

## **Editorial: Choosing a wildlife refuge over an uncertainty**

Marshall News-Messenger

Sunday, February 26, 2006

The gist of a public hearing to be held this week about the possibility of a "business park" at the site of the old Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant is not, as some might have you believe, the choice between a wildlife refuge and tourism jobs versus a business park and industrial jobs.

If indeed, that were the choice, it might present some difficulty for county commissioners and the public.

Industrial jobs, after all, provide a real future for a community and its children. Tourism jobs, while not to be discarded, are at the lower end of the pay scale.

But, as we said, that is not the choice.

Because so far as we know there is not currently any business or industry that might want to locate on the property. This, in fact, is just what those who support the business park have said. The business park proposal is for a speculative set-aside.

Thus, the real choice is between wildlife refuge and the complete unknown. That being the case, we choose wildlife refuge.

That is the same choice we urge upon Harrison County commissioners and, for that matter, U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison. There is no plan for a business park other than to set roughly 2,000 acres aside and let the state of Texas market it as an available large property.

And while supporters of a business park have offered up some high-flying industrial names – Microsoft, 3M, auto company – we cannot tell that there is any protection in what kind of business might eventually be placed at the site. Indeed, we aren't sure there would be any sort of local control of that at all.

Microsoft sounds wonderful. Pilgrim's Pride sounds worse than bad for a whole range of reasons. How do we guarantee it is the kind of industry we want? The answer is simple: We cannot.

We truly believe that the supporters of the business park want to do the right thing with a non-intrusive industry, but they cannot guarantee any such thing.

We might well agree with supporters of the business park that it is far enough away from Caddo that the lake itself could be environmentally protected from most kinds of industrial activity.

Again, we aren't sure we understand how this could be mandated, but perhaps state laws would offer enough protection.

But while the lake might be (choose one) one mile, two miles, eight miles away from the property, the wildlife refuge is directly adjacent to it. It would take an extremely non-intrusive industry not to have an effect on the wildlife refuge. Again, we deal with the unknown. We don't know what kind of industry might go there.

Our honest guess is that no industry would ever locate on the property. Ever. There is no reason, in fact, to believe that might happen beyond some wishful thinking.

Those who support this business park have been the target of some undue criticism and questioning of their motives. Those who have done this should be ashamed of themselves. If a wildlife refuge is worthwhile it will stand on its own merits and does not need the help of ad hominem attacks.

This group of individuals was acting with the best motive to what they believe would help Harrison County in the future.

But if the effort expended in trying to get this business park could be added to the effort fighting it and those combined efforts used to bring economic growth to Harrison County, then we believe mountains could be moved.