

Hearing on lake industry planned

By JULIA ROBB, Special Projects Editor

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Harrison County Judge Wayne McWhorter said Monday he will schedule a November public hearing about possible industrialization at the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

McWhorter – who publicly supports using a portion of land for industry that was scheduled to be included in the refuge – said he intends to record what both sides of the issue have to say about the subject and then relay that information to U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert and Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison.

"They should have access to what local constituents have to say," the judge said.

McWhorter said he has discussed the meeting with both the senator and congressman and they support the idea.

He hasn't decided where the meeting should be held, "but somewhere in Marshall," McWhorter said.

In other developments, Gohmert met Monday with anti-industry activist Jack Canson, Wildlife Refuge Manager Mark Williams, and Greater Caddo Lake Association Board Member Judith Johnson, among others.

Canson later said Gohmert made an effort to understand the anti-industrial point of view and the two groups had "an open" conversation.

Gohmert, through his press spokesman, said he and his staff had been in "a very informative meeting" with Canson and associates.

"They had some very interesting points to make as we discussed various issues," the congressman said. "Since the former ammunition and rocket facility has so many concrete slabs and walls still in place along with so many asphalt roads, I was interested in how that could ever be much of a wildlife refuge, and they had some interesting ideas.

"As the U.S. representative for Harrison County, it is important to me to have input from the county."

Gohmert said he will "look forward" to information gleaned from a public hearing: "...I want to help in whatever way will be the very most benefit to the county," he said.

The controversy began months ago when it was revealed that Marshall residents Sam Moseley, Tommy Whaley and an unnamed group of other residents had asked Ms. Hutchison, Gohmert and the governor's office to appropriate a portion of the land that was scheduled to be included in the wildlife refuge.

The state of Texas would own the land, and use it for industrial development.

The plan has met with great opposition from groups associated with the refuge and lake protection. ✱

Canson, Williams, Johnson and a representative from a New Mexico wildlife refuge also met with Marshall News Messenger staff Monday.

Emerson Learn, past president of the Friends of the Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge, said his group started with five people and the support group now has 1,200 members.

The refuge generates \$5.1 million in the Socorro area – Socorro is the nearest town – through 125,000 visitors the refuge attracts each year.

Refuge visitors spend \$2.4 million for lodging, \$770,000 for meals, \$385,000 for gasoline and \$1.6 million for other purposes, according to a Bosque del Apache press release.

Activists who seek to stop a portion of the former Longhorn Army Ammunition property from being used as an industrial site have argued that tourists will bring in as much, if not more, money than would an industry.