

Caddo Watershed goals OK'd

By Steve Bandy, News Messenger

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JEFFERSON — With just a bit of tweaking, water quality goals for the Caddo Lake Watershed Protection Plan were adopted during a meeting Wednesday.

Lee Thomas of the Northeast Texas Municipal Water District initially presented the goals, developed by the WPP's Water Quality Work Group, during a Sept. 30 meeting of Caddo Lake watershed stakeholders, also held at the Jeffersonian Institute.

At that meeting, the goals and objectives were spelled out and Thomas invited comments.

"I didn't receive any comments since we presented them," Thomas said prior to discussion Wednesday.

However, when considered for adoption, there was considerable discussion concerning the goal for addressing mercury levels in the lake.

While a fish consumption advisory that has been in effect at Caddo Lake for about 10 years due to high levels of mercury remains intact, recent studies indicate that not much has changed.

The WQWG's stated goal was to "participate in the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's advisory committee on mercury impaired waters."

However, Rick Lowerre, president of the Caddo Lake Institute, said he felt that statement didn't rise to the level of the other goals being considered.

Thomas explained that the WQWG's position is that they are trying to make the statement conform to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency specifications and that they are insisting on a Best Management Practices approach to the goals — and there isn't one for mercury.

Richard LeTourneau of Longview, a member of the Region D Water Board who is active in water and other conservation issues, recommended that one of the objectives listed for meeting the stated goal, with a little bit of rewriting, would better serve as the WPP's goal for addressing mercury levels. He suggested that the goal should be something to the effect of: "To pursue efforts to evaluate the sources and risks of mercury impaired waters."

Dr. Roy Darville, professor of biology and chair of the Biology Department at East Texas Baptist University, recommended that, since all the other goals incorporate "monitoring," that the goal for mercury should also.

It was agreed that Thomas would take the proposed language and discuss it with the EPA and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and that those changes would be considered before the statement of goals was adopted.

Meanwhile, the WPP will assist with public education on the risks of consumption of mercury-contaminated fish and seek voluntary reductions in future mercury releases and existing levels in water sediments and aquatic species.

Other goals

The overall goal of the Watershed Protection Plan is "to restore and/or protect the water quality and associated conditions of the Caddo Lake Watershed to levels that meet the needs of the current and future stakeholders in the watershed."

In addition to the one addressing mercury levels in the lake and watershed, the individual goals and objectives adopted Wednesday include:

Levels of dissolved oxygen and nutrients in the lake and watershed: WPP's goal is to "restore and maintain the highest levels of DO and the lowest levels of nutrients with all due consideration of the costs and economic impacts of the steps needed to achieve for such levels."

Additional monitoring will be necessary to identify areas of concern and potential sources of nutrients, according to Thomas.

"Our objective is to reduce nutrient loading to the watershed and assist in determining appropriate water quality standards for different areas of, and conditions in, the watershed," he said.

Bacteria levels in the watershed: The goal is to "minimize loadings of bacteria that are the result of human activities, including agricultural activities, sewage treatment and use of septic tanks, to the extent reasonably achievable given the costs."

Again, Thomas explained additional monitoring is necessary to identify areas of concern and potential sources of bacteria.

"We hope to minimize bacteria loading by encouraging BMPs, effective sewage treatment and use of appropriate on-site sewage systems," he said. "One ongoing practice is to assist with public education on the risks of recreational contact with and consumption of waters with elevated levels of bacteria."

Addressing the pH level of the various bodies of water included in the watershed: WPP's goal in this area is to "monitor and maintain pH levels in the watershed within the appropriate range for protection of water quality, the ecology of the watershed and other uses of the waters."

As with the earlier goals, additional monitoring is necessary to identify waters where pH levels are not within acceptable ranges.

"We hope to identify sources of acidity affecting the watershed or parts thereof and develop proposals for addressing those acidic conditions," Thomas said. "Another objective is to assist in determining appropriate standards for different areas and conditions within the watershed."

The watershed

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 through Lake O' the Pines to Caddo Lake.

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 of that year, the organization formed three workgroups — water quality, physical concerns and hydrology — to address concerns and to assist in the development of the protection plan.