

Watershed staff seeks landowner information

By TERRI HAHN, News Messenger

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JEFFERSON — Stakeholders in the Big Cypress Basin Watershed Protection Plan met Thursday afternoon at the Jefferson Transportation/Visitor Center as they continue to seek data about Caddo Lake.

"These are some things that could improve or maintain water quality in the watershed," said Tim Osting with Espey Consultants, Inc., as he shared information about lake models for use in determining the factors of Caddo Lake water quality.

"The ultimate goal of this project is to relate what is going on in the watershed to what is going on in the lake," said David Harkins. "If you do something in the watershed, how does it change the quality of water in Caddo Lake?"

Data collection in the Big Cypress Basin Watershed and at Caddo Lake is a more recent project than other water bodies in Texas.

"We need any information on water consumption and irrigation. We also need to know whether it was service water or ground water sources," said Osting.

Information about a parcel's Best Management Practices entered into a model helps them analyze the amount of nutrients, bacteria and vegetation in the watershed.

The project includes four models. In the watershed, modeling is being done in bacteria assessment with a second model in hydrology and water quality. The third is a lake model of water movements and circulation with a fourth model focusing on lake water quality.

"We've given them (Espey) a very difficult task, and I'm pleased with how hard they're working," said Rick Lowerre. "We will not get the answer right out of this process, but we're going to get a start."

Espey has set a timeline of goals for including a Jan. 15 deadline to have contributed data from public sources. Owners of land areas of 1,000 acres or more can share their BMP information with Caddo Watershed Protection Plan Coordinator Lee Thomas at caddowpp@aol.com or 903-639-7538.

"We're looking for data in this watershed pertaining to land management practices," said Thomas, who also works with Northeast Texas Municipal Water District. "This is a stakeholder driven process, so the public has all the say."

Information needed could include the amount of cattle on a set area, whether poultry litter is used, whether and what sorts of fertilizer are used or irrigating practices.

Due to the formula for cattle grazing, large areas of pasture land may also affect models.

"We're at a point in the process because of the deadlines in the next eight months, so we have to make a decision about the data we have got," Osting said.

Espey is also looking for more data about movement in the lake with a distinction between main channel current and water flow into marsh areas. Also, more water quality data from the middle of the lake is needed, said Osting.

Any additional data should arrive soon, with February set for the release of preliminary results for watershed and lake models. Its next goal is to have final results for calibrated watershed and lake models in April and be able to begin using lake models to evaluate management measures by May.

A final technical report is due to Texas Commission on Environmental Quality by June.

"We're just happy to participate and help supply the Watershed Protection Plan project in Caddo Lake," said TCEQ's Arthur Talley. "We'd like to encourage people to participate and help. Also, the more local participation you have, the better the product will be."

Talley said the models will be a tool to determine what things will be done to maintain water quality better in Caddo Lake.

The Caddo Watershed Protection Plan stakeholders and Espey have tentatively set the next meeting for Feb. 18, with other meetings expected in early May and June.