

Wetlands celebration turns into town hall meeting on salvinia

By Terri Hahn, News Messenger

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A World Wetlands Day celebration was Tuesday evening at the Karnack Community Center as Caddo Lake residents and organizations turned out to learn about the lake's Ramsar designation.



"Ramsar is a voluntary program. If you become a Ramsar site, you are not regulated and people can join or take their land out of it at will," said Rick Lowerre.

The celebration of World Wetlands Day became a town hall meeting with about 75 people joining both to listen to presenters and voice their own concerns about Caddo Lake's invasive plant issues.

Terri Hahn/News Messenger

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Rick Lowerre, left, and Tim Bister, resident biologist for Texas Parks and Wildlife, display maps showing 3,227 acres of giant salvinia and an estimate of its infestation on Caddo Lake during a World Wetlands Day presentation Thursday in Karnack.

About 20,000 acres of Caddo Lake are included in the Ramsar Treaty and defined as wetlands of international importance. The first 8,000 acres were protected by the treaty in 1993 and another 12,000 acres were added in 1998.

Lowerre also presented the issues for the lake in 2010 as being:

Invasive species.

Water flow in the lake.

Pollution and watershed protection.

Economic development at the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

Educational programs and proposals.

Study of the Caddo Lake gravity dam.

Possible expansion of the Ramsar designation.

"Giant salvinia was first discovered in a school pond demonstration near Houston," said Bob Pitman, a fisheries biologist and aquatic invasive species coordinator from New Mexico.

It was first discovered in Caddo Lake on the Louisiana-side in 2006. It began to migrate to the Texas-side and, in 2007, there was about 100 acres coverage in small clumps. By 2008, those fragments had begun to grow, Pitman said.

"Giant salvinia will be here forever now. We can control that through scientific expertise available, but we will never eradicate it," said Pitman, who works under the Non-indigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990.

He seemed very hopeful for working with the giant salvinia weevils as a long-term control method.

Several presenters explained efforts that have been made in controlling the lake's giant salvinia growth. They also detailed several plans for future effort in controlling the plant's spread and in areas most needed for animal habitat and human use.

Methods of controlling giant salvinia and water hyacinth, both floating vegetation, requires tremendous amounts of patience and cunning for sprayers as the plants move with the wind. They also cluster in some areas, swept there prevailing winds.

Tim Bister, resident biologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife, estimated there are 3,227 acres of giant salvinia on the lake.

While it will not be known for sure how winter weather has ultimately affected the giant salvinia, there have been signs some of the plants have been damaged by freezing temperatures.

"This winter, with the cold temperatures, we have seen a lot of evidence that some of it has been burned by frost, but there is plenty of green to come back in the spring," said Bister.

Bister said spraying operations will begin again soon with emphasis on keeping the water lanes open to people who use the lake. Areas such as docks and boat roads will be given preference.

"We want to keep the public boat ramps open," said Robert Speight with the Caddo Lake Navigational District. "It only takes one little piece to spread it to another lake."

Speight and the CLND are in charge of spraying the lake's invasive plants with herbicides. He reported they have two boats, one of which is an air boat, and they can spray 10 gallons a minute over six acres an hour.

"We need to throw all we have at this because it's not going anywhere," said Speight.

Methods for controlling the plants on canals, more isolated regions and less populated areas were also discussed for those who hope to manage the plant's presence on their own or near their home.

Use of booms for keeping the bulk of floating plants from re-entering was also suggested by Jack Canson who along with John Sanders conducted successful experiments with water harvesters. Detailed reports on their efforts are expected to be released later this month.

Much of the differences in the methods used to clear the giant salvinia from the lake depend on the goal of long-term results or short-term triumphs. However, it was made clear by all presenting experts that there is little chance of ever eradicating the plant threats all together.

Using the weevils, that are being developed to handle harsher winter temperatures, was included in long term solutions. Among short term solutions, use of harvesters were likened to "mowing your yard" and a job that would be ongoing into infinitum.

The meeting was hosted by the Caddo Lake Clearinghouse is a combined effort of the city of Uncertain, the Greater Caddo Lake Association, the Caddo Lake Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism, the Friends of the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge and the Caddo Lake Institute.