

Caddo Lake, Refuge get international attention

By Steve Bandy, Marshall News Messenger

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Three environmental managers from the world's largest wetlands will visit Caddo Lake Sunday and Monday as part of the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Training program.

Two visitors from Brazil and another from Paraguay will tour Caddo Lake and the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge. They also will meet with representatives from Caddo Lake organizations involved in the Ramsar activities, lake protection and ecotourism.

"This is yet another indication of Caddo Lake's growing international reputation and a reminder of the tremendous role the lake, its wetlands and the wildlife refuge play in attracting visitors to our area," said Jack Canson, director of Outreach for the Caddo Lake Institute, which is the local coordinator for the visit.

The visitors are environmentalists working in the Pantanal, arguably the largest wetland in the world, covering close to 75,000 square miles, Canson said. Located in the countries of Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay, the Pantanal ecosystem makes up a complex system of meandering rivers, marshlands, lagoons, floodplains and interconnected drainage lines.

The area is also thought to have one of the densest flora and fauna ecosystems on the planet.

The visitors are:

Maria Carolina Hazin of Brazil, specialist and technical advisor, Coastal and Marine Zone Division, Ministry of the Environment.

Nuno Rodrigues da Silva of Brazil, environmental analyst, Pantanal Matogrossense National Park, Brazilian Environmental Agency.

Rodrigo Rafael Zarate Irala of Paraguay, site manager, Paraguayan Pantanal, Private Reserve of Guyra Paraguay.

The delegation specifically requested a visit to Caddo Lake on their two-week tour of the U.S. because of the lake area's designation as a "wetland of international importance" under the international Ramsar Treaty and because of its multi-jurisdictional status involving Texas and Louisiana, according to Canson.

In addition to a translator provided by the State Department, the group will be escorted by Canson and East Texas Baptist University biology professor Dr. Roy Darville, who will accompany the group as science advisor.

The IVLP

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs funds and administers the International Visitor Leadership Program — or IVLP. It is one of its premier professional exchange programs.

The IVLP is designed to build mutual understanding between the U.S. and other countries through carefully designed visits that reflect the participants' professional interests and support U.S. foreign policy goals. Participants are established or potential foreign opinion makers in government, public policy, media, education, labor, the arts and other key fields.

Selected by American embassies abroad, International Visitors come to the United States to meet and confer with their professional counterparts and to gain an appreciation of the ethnic, cultural, political and socio-economic diversity of the U.S.

In fiscal year 2005, more than 4,000 International Visitors participated in 1,003 projects.

The IVLP is carried out through close collaboration with eight non-profit program agencies in Washington and 94 community-based organizations across the country whose members arrange professional meetings, cultural activities and home hospitality for the visitors. These organizations are members of the National Council for International Visitors (www.nciv.org).

A typical IVLP project is three weeks in length and includes visits to four U.S. cities. IVLP participants meet with professional counterparts and visit U.S. public and private sector organizations and areas related to the project theme.

In addition, International Visitors often are hosted by American families and participate in cultural activities.

More than 135,000 International Visitors have participated in the program since its inception in 1940.

At any given time during the year, about 250 International Visitors are on projects in the United States on projects with themes including but not limited to counterterrorism, combating HIV/AIDS, civic education, foreign policy, democracy and rule of law, international crime and drug prevention, religious tolerance and broadcast/print journalism.