

Caddo Lake cleanup resolution is passed

[By SANDRA CASON, News Messenger]

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The chairman of Cypress Valley Navigation District said Harrison County Judge Wayne McWhorter "didn't have all the facts" this week when he asked for transfer of federal funds to CVND.

During Tuesday's Harrison County Commissioners meeting, the court unanimously approved a resolution "supporting funding of programs" for Caddo Lake cleanup.

The resolution referred to a letter from U. S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas) in which she informed the judge of federal government appropriations of \$300,000 this year and \$400,000 next year for "the Ramsar Wetland Science Center."

McWhorter's resolution notes that, from the 1960s to the 1990s, CVND "was funded with up to \$50,000 per year" from the state and Harrison and Marion counties.

"Now the state gives it nothing and the two counties are only able to fund about \$5,000 each per year," the resolution reads.

Since "maintenance money ... is virtually non-existent" and CVND "was created by the state ... to maintain navigation," the resolution asks for a portion of the funds.

The resolution states further that a lack of funding has resulted in Caddo being "in the worst shape of our lifetime.

"It is in dire need of a program and funds to control aquatic vegetation, which prevents navigation on 80 to 90 percent of the lake from June through November," the document adds.

As a result, "we respectfully request that Senator Hutchison sponsor an initiative to re-program a minimum of \$400,000 of the \$700,000 approved ... for Caddo Lake Institute's Ramsar Wetland Science Center ... for the exclusive use of cleaning up, maintaining and prolonging the life of Caddo Lake," the resolution concludes.

CVND Chairman Ken Shaw said he did not know of the agenda item until "the night before when somebody told me" of it.

Shaw was among those who attended Tuesday's meeting because of another matter regarding the lake, that being the possible introduction of industry.

"I spoke to Judge McWhorter during a break and asked him why I had not been informed. He said he didn't want anybody to make a big deal out of it," Shaw said.

However, Shaw said the judge "partially misled the commissioners, and the audience was completely misled. What the judge did not know – or didn't communicate – was that there are other organizations involved in the rehabilitation of Caddo Lake.

"In fact, a meeting is to be held Friday (today) in Jefferson on that very topic." These groups include Environmental Protection Agency, U. S. Geological Survey and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

"They are the ones working on rehabilitation and are qualified to do so," Shaw said, adding CVND "is not particularly qualified.

"That's not what we are about. We are basically a group of volunteers who work to keep the boat roads open. Our members are not competent to handle the very difficult fix" of rehabilitation.

Responding to the allegations, McWhorter said he had no information other than that contained in a very brief letter from Sen. Hutchison.

"I have no explanations other than that the money is going to be spent on the Ramsar Wetlands Science Center," McWhorter said. "That sounds like a building to me. It doesn't sound like money going into the lake. We've studied it enough. It's time to put some money into (the rejuvenation of) the lake – for heaven's sake!

"I saw an opportunity to do something rather than just talk about it, and I acted," the judge added.

Responding to Shaw's comment that CVND is not qualified to handle the project, McWhorter pointed out the resolution asks for a diversion of funds to "CVND and/or Harrison County.

"I'm sure we can work together to achieve a satisfactory result, but if they (CVND) don't feel competent, then we'll find somebody who is. We have access to state resources that we can use for guidance."

The agenda item called for action on a resolution "supporting funding of programs to control aquatic vegetation, maintenance, and cleaning up of Caddo Lake so as to prolong its life."

Shaw said organizations, such as TCEQ, have plans for doing just that. As to the chemical treatment of water hyacinth that clog the lake, Shaw noted this, too, is "very difficult" and not something that CVND is capable of handling.

Even so, he added, until something is done to control the nutrients feeding lake vegetation, it makes no sense to destroy the plant through the use of herbicides.

He said TCEQ is underwriting a current study "for harvesting water hyacinth to be used as fertilizer or cattle food.

"There are things that are going on," Shaw said, and to divert funds to CVND would hinder them.

Another meeting attendee agreed. "The Ramsar Center is a key part of tourism efforts for Caddo Lake and this back-door attack is misguided," Charles Dixon said.

"It will prove detrimental to Harrison County and Caddo Lake. Current drought-caused problems at the lake cannot be sprayed away with 'do something' talk, especially if it wrecks the construction timetable or even blocks construction of the Ramsar Center," he said.