

Meeting to look at enhancing water flow into Caddo Lake

|Staff Reports, MNM

Sunday, October 01, 2006

Scientists, water managers and others interested in the future ecological health of water resources from Texas, Louisiana and across the nation will gather with local community members this week to discuss the process for enhancing water flows to Caddo Lake from Big Cypress Bayou and other tributaries of the lake.

The workshop will be held in Jefferson at the Jeffersonian Institute beginning at 9 a.m. Tuesday. Tuesday's session is scheduled to last until 5 p.m. Wednesday's half-day session begins at 9 a.m. and runs until noon.

Organized by The Nature Conservancy and the Caddo Lake Institute, the ecological-flows workshop Tuesday and Wednesday will examine technical aspects of biology, hydrology, hydraulics, geomorphology and water quality, organizers said. The ultimate goal of the session is determining how much water is needed to maintain the ecological health of Caddo Lake and its tributaries as habitat for animals and plants while supplying adequate water for human needs such as drinking water, flood control and recreation.

Caddo Lake Institute President Richard Lowerre said the workshops at Caddo Lake represent the leading edge of a new round of planning Texans are undertaking to manage water resources under increasing demand from growing populations.

"People who care about our rivers, lakes and other water resources are realizing we need to understand how these water systems work to determine how we can make the best use of what we have," Lowerre said. "We have to understand what we've got first in order to make those determinations."

Ecological flows are much on the minds of Texas water experts these days, Lowerre said. The Texas Environmental Flows Advisory Committee was created in October 2005 to establish a process that will achieve a consensus-based, regional approach to integrate environmental flow protection into the water allocation process while assuring that human water needs are satisfied.

The committee is poised to make recommendations in late November or early December for action and legislation concerning flow allocation to meet human and environmental needs in time for the next session of the Texas Legislature in January 2007, Lowerre said.

Ryan Smith, a freshwater ecologist with the Conservancy's Texas Program and workshop participant, said the workshop will address two major issues.

"We are looking to achieve ecologically sustainable water management in a process that is both science based and stakeholder driven," Smith said.

One issue to be focused upon is to align the Caddo Lake process with the framework being used to determine statewide environmental flow protection. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the Texas Water Development Board, in cooperation with other agencies, are currently establishing an in stream flow data collection and evaluation program and are conducting studies to determine methodologies for determining flow conditions for rivers and streams, Smith.

These agencies also are participating in the Caddo workshops.

The second is to expand the workshop's perspective beyond maintaining ecological flows in Big Cypress Bayou to the other major tributaries to Caddo Lake, including Black Cypress Bayou and Little Cypress Bayou. The flows-ecology workshop also will serve as the hydrology working group for the Watershed Protection Program for Cypress Basin.

A stakeholders' meeting for the Watershed Protection Program will take place on Oct. 26.

Texas' only natural lake, Caddo Lake covers 50 square miles, half in Texas and half in Louisiana. Believed to have been created originally by logjams on the Red River, the lake and its surrounding wetlands are a mixed bottomland hardwood forest and shallow bald cypress swamp.

Contact the Marshall News Messenger via e-mail at: news messenger@coxmnm.com.