

Texas Lake Home Search

Austin & Dallas Areas | Prepared for Keith Holland | March 2026

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Goal: Find a lake property with land outside Austin or Dallas. More space, more value than California. Purchase timeline: 1-2 years.

Why Texas?

Factor	California (OC)	Texas (Lake Country)
Median home price	\$1M+	\$350-600K
Acreage for \$500K	0.1-0.25 acres	1-10+ acres
Property tax	~0.75%	~1.8-2.2% (no income tax)
State income tax	9.3-13.3%	0%
Cost of living	Very high	Moderate
Waterfront premium	Astronomical	Significant but accessible

The math: What buys you a 1,500 sq ft condo in OC can get you a 3,000+ sq ft lakefront home on 1-5 acres in Texas. The income tax savings alone (~\$10-30K/year depending on income) offset the higher property taxes.

Lake Areas Near Austin (Within 1-2 Hours)

Tier 1: Premium Lakes

Lake Travis

- Distance from Austin: 20-45 min
- Vibe: Hill Country luxury, party coves, crystal clear water
- Key towns: Lakeway, Bee Cave, Spicewood, Lago Vista, Jonestown
- Price range: \$500K-\$5M+ (waterfront), \$300-700K (lake access/view)
- Lot sizes: 0.25-5 acres typical, larger available further out
- Pros: Closest major lake to Austin, great restaurants/amenities, strong appreciation
- Cons: Most expensive Austin lake, can get crowded, water levels fluctuate (LCRA managed)
- Best for: Want lake life + easy Austin access

Lake Austin

- Distance from Austin: 10-30 min (it's basically IN Austin)
- Vibe: Ultra-premium, private, constant water level
- Key areas: West Austin, Westlake Hills
- Price range: \$1M-\$10M+ (very limited waterfront inventory)
- Pros: Constant water level (unlike Travis), closest to downtown, extremely desirable
- Cons: Very expensive, limited inventory, small lake
- Best for: Money-is-no-object buyers who want city + lake

Canyon Lake

- Distance from Austin: 45-60 min (between Austin & San Antonio)
- Vibe: Hill Country gem, clear spring-fed water, more relaxed
- Key towns: Canyon Lake, New Braunfels (nearby), Wimberley (nearby)

- Price range: \$350K-\$1.5M (waterfront), \$250-500K (lake view/access)
- Lot sizes: 0.5-10+ acres
- Pros: Crystal clear water, beautiful Hill Country, more affordable than Travis, consistent water
- Cons: Further from Austin, fewer restaurants/amenities, more rural
- Best for: Best value for waterfront + Hill Country beauty

Tier 2: Great Value Lakes

Lake LBJ

- Distance from Austin: 60-75 min
- Vibe: Constant-level lake, granite shores, Hill Country
- Key towns: Horseshoe Bay, Kingsland, Granite Shoals
- Price range: \$400K-\$2M (waterfront), \$200-500K (view/access)
- Pros: Constant water level, Horseshoe Bay resort community, gorgeous granite shores
- Cons: Further out, smaller town feel
- Best for: Retirement/vacation home with consistent water

Inks Lake

- Distance from Austin: 70-80 min
- Vibe: State park vibes, constant level, scenic
- Key towns: Burnet, Buchanan Dam
- Price range: \$300K-\$1M (waterfront)
- Pros: Constant water level, beautiful, less crowded, affordable
- Cons: Smaller lake, remote, limited amenities
- Best for: Nature lovers, quiet retreat

Lake Buchanan

- Distance from Austin: 75-90 min
- Vibe: Largest Highland Lake, wide open, rugged
- Key towns: Burnet, Tow, Bluffton
- Price range: \$250K-\$800K (waterfront), \$150-350K (acreage nearby)
- Lot sizes: 1-50+ acres available
- Pros: Most affordable waterfront in the Highland Lakes chain, BIG lots
- Cons: Water level fluctuates significantly, remote, limited services
- Best for: Maximum acreage + waterfront on a budget

Lake Areas Near Dallas (Within 1-2 Hours)

Tier 1: Premium Lakes

Lake Texoma

- Distance from Dallas: 60-75 min north
- Vibe: Massive lake (89,000 acres), resort communities, great fishing
- Key towns: Pottsboro, Denison, Kingston (OK side)
- Price range: \$300K-\$1.5M (waterfront), \$200-500K (lake access)
- Lot sizes: 0.5-20+ acres
- Pros: Huge lake (never feels crowded), great striped bass fishing, strong communities, affordable for the size
- Cons: On TX/OK border (some properties on OK side), can be windy

- Best for: Best big-lake experience near Dallas

Cedar Creek Lake

- Distance from Dallas: 55-70 min southeast
- Vibe: Classic Texas lake town, established communities
- Key towns: Mabank, Gun Barrel City, Tool, Malakoff
- Price range: \$250K-\$1M (waterfront), \$150-400K (lake area)
- Lot sizes: 0.25-5+ acres
- Pros: Closest major recreational lake to Dallas, established infrastructure, good fishing
- Cons: Water can be murky, summer algae, less "scenic" than Hill Country
- Best for: Easy Dallas commute + lake life

Lake Ray Hubbard

- Distance from Dallas: 20-30 min east (basically in Dallas metro)
- Vibe: Suburban lake, mixed residential
- Key towns: Rockwall, Rowlett, Heath
- Price range: \$400K-\$2M+ (waterfront), \$300-600K (lake area)
- Pros: Very close to Dallas, Rockwall is a charming town, good schools
- Cons: Suburban feel, less "escape" vibe, higher prices for waterfront
- Best for: Dallas commuters who want water views

Tier 2: Great Value Lakes

Richland-Chambers Reservoir

- Distance from Dallas: 70-80 min southeast
- Vibe: Huge (44,000 acres), uncrowded, fishing paradise
- Key towns: Corsicana, Kerens
- Price range: \$200K-\$700K (waterfront), \$100-300K (nearby acreage)
- Lot sizes: 1-50+ acres
- Pros: Third largest lake in TX, very affordable, not crowded, excellent fishing
- Cons: Remote, limited amenities, not as scenic
- Best for: Maximum bang for buck, fishing, privacy

Lake Whitney

- Distance from Dallas: 80-90 min south (also ~90 min from Austin)
- Vibe: Hill Country-ish limestone bluffs, state park, scenic
- Key towns: Whitney, Laguna Park, Morgan
- Price range: \$200K-\$800K (waterfront), \$100-350K (acreage)
- Lot sizes: 1-20+ acres common
- Pros: Beautiful bluffs, between Dallas & Austin, affordable, less developed
- Cons: Water level fluctuates, further from both cities
- Best for: Scenic + affordable, good if you want between Dallas & Austin

Lake Fork

- Distance from Dallas: 80-90 min east
- Vibe: #1 bass fishing lake in Texas, laid back
- Key towns: Quitman, Emory, Alba
- Price range: \$200K-\$600K (waterfront), \$100-250K (nearby)
- Lot sizes: 1-20+ acres
- Pros: Legendary fishing, very affordable, peaceful
- Cons: Remote, small towns, not much nightlife/dining

- Best for: Fishing enthusiasts, maximum quiet/privacy

Budget Planning

What \$400-600K Gets You in Texas Lake Country

Austin area (Canyon Lake, Lake LBJ, Buchanan):

- 2,000-3,500 sq ft home
- 1-5 acres
- Waterfront or water view
- Hill Country setting
- Possibly a dock or boat slip

Dallas area (Cedar Creek, Texoma, Whitney):

- 2,500-4,000 sq ft home
- 1-10+ acres
- Waterfront or very close
- May include workshop/barn
- Possibly a boat house

Cost Comparison: Ongoing Expenses

Expense	OC, CA	TX Lake Country
Property tax (\$500K home)	~\$3,750/yr	~\$9,000-11,000/yr
State income tax (\$150K income)	~\$10,500/yr	\$0
Homeowner's insurance	~\$1,500/yr	~\$2,500-4,000/yr (flood zones higher)
HOA (if applicable)	\$200-500/mo	\$0-200/mo
Utilities	~\$250/mo	~\$200-350/mo
Net annual savings	—	~\$3,000-8,000+ (income tax savings offset property tax)

Additional Costs to Budget

- Septic system — many lake properties use septic instead of city sewer (\$3-5K to inspect/maintain)
- Well water — some rural lake properties aren't on city water
- Flood insurance — required if in FEMA flood zone (waterfront often is). \$1,000-3,000/yr
- Dock permits — Army Corps of Engineers permit needed on some lakes. \$500-2,000
- Boat — because you'll want one Budget \$10-30K used

Search Strategy

Best Sites for TX Lake Homes

1. Zillow/Redfin — broadest listings, set up saved searches with alerts
2. LakeHomes.com — lake-specific MLS, great filters (waterfront vs. water view vs. water access)
3. Realtor.com — good for acreage filters
4. LandsOfTexas.com — best for larger acreage parcels with water
5. LandWatch.com — rural properties with land

6. HAR.com — Houston Assoc of Realtors but covers wider TX
7. Local lake-specific Facebook groups — often have FSBO and pocket listings

Search Filters to Set Up

- Location: Target zip codes for each lake area
- Price: \$350K-\$700K (adjust as needed)
- Lot size: 1+ acres
- Keywords: "lake view", "waterfront", "lake access", "water view", "dock"
- Property type: Single family, farm/ranch
- Exclude: Timeshares, mobile homes (unless on great land)

Working With Agents

- Use a buyer's agent local to the lake area — they know which properties flood, which docks are legal, water rights, etc.
- TX is a buyer-friendly state — seller typically pays both agent commissions (5-6% total)
- For lake properties specifically, look for agents with the ALHS (Accredited Lakefront & Homesite Specialist) designation

Property Evaluation Checklist (Lake-Specific)

Must-Verify Before Offer

- Water access type: Deeded waterfront? Shared dock? Community access only?
- Flood zone: Check FEMA flood maps. Zone A/AE = mandatory flood insurance
- Water level history: Is this a constant-level lake or does it fluctuate? (Critical for docks)
- Septic vs. sewer: If septic, when was it last inspected/pumped?
- Water source: City water or well? If well, get a water quality test
- Dock permits: Can you build/expand a dock? Who issues permits (Army Corps, LCRA, etc.)?
- HOA restrictions: Some lake communities restrict boat sizes, dock types, short-term rentals
- Road access: Paved? Gravel? Private road maintenance agreement?
- Internet: Fiber? Cable? Satellite only? (Remote lake = possibly limited)
- Commute test: Drive the route to nearest city during rush hour

Nice-to-Know

- Rental income potential (Airbnb lake house = cash flow machine)
- Boat ramp proximity (if no private dock)
- Nearest grocery/hospital/school
- Neighbor density (how private is it?)
- Tree coverage and wildlife
- Sunset orientation (west-facing over water =)

Garl's Top Picks (To Explore First)

If Leaning Austin:

1. Canyon Lake — Best overall value. Clear water, Hill Country, 1+ acre lots under \$500K waterfront. 45 min to Austin.
2. Lake Travis (Spicewood/Lago Vista side) — If you want closer to Austin. North shore is more affordable than Lakeway side.
3. Lake LBJ (Horseshoe Bay) — If you want resort-style community with constant water level.

If Leaning Dallas:

1. Lake Texoma — Best big-lake experience. Massive, affordable, great fishing. TX side for no income tax.
2. Cedar Creek Lake — Closest to Dallas with real lake-town feel. Established communities.
3. Lake Whitney — Sleeper pick. Beautiful bluffs, very affordable, positioned between both cities.

Wild Card:

Lake Whitney — 90 min from both Austin AND Dallas. If you don't need to be close to either city specifically, this gives you access to both metros with Hill Country scenery at the lowest price point.

Timeline & Next Steps

Phase 1: Define Priorities (Now - Month 1)

- Set budget range (all-in including closing costs, repairs, boat)
- Austin area vs. Dallas area vs. open to both?
- Must-haves: waterfront vs. water view? Min acreage? Min sq ft?
- Visit timeline: when can you do a scouting trip?
- Primary residence vs. vacation/investment property?

Phase 2: Research & Monitor (Months 1-6)

- Set up saved searches on Zillow, LakeHomes.com, LandsOfTexas.com
- I'll run weekly scans and flag standout listings
- Join local lake Facebook groups for insider listings
- Connect with 1-2 buyer's agents in target areas
- Start mortgage pre-approval process (TX rates, loan options)

Phase 3: Scout & Narrow (Months 6-12)

- Plan a scouting trip — visit 2-3 lake areas over a long weekend
- Drive properties, check water access, meet locals
- Narrow to 1-2 target lakes

Phase 4: Strike (Months 12-24)

- Active monitoring for the right property
 - Make offers, negotiate
 - Close and start lake life
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Questions for Keith & Wife

These will help me refine the search:

1. Budget range? (Comfortable monthly payment or total purchase price)
2. Austin vs. Dallas preference? (Or do you have ties to either city?)
3. Primary home or second home? (Affects loan type, rates, and tax treatment)
4. Remote work possible? (If so, distance from city matters less)
5. Min acreage? (1 acre? 5? 10+?)
6. Waterfront required or is water view/access OK?

7. When could you do a scouting trip?
 8. Any interest in short-term rental income (Airbnb)?
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This is a living document. Garl will update as we refine criteria and find listings.