

Salvinia, oil and gas are main concerns at Caddo

By Steve Bandy, News Messenger

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Giant salvinia continues to be a problem at Caddo Lake and with the warm weather moving in, the problem is growing — literally.

"It's a major problem, not only at Caddo Lake, but at a number of lakes in and around the Ark-La-Tex," Ken Shaw, chairman of the Cypress Valley Navigation District (CVND) told the 40 to 50 guests gathered at the Karnack Community Center Thursday night for the community meeting hosted by the Caddo Lake Clearinghouse. "We're finding it almost too fast."

Also discussed during the meeting were issues concerning the oil and gas industry and landowners' rights. Shaw said the latest survey conducted by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) in August 2007 reported 3,683 acres of water hyacinth and "between 50 and 100 acres" of giant salvinia — "that's a patch here, a spot over there, an acre or so somewhere else" — on the Texas side of the lake. The report also showed an estimated 600 acres of the latter on the Louisiana side.

Outlining the action taken since giant salvinia was first discovered in the lake in 2006, Shaw said various agencies, communities and individuals have joined in the fight.

"In September (2007), the Texas Legislature approved \$120,000 a year for the next two years for the CVND," Shaw said. "That, added with donations and grants from other sources gives us about \$240,000 to work with this year." He said the TPWD's Nuisance Aquatic Vegetation Management Plan has budgeted \$378,250 for Caddo Lake for this year, with CVND's share being \$215,000.

"Now don't get excited thinking we have extra money, we don't," Shaw said, explaining that the TPWD budget does not include spot spraying and boat maintenance, "which has been running about \$5,000 a month."

He said the spraying operation in Caddo Lake will be greatly enhanced when the airboat donated by TPWD is retrofitted for spraying. He expects the boat to be in use by the beginning of May.

Earlier during the meeting, three law students — Brad Smith, Virgil Ochoa and Bina Reddy — from the University of Texas at Austin School of Law, spoke on the impact the oil and gas industries have had and are having on the area. All agreed that Texas law generally favors the oil and gas companies, and each stressed the importance of developing and negotiating comprehensive surface use agreements with those companies.

"Texas has severance of rights, meaning you can own the surface property and not own the mineral rights," said Ochoa. "In fact, it's estimated that as much as 90 percent of the landowners in Texas do not own the mineral rights under their property."

Smith outlined the various ways a drilling operation can negatively impact a landowner who does not own mineral rights, including noise, a reduction in property values due to surface damage caused by the drilling operation, road damage and deteriorating air and water quality.

The Caddo Lake Clearinghouse is composed of the city of Uncertain, the Greater Caddo Lake Association, the Caddo Lake Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism and the Caddo Lake Institute.