads/



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What it is and why it matters when buying

The Trinity River Authority built Lake Livingston and still owns and runs the lake and dam. On the shoreline, TRA authorizes piers, boathouses, bulkheads and dredging. A structure at the water's edge should have a TRA permit behind it.

TRA holds the lake at a normal pool of 131 feet above sea level when there is no flood. In a flood, the water can rise higher while TRA passes it downstream. To allow for that, TRA owns a flowage easement around the lake that reaches up to 135 feet at the southern end and 140 feet at the northern end.

Septic works differently near the water too. Within 2,000 feet of the lake, septic permits come from TRA rather than the county.

What to check before you buy

- Ask whether the dock, pier, boathouse and bulkhead have TRA permits, and get copies. TRA's online portal can search existing permits.
- Ask how old the bulkhead is, what it is made of and whether it has been repaired.
- Compare the lot's ground elevation with the 131-foot normal pool, and ask where the flowage easement falls on the lot.
- Look up the flood zone, and ask for an elevation certificate if one exists.
- Confirm whether the septic system is permitted through TRA.
- In lake subdivisions, check for deed restrictions or a property owners association.

Questions to ask the seller or listing agent

- Are the dock, pier, boathouse and bulkhead permitted by TRA? Do you have copies?
- How old is the bulkhead, and what repairs has it had?
- Has water ever reached the house or outbuildings?
- Is there an elevation certificate?
- Does anything need to be transferred or re-permitted with TRA when the property sells?
- Is there an HOA or deed restrictions, and what do they say about the shoreline?

Who handles it in Polk County

Trinity River Authority, Lake Livingston

Project

Septic permits within 2,000 feet of Lake Livingston, and permits for piers, boathouses, bulkheads and dredging on the shoreline.

PHONE (936) 365-2292

ADDRESS 5170 S. FM 1988, Livingston, TX 77351

WEB trinityra.org (trinityra.org/lake_information/water_storage/lake_livingston/index.php)

Source: Polk County FAQ (2,000-foot rule); TRA Lake Livingston and permit pages

Polk County Permit Department

Septic (OSSF) permits, development permits, 911 addresses and floodplain questions outside city limits. For floodplain, ask for the Floodplain Administrator.

PHONE (936) 327-6820 ext. 1

EMAIL permits@co.polk.tx.us

ADDRESS 602 E. Church St., Suite 141, Livingston, TX 77351

HOURS Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–4 p.m.

WEB polktx.gov (polktx.gov/325/Permits)

Source: Polk County Permits page

Polk County Clerk, Research Department

Deeds and other recorded documents: easements, deed restrictions, plats and affidavits filed with a property. The County Clerk's main office is (936) 327-6805.

PHONE (936) 327-6804

ADDRESS 410 E. Church St., Suite A, Livingston, TX 77351

WEB polktx.gov (polktx.gov/Directory.aspx?did=9)

Source: Polk County staff directory, County Clerk

Look it up yourself

Official sources only.

TRA online permits and licenses (trinityra.org/lake_information/water_storage/lake_livingston/online_permits_and_licenses.php)

Search existing TRA permits and see the map of TRA's septic areas.

TRA property owner permits (trinityra.org/lake_information/water_storage/lake_livingston/property_owner_permits_and_licenses.php)

Forms for piers, boathouses, bulkheads, dredging and septic near the lake.

TRA Lake Livingston page (trinityra.org/lake_information/water_storage/lake_livingston/index.php)

Normal pool elevation, dam operations and the flowage easement.

FEMA Flood Map Service Center (msc.fema.gov/portal/home)

The flood zone for an address.

How to find a licensed professional

PolkTX does not recommend or list contractors. To check that someone holds a current Texas license, use the state's own search:

Texas Board of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors: surveyor search (pels.texas.gov/roster/rplsearch.html)

Registered professional land surveyors. Search by name or license number.

Texas Board of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors: engineer search (pels.texas.gov/roster/pesearch.html)

Professional engineers. Search by name or license number.

TCEQ occupational license search (www2.tceq.texas.gov/lic_dpa/index.cfm?fuseaction=licall.searchgp)

Septic (OSSF) installers, site evaluators and maintenance providers. Choose "On Site Sewage Facility Licensing," then the license type.

TREC license holder search (trec.texas.gov/license-search)

Home inspectors. Search under Inspectors.

We could not find a state license lookup for marine or bulkhead builders, so none is listed. TRA's portal has its own contractor licensing; ask TRA how to check it.

Last checked: October 9, 2026

Sources for this page:

- Trinity River Authority, Lake Livingston Project (Polk County FAQ (2,000-foot rule); TRA Lake Livingston and permit pages) (trinityra.org/lake_information/water_storage/lake_livingston/index.php)
- Polk County Permit Department (Polk County Permits page) (polktx.gov/325/Permits)
- Polk County Clerk, Research Department (Polk County staff directory, County Clerk) (polktx.gov/Directory.aspx?did=9)
- TRA online permits and licenses (trinityra.org/lake_information/water_storage/lake_livingston/online_permits_and_licenses.php)
- TRA property owner permits (trinityra.org/lake_information/water_storage/lake_livingston/property_owner_permits_and_licenses.php)
- FEMA Flood Map Service Center (msc.fema.gov/portal/home)
- Texas Board of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors: surveyor search (pels.texas.gov/roster/rplssearch.html)
- Texas Board of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors: engineer search (pels.texas.gov/roster/pesearch.html)
- TCEQ occupational license search (www2.tceq.texas.gov/lic_dpa/index.cfm?fuseaction=licall.searchgp)
- TREC license holder search (trec.texas.gov/license-search)

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