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Navigation District Endorses Commissioners Decision

By VBLewis

At a special meeting in Jefferson this past Monday evening, the Cypress Valley Navigation District (CVND) voted, by a comfortable margin of 6 to 3, to endorse the Jan. 31 resolution by the Harrison County Commissioners Court to ask Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison to sponsor the reprogramming of federal funds from the Ramsar Wetlands Center to Harrison County/CVND for direct use in maintaining and solving problems on Caddo Lake. The control of aquatic vegetation was the centerpiece of the request.

The meeting was chaired by Tom Wagner of Jefferson because Chairman Ken Shaw was out of town. There were four directors from Harrison County present, and all five directors from Marion County were there. There were about twenty spectators at the meeting to include County Judge Candidate Richard Anderson, and none spoke.

The session opened with a director reading a letter from Ken Shaw opposing the endorsement of the Commissioners decision, and asking that the meeting be postponed until the regularly scheduled CVND meeting in May. Next, the same director moved that the meeting be postponed for two weeks until more data were available. The motion was voted down so the meeting continued.

Those who supported the Commissioners Court resolution had copies of the grant requests with budgets attached and the Congressional language showing that the grant was for the Ramsar Wetlands Center, and not the Caddo Lake Institute. This was an important point – these were not funds appropriated to the Caddo Lake Institute. The Congressional language prohibits the grant funds from being used for infrastructure or construction. Copies of the budgets submitted with grant requests for 2001 through 2004 were furnished to the directors. Apparently no one in the room had read the grant request, except the directors who had secured them. It is questionable that they were ever made public until secured from the Dept. of Interior through the Freedom of Information Act. These budgets did not reflect that any funds would be spent gathering scientific data, or for that matter, improving conditions on Caddo Lake. This effectively countered the assertion by those opposed that the CVND would be doing great harm to studies on stream flows and other data needed for the long term health of Caddo.

Those opposed continually made the point that it was unethical to ask to reprogram funds that had been secured by the laborious preparation and processing of grant requests. Those supporting the Commissioners decision did not agree, and insisted that this is federal tax money which is frequently reprogrammed to meet higher priority

needs, and that the rapidly deteriorating condition of Caddo Lake took precedence over yet more long range studies and educational programs.

After lengthy debate, the CVND voted to send a letter to the Harrison County Commissioners Court affirming its support for the Courts resolution on reprogramming federal funds, and another similar letter to Sen. Hutchison notifying her of its support for the Commissioners Court.

Everyone on the board was heard. Unlike the last meeting, this one was a civil, but intense, debate. There were sincere and honest disagreements, and the majority prevailed by a 2 to 1 margin – democracy in action. No one knows how this will play out. The chances of some of the money being reprogrammed are real, but no one is overly optimistic. It was considered important by a majority of the directors that they be on record in support of the County’s effort to secure additional funds for the District. The majority of the directors agreed that the sum of money requested could be well spent, properly accounted for in public media, and that it would all go “directly” to the aid of Caddo Lake.