

Combatting in the invasion



COURTNEY CASE/News Messenger

THE SUN SHINES on a section of cypress trees at Caddo Lake on Thursday in Uncertain.

Representatives discuss species overtaking of native ones

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News Messenger

Caddo Lake State Park welcomed more than 50 wetland representatives from Hawaii to Connecticut to discuss their areas' designation as Ramsar wetlands and conservation efforts at the sites.

"Ramsar is a network of sites and it's also a network of people and getting together like this gives us an opportunity to share and compare experiences," said Roy Gardner, chair of the U.S. National

Ramsar Committee at Thursday's meeting.

"The Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971 is an intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources," according to the organization's Web site. There are presently 157 contracting parties involved, with 1,678 wetland sites designated in the Ramsar list of Wetlands of

International Importance, according to the Web site.

The Texas side of Caddo Lake, with the exception of the National Wildlife Refuge, is one of only 22 Ramsar designated wetlands in the United States.

Vanessa Adams, a biologist for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, spoke about the giant salvinia that has started to take over Caddo Lake.

"This is an aquatic fern and it reproduces vegetatively. It

produces a spore but it's an infertile spore and sometimes you think that can't be true because it shows up where only a spore can get. It's small and it covers up the entire area before you know it."

Ms. Adams showed a picture of the north side of Toledo Bend Lake and described how the salvinia has choked nearly 3,000 acres of the lake.

"This is what we're faced with right here. This plant will not only cover the surface but it will go two feet deep

and you just can't get through it. It's just a nightmare and we need a lot of help to combat it and our locals are doing a bang up job on it. They've done all the can."

During her presentation, she also covered many of the terrestrial invasive species that affect the Caddo Lake area, "the worse of which is this little booger, Chinese tallow tree."

The Chinese tallow tree grows very quickly and can overrun slower growing trees

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such as the native oak tree and is resistant to most predators and weather conditions, she said.

"It will also produce a seed, and that seed feeds a lot of birds but that is the only thing that will eat it. Bugs won't eat it and deer won't eat it," she said. "It is drought resistant, it is flood resistant and those seeds will drop off and float every where. So if you have it in your yard and live next to stream, you need to pull it up."

Local residents from Uncertain attended the meeting to explain why Caddo Lake is such an important resource for their community.

"Tourism is our major industry, it's our only industry. We wouldn't have any business if we didn't have any tourism. Wetlands play a big part in that. What we're interested in is the protection of Caddo Lake," said Randie Canup.

The Florida Everglades, which is the only national park with the Ramsar classification, has the unique problem of pet owners dumping their pets into the wetlands and that introduces non-native animals such as pythons to the area that can wreak havoc on the natural habitat of other animals.

The Connecticut River Estuary is comprised of more than 2,500 acres of tidal wetland and is home to the osprey that make its nests on the ground near the wetlands. The reduction of those lands is causing

a decline in the already rare species.

Ron Rozsa, a program specialist for the Connecticut River Estuary Conservation Fund, also mentioned the program "No Child Left Inside" that is used to get children interested in the surrounding wetlands and make them active in the conservation process.

Charles Burrows was perhaps the farthest traveled representative, coming all the way from Hawaii. Burrows Hawaiian name, Pe'ape'a Makawalu, is a combination of the Hawaiian title for their native bat and the term for eight eyes and when they are put together it mean "all seeing bat," a designation of honor in his home state.

Burrows represented the Kawai Nui Marsh and Hamakua Wetlands that are being overrun by several invasive non-native species. The Hawaiian islands have few native species left and one of the main conservation efforts is to try and reintroduce the original species back to the area, said Burrows.

The meeting concluded with conversation over how to better publicize wetlands with the Ramsar designation and a call to spread the word that Feb. 2, 2008, is not just Groundhog Day, it's also World Wetlands Day.

Information on the Ramsar organization can be found at www.ramsar.org and www.ramsarcommittee.us.

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