

Hard work comes to fruition in refuge

Editorial MNM Sunday, September 27, 2009

The Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge officially opened Saturday. It has neither been easy nor quick in coming, which made Saturday's ceremonies all that much more special.

The former site of the Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant began the transition in 2000 and now includes 8,500 acres in the refuge. It comes to fruition after years of delay and a local attempt to take part of the land away for a possible industrial site.

Fortunately, that effort failed and we are able to hail its opening to the public.

We don't know exactly what kind of tourism to expect from the refuge. We would guess that those who supported it probably overestimated that somewhat, but we could be wrong. Eco-tourism is a growing field in the United States and the world and it is likely to get bigger. The economic impact on Harrison County is likely to grow over the years.

But this refuge is certainly about more than putting money in the pockets of local citizens. It is about offering a safe habitat for hundreds of species of animals and plants.

Having said that, some hunting will be allowed on the property to help keep the biological balance in order. At present there is a lack of predators and to keep say, the deer population at a peak, hunts will need to be held.

We would hope that the most frequent visitors at the refuge would be people from Harrison County itself. Both a driving and a walking trail — we suppose you could also walk along the driving trail — are provided and the refuge will be open during daylight hours.

You do not have to be an experienced outdoorsman to enjoy the refuge.

We would expect those who love bird-watching to take special interest in the refuge, particularly during the migratory seasons.

This is yet another resource that makes Harrison County a great place in which to live.

For those who spent these years working for the refuge we salute them. There are many whose names we will never know, who worked behind the scenes doing the tasks that no one else wanted to do.

U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison played a huge role in getting this accomplished. Likewise, U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert has proved himself to be a consistent and important friend of Caddo Lake.

The full Harrison County commissioners' court has played a role in keeping the project going, too, particularly when it turned aside the move to pare off a large portion of the site for other uses.

If you were not at the opening ceremonies Saturday (or even if you were) we encourage you to drive out to the refuge soon and take advantage of the natural beauty and wonder that is a part of the place we live.

If you do, we have a feeling it will not be your last visit, that you will come again and again.