

Water for both humans, nature workshop focus

By STEVE BANDY, News Messenger

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JEFFERSON — Up to 100 scientists, water managers, and stakeholders from throughout East Texas are expected to be in attendance for the annual Cypress Basin/Caddo Lake Watershed Flows Workshop here today and Thursday.

This year's workshop is the fourth in a series that was initiated in 2004 by the Caddo Lake Institute and The Nature Conservancy in partnership with the Northeast Texas Municipal Water District, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and others. The sessions will be held at the Jeffersonian Institute beginning at 9 a.m. today and concluding at noon Thursday.

"The workshops are helping us determine how much water is needed for fish and wildlife in Cypress Basin, so we can add that information to our knowledge of the needs for surrounding cities, industries, recreation, and other purposes," said Rick Lowerre, president of the Caddo Lake Institute. "We have to establish and ensure all our water needs here are met before some other area asks to pump water from the Cypress Basin for their needs."

The Cypress Basin Flows Project was begun in 2004, before the Texas Legislature enacted Senate Bill 3, a law establishing a process for setting aside water for in-stream flows in Texas. The project expanded in 2006 with the creation of the Caddo Lake Watershed Protection Plan, a process to protect the water quality of the rivers, streams and lakes in the basin. Coordinated by the Northeast Texas Municipal Water District, the WPP focuses on ways to reduce pollutants.

Scientists and stakeholders who attended the orientation meeting in December 2004 and later Flows meetings established the project's overall goal and developed four objectives:

An SB 3 flow reservation or set-aside: Recommendations for Senate Bill 3 "environmental flow standards" for reservation of water in the watershed.

A new "release rule" for Lake O' the Pines: Recommendations for changes in the operations of the dam at Lake O' the Pines to provide a more natural pattern of releases, while assuring flood control, water supply and the other purposes of the reservoir.

Flow needs for the Watershed Protection Plan: Serve as the hydrology workgroup for the Watershed Protection Plan to evaluate and recommend flows, lake level management, etc., to assist with protection of water quality and management of invasive aquatic species.

Long-term adaptive management: Establish a long-term effort with the continuation of field work, other research, and consensus decision-making to refine environmental flow recommendations over time.

Over a series of meetings involving stakeholders and natural resource experts, the Cypress Basin Flows Project has established an initial set of building blocks for environmental flow reg'imes and proposed new Lake O' the Pines water releases.

Using an adaptive management approach, some of the proposals have already been tested in the field with coordinated releases from Lake O' the Pines.

"It's important for people to know that first-class work is being done to protect Caddo Lake and all of the Cypress Basin Watershed," Lowerre said.

"Scientists, agency officials, and stakeholders from all walks of life are working hard to ensure we maintain adequate and high quality water for all our needs," he said.

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