

Hutchison aiding Caddo land acquisition

By JULIA ROBB, Special Projects Editor

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Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchinson said she is attempting to help local business interests acquire between 1,000 and 2,000 acres around Caddo Lake that are now slated to become part of the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

The acreage in question is on the Karnack-Uncertain highway.

Sen. Hutchinson said, through spokesman Jamie Loftis, she is supportive of those business interests "securing some of this land for economic development.

"The senator believes with the thousands of acres available from the ammunition plant, thousands of acres have gone to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a portion of this can be used for future economic development purposes."

Ms. Loftis said Ms. Hutchinson is working with the U.S. Army, which owns the land, and the U.S. Department of the Interior about the proposed land transfer.

The land was previously occupied by the Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant.

In May, 2004, the U.S. Army transferred 6,000 acres to create the refuge, but more than 2,000 polluted acres were left in Army custody. The land is now a Environmental Protection Agency clean up site.

Those acres are scheduled for transfer after the cleanup is completed.

Local attorney Sam Moseley said Monday he and local businessman Tommy Whaley have been working on the proposed land transfer for some time.

Moseley said he wants to do something for the community and does not believe a nearby industry would harm the wildlife preserve.

In the meantime, some Caddo Lake-area residents are upset.

Jack and Mary Jane Sanders are reaching out to the community via e-mail asking people to protest the proposed transfer by writing their U.S. senators and congressmen.

The Sanders have supplied an example of what people can write to their representatives: "Any concentrated economic development or industry would cause damage beyond measure to Caddo, its forests, and flora and fauna plus the tourist industry," the sample letter says.

It is important for Marshall people to realize tourism is an industry," they said. "Industrial Parks can be located many places. There is only one Caddo Lake.

"This Texas jewel we are fortunate to have at our doorstep can in no way be replaced anywhere any time," the Sanders said in their e-mail letter.

The Greater Caddo Lake Association is also opposing the proposed land transfer and has written a letter dated Aug. 7 to Sen. Hutchinson.

Among other things, the association's letter says due to the contamination, industry will not want to locate near the cleanup site and an industry would only devalue the preserve and drive away eco-tourism.

Caddo Lake Institute President Dwight Shellman said Monday that the army and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are now negotiating a permit that would allow the FWS to manage the contaminated land until it is transferred to the preserve.