

## **Rich with history**

Tour of Caddo NWR shows progress being made on the transferred land

By RYAN RENFROW, Marshall News Messenger, Saturday, October 20, 2007

Local residents got a look at what's happening at the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Reserve Saturday.

The refuge is on the former Longhorn Ammunition Plant in Karnack and consists of 8,500 acres that extend from Highway 43 to the shores of Caddo Lake. The guided tour was sponsored by the Marshall-Harrison County League of Women Voters.

The planned opening of the NWR is not until spring 2008 and will feature horseback riding, nature trails, bird watching and game hunting.

One of the ideas proposed for the refuge is thinning parts of the forest to add a historic feel to area.

"It opens up the whole forest and you have great big trees and canopies that close up and beneath you have grasses and open forest, and that's what Texas looked like when it was a republic. You could get on a horse and ride around anywhere through the forest," said Mark Williams, a representative of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and tour guide for the trip.

The first stop was a group of large concrete stands that once held huge vats of acid used in the production of TNT. The leaders of the refuge asked to keep the stands and several other concrete buildings for a special reason.

"We asked the Army to leave behind anything that was a solid concrete structure because it's a great bat habitat. We have all the species of bats that inhabit East Texas and the largest concentration of Rafinesque's big-eared bats in Texas, which is a species of concern in Texas," said Williams.

The refuge is rich with history and contains several historic cemeteries and a few Caddo Indian mounds. And, because the area is so large, officials are looking for assistance in finding more important sites.

"If anybody knows of a historical cemetery site out here we would love to get the government out here to start doing research on it," said Jonny Webb, a volunteer for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

An electrical plant that ran on steam power still stands on the grounds and one of the original 1940s transformers is used to supply power to the refuge.

A fire station that was one of the last buildings built by the Army before the base closed will be used as a fire department and security office.

Behind the station are two trailers provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency that are used "any time someone is town and is going to do work on the refuge." Several interns have worked on the refuge doing research on bats, wood ducks and cotton mouth and water moccasin snakes.

There is one site on the refuge, originally used to assemble rockets, that was burned down during the early part of 2000 during a dispute between contractors who stored equipment there.

The huge concrete walls still standing will be made into a "walk-through tour of the history of Caddo Lake, from pre-Columbian to today's date. They will paint the history on the walls and you'll walk through the pictures," said Williams.

The Stonehenge-like ruins are an impressive visual even without murals and paintings as a person can feel a bit of history walking under the tall walls.

A working water treatment plant is still on site because many parts of the refuge are considered contaminated from the ammunition work and several landfills on the property. The plant is constantly treating any underground water to keep it from further contaminating the surrounding land.

Besides creating ammunition, the former base was one of the sites where Pershing motors were destroyed because of the U.S.-Soviet IMF Elimination Treaty.

"On Sept. 8, 1988 before a U.S. delegation led by Vice President George H.W. Bush and a Soviet entourage led Chief Inspector Nikolai Shabalin...engineers fired the first Pershing I motor, tethered into the harness at the static testing site, and it burned itself out.

"It was then rolled from the platform and beaten into small bits by the bucket of a bull dozer," wrote Gail K. Beil in a history of the Longhorn Ammunition Plant supplied to The Marshall News Messenger.

The tour ended with a look at several photographs from the days when the base first opened. One glaring difference between then and now is the amount of trees covering the refuge.

The park is now coated with a forest full of trees that will no doubt add to fun and wonder of the refuge when it opens in the spring.

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