



Private Pond Owner FAQs: Stocking Tilapia in the “Conservation Zone”

What is the Conservation Zone?

The Conservation Zone (see map next page) is the area of the state where Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) has prioritized protection of native fish species in need of conservation (imperiled fishes) that research suggests could be harmed by tilapia if they escape from stocked ponds. The Conservation Zone was identified based on a research study that weighed potential harmful impacts of tilapia escapes on at-risk imperiled fishes against the economic importance of the tilapia pond stocking trade across Texas. In the Conservation Zone, the potential harm tilapia could cause to imperiled fishes outweighs the economic importance of tilapia stocking and TPWD approval is required for stocking tilapia in private ponds.

How do Tilapia Harm Native Imperiled Fishes?

Harmful impacts of tilapia on imperiled fishes can result from tilapia competing with native fish for nesting space and resources, preying on small/young fish, consuming fish eggs, and degrading habitat. Tilapia pose a threat to many native fish species and TPWD has a responsibility to ensure that tilapia stocking allowed under our regulations for prohibited exotic species does not cause harm to imperiled fishes or ecosystems.

What Native Imperiled Fishes May Be Harmed by Tilapia?

Imperiled fishes present in the Conservation Zone that could be harmed by tilapia include the Guadalupe Bass, Plateau Shiner, Proserpine Shiner, Leon Springs Pupfish, Comanche Springs Pupfish, Conchos Pupfish, Pecos Pupfish, Red River Pupfish, San Felipe Gambusia, Big Bend Gambusia, Clear Creek Gambusia, Pecos Gambusia, Rio Grande Chub, and Headwater Catfish. Not all of these species are present in every area of the Conservation Zone. To learn more about these and other fishes in Texas, visit: <https://www.fishesoftexas.org/checklists/texas/>

How Are Private Ponds in the Conservation Zone Evaluated for Approval?

Requests for stocking of tilapia in the Conservation Zone are reviewed to determine whether the pond is likely to overflow, potentially resulting in unlawful escape of tilapia downstream and eventually into public waters. The review process includes evaluating the pond in relation to existing creeks and rivers, location in the watershed and flood zones, and signs of overflow into a creek bed on satellite imagery and provided photographs. If TPWD determines that such overflow is likely to occur, stocking of tilapia will typically not be approved, although presence of imperiled fishes likely to be harmed by tilapia will also be considered, both in the immediate area and upstream and downstream areas to which tilapia could swim if they escape.

Do I Have to Apply Every Year for Approval to Stock Tilapia in My Pond?

No. Once you have received an approval letter, it remains valid unless the pond is modified in such a way that it overflows and risk of tilapia escape is increased (if so, you must submit a request for re-approval), and the approval can be transferred to a new owner with the sale of the property.

Is There Anything I Can Do to Modify My Pond to Gain Approval to Stock Tilapia?

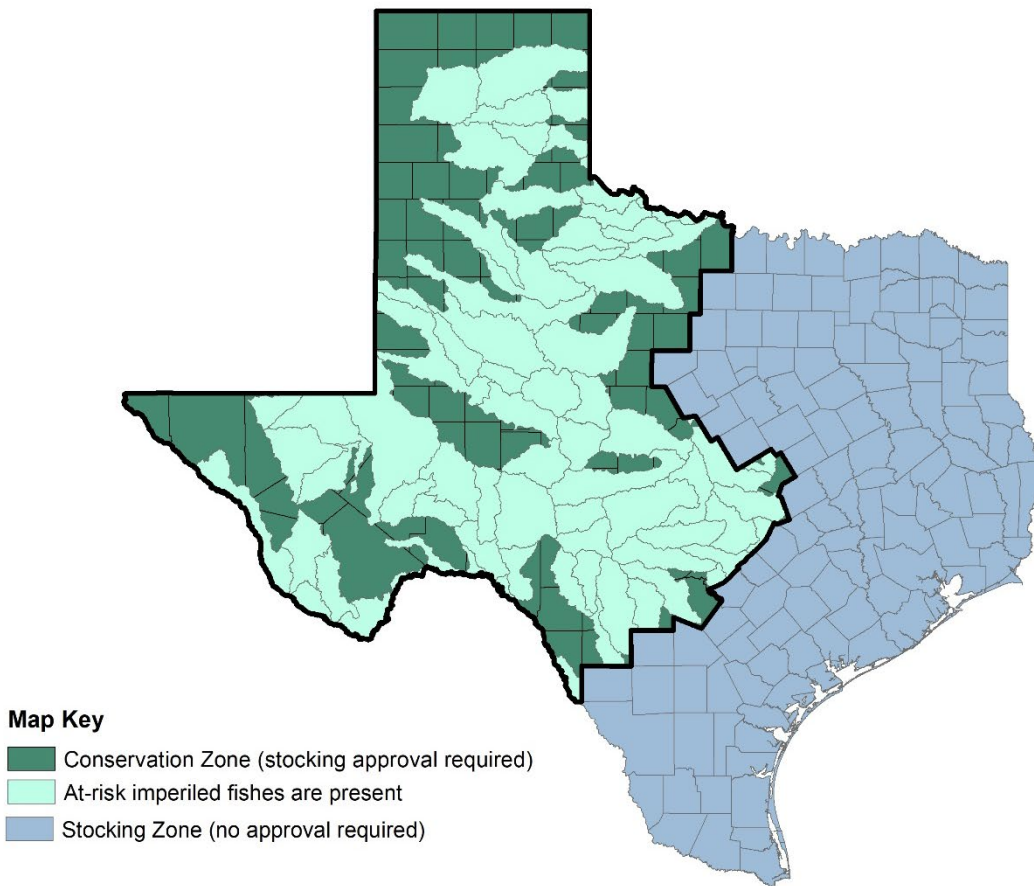
Because tilapia reproduce and very small tilapia may be present in ponds, fencing or grating used to prevent escape of the larger, non-reproducing triploid grass carp is not adequate for tilapia. Ponds that overflow into a creek bed typically cannot be modified so that stocking of tilapia would be approved because this would require extensive modification, such as elevating dams and eliminating all overflow structures, to ensure a pond does not ever overflow into the creek bed during heavy rains and tilapia cannot escape. If a pond is modified so that there is no potential for overflow into the creek bed, photographs of the modifications can be submitted with a new request for approval.

What are the Alternatives to Tilapia Use?

Alternatives for the use of tilapia for filamentous algae control include spring fertilization, non-toxic dyes, mechanical removal, and herbicides. For more information, contact a pond management company or visit the Texas A&M AquaPlant site at: <https://aquaplant.tamu.edu/management-options/filamentous-algae/>

Where Is the Conservation Zone and Where Are At-Risk Imperiled Fishes?

The map below shows the designated Conservation and Stocking Zones (the area where economic importance of stocking outweighs potential risks to imperiled fishes and approval is not required for stocking). The map also shows the watersheds within the Conservation Zone where imperiled fishes potentially impacted by tilapia (listed above) are present.



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