

CVND, workgroups present updates

By Steve Bandy, News Messenger  
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JEFFERSON — The increased funding through grants and donations being received by the Cypress Valley Navigation District is a double-edged sword, according to Ken Shaw, president. Shaw's report on funding was one of a number presented during Tuesday afternoon's meeting of stakeholders of the Caddo Lake Watershed Protection Plan held at the Jeffersonian Institute.

"While we certainly appreciate and need the funding to continue the fight against invasive vegetation in Caddo Lake, the additional money has actually had the effect of restricting our operating capital," Shaw said.

He explained that CVND annually receives \$10,000 from Harrison County and \$7,500 from Marion County. "That's our operating capital," he said.

Grants and donations are dedicated to herbicide, fuel, boat maintenance and salaries associated with the spraying program on the lake.

"As long as we were handling less than \$100,000, all (Texas Commission on Environmental Quality) required of us was a financial statement," Shaw said. "Since we've now topped \$120,000, we're being required to submit audited financial reports to TCEQ." Those audits cost \$1,100 to \$1,300, he said.

However, despite the added cost of an annual audit, Shaw said CVND could not maintain the spraying program in the lake without the influx of funds from state agencies, companies and corporations, individuals and civic groups.

Robert Speight, immediate past president of the Greater Caddo Lake Association, said the recent addition of an airboat, donated to the CVND by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and outfitted for spraying herbicide, has greatly enhanced the spraying operations in the lake.

"We put the boat into operation on Memorial Day and, since then, we've sprayed over 1,700 acres of water hyacinth and about 950 acres of giant salvinia," Speight said.

"We've been very successful with the hyacinth in knocking it back. We've had good results with the salvinia, but it grows so fast and takes about three applications to knock it down.

"In the first four months of the program we've greatly improved the usability of the lake and brought relief to numerous shoreline residents who had been unable to access their property from the lake for years," he added.

Tim Bister, TPWD, Inland Fisheries Division, reported that the lake has experienced a slight increase in hydrilla from 2007 to 2008, but has seen a 62 percent reduction in water hyacinth during that same period.

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However, with the reduction in water hyacinth, that has allowed the rapid expansion of giant salvinia," he said.

"We saw less than 100 acres of giant salvinia in the lake area last year and that's up to about 1,100 acres now. When you knock back the hyacinth, the salvinia spreads.

"I don't think eradication of salvinia in Caddo is an option. Our focus needs to be on control."

In addition to the spraying program, Bister said TPWD was experimenting with biological controls to the invasive species with the introduction of water hyacinth weevils, hydrilla flies and salvinia weevils.

He added that these insects will take a long time to establish themselves and impact the vegetation.

Jack Canson, member of the Caddo Lake Institute, presented an update on the environmental flow plan being formulated by the WPP hydrology workgroup.

Canson explained that the group is developing a new "release rule" for Lake O' the Pines — a change in the operations of the dam by the Northeast Texas Municipal Water District and the

Corps of Engineers to provide a more desired variety of releases needed downstream in Big Cypress Bayou and Caddo Lake.

"We know now that a steady, even flow is not necessarily what's best for wildlife management," Canson said. "With that type of flow, we're missing the peaks and ebbs that were natural before the dam was erected. What we'd like to do is recreate that, or something similar to it."

Canson also mentioned the workgroup's efforts in 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 enhance economic development in the region.

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