

## Caddo Lake stakeholders approve all WPP efforts

By Steve Bandy, Marshall News Messenger  
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JEFFERSON — Nearly 75 stakeholders of the Caddo Lake Watershed Protection Plan gave a unanimous "thumbs-up" to the three workgroups actively addressing issues of concern in and around the lake during a public meeting at the Jeffersonian Institute Tuesday afternoon. The gathering represented about one-quarter of the approximately 300 stakeholders who have identified an interest in the lake at one time or another, according to Walt Sears of the Northeast Texas Municipal Water District, which provides coordination, guidance and technical assistance to such groups in developing and implementing watershed protection plans. The vote reinforced the efforts of the Water Quality, Physical Concerns and Hydrology workgroups and urged continuance of programs under way at the lake.

Tuesday's meeting, sponsored by NETMWD and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, was one of the Caddo Lake WPP's quarterly meetings held since 2006.

The state of Texas uses a watershed approach as its water quality management strategy to protect and restore water quality. A watershed is the total geographic area that drains storm water — and pollutants — to a particular stream, lake, aquifer or other water body.

The Greater Caddo Lake Watershed begins in Hopkins County and continues east through Franklin, Upshur, Titus, Camp, Morris, Cass, Marion and Harrison counties. Four main tributaries supply water to Caddo Lake.

Big Cypress Bayou originates in southeast Hopkins County and flows east and southeast to Lake O' the Pines.

Little Cypress Bayou originates in Upshur County and flows east to join Big Cypress Bayou east of Jefferson.

Black Cypress Bayou originates in Morris County and flows east and southeast. It also joins Big Cypress Bayou east of Jefferson.

James Bayou originates in Cass County and flows east and southeast to Louisiana, where it then enters Caddo Lake.

The Caddo Lake WPP Stakeholders group was formed in Jefferson in February 2006. At its very next meeting in April, the organization formed the three workgroups to address concerns and to assist in the development of the protection plan.

### Water Quality

Dr. Roy Darville, chairman of the biology department at East Texas Baptist University, and David Harkins of Espey Consultants of Austin explained the steps being taken to determine existing and potential water quality threats in the watershed area.

Darville noted that, while bacteria is the most common impairment to water quality in the Cypress Creek Basin, mercury continues to be a concern in Caddo, as do low levels of dissolved oxygen and high pH levels.

He added that his group will focus more on the bacteria, pH and oxygen issues since there is currently a statewide advisory group exploring mercury concentrations in waterbodies across Texas.

Harkins said his company currently is collecting data being submitted by various study groups. "Our challenge will be, once we've collected all this data, to analyze it and decide what's the best foot forward," he said. "We've collected a lot of data and are just starting to analyze it." Sears added that the study is difficult because of the remoteness and rural climate of the watershed. "More than 85 percent of the basin is forested," he said.

### Physical Concerns

Cypress Valley Navigation District's Robert Speight outlined efforts to control invasive vegetation — primarily water hyacinth and giant salvinia — on Caddo Lake. He told the group that the first efforts began in early 2006 when water hyacinth became a problem on the lake.

Then, on Labor Day, giant salvinia was discovered on the Texas side of the lake. It was mostly contained until a flooding event in February of 2007 washed large quantities into the area. Speight told of the construction of the fence across the lake to keep the plant from floating into Texas and the subsequent spraying efforts which recently got a boost with the addition of an airboat to the "fleet."

"The fence has pretty much served its usefulness and is being dismantled," Speight said. "The spraying system we have is going well but there's still a lot of it out there."

### Hydrology

Rick Lowerre, president of the Caddo Lake Institute, said his group is developing a new "release rule" for Lake O' the Pines — a change in the operations of the dam by the NETMWD and the Corps of Engineers to provide a more desired variety of releases needed downstream in Big Cypress Bayou and Caddo Lake.

"We understand now that a steady, even flow is not necessarily best for wildlife management," Lowerre said. "What's missing are the peaks and ebbs in flow. We're looking at recreating that — or something close to that."

He noted that the workgroup also is seeking an Environmental Flow Reservation, or set-aside. This is a state-approved reservation of water for environmental flows in the Caddo Lake watershed, reflecting the flow regime needed to restore and maintain the ecology of the system and to enhance economic development in the region.

Habitat enhancement, such as the recent placement of gravel beds to be used for spawning grounds, also is part of this workgroup's efforts, Lowerre said.