

Editorial: Let's work to make refuge live up to its potential

Sunday, January 29, 2006

Depending on your point of view, the final death knell of a proposed 2,000-acre industrial site adjacent to the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge is either a tragedy or a victory. It can hardly be surprising to anyone, supporter or detractor, as the chances that it would ever happen were always extremely slim.

We've said in this space before we believe that both sides in this issue did what they thought was best for Marshall and Harrison County. There was no nefarious plot by those who proposed the industrial site to somehow make millions of dollars personally. Likewise, those who were vehemently opposed to the industrial site are not against growth, they simply see growth coming in other ways.

Contentious as this issue was, it is important that the community put it in the past. It does no good to add this to the long list of issues which divide us. There are plenty of items that are still current. We don't need to nurse ones that have already been decided.

Emotions have always played a major role in Caddo Lake matters and, unfortunately, emotions have sometimes overwhelmed reason. Anything we can do to put our emotions on "low" and our logical thinking on "high" would be a good move.

One way that we might begin to accomplish this is if the community as a whole could work together on a project involving the lake, where all of us had one goal. Just such an opportunity exists.

Since we now know the refuge will be unfettered, we should work together to see that the wildlife refuge lives up to its promised potential. We've spoken much about tourism over the last few months and those who support the refuge have told us that it will be a boon to our county.

But we know enough about tourism to realize that this will not happen by itself. People are not going to suddenly come to the refuge unless they are told about it and given a reason to come.

That needs to be our goal now: To spread the word and to tell potential refuge visitors what else is available when they come to our part of the state. After all, many of these people are going to stay in our area, eat dinner in our area and potentially shop in our area. We need an inclusive plan that gives visitors a chance to do all of those things.

Wildlife refuges are designed, first and foremost to protect sensitive parts of the environment, but there is nothing wrong with taking economic advantage of them as well. This is something about which we can all agree. Let's get to it.