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Not about to take it easy;
Eagles' Henley vows to win fight against town, protect **Caddo Lake**

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Don Henley tells his earliest memory of **Caddo Lake** as if it were yesterday. The flash of a shad lure arcing over tea-stained water. Sunlight winking through Spanish moss and centuries-old cypress. The pull and heft of an 8-year-old's first bass. A rite of passage for father and son.

The Linden, Texas, boy is now a rock star who fears his childhood lake - the place he calls his church - is in trouble. Another plan is afoot to exploit Texas' only naturally formed lake, and he intends to stop it.

"They just can't leave it alone," he said. "Every 10 years or even more often, there's some kind of threat to the lake. People try to exploit the lake for special interests. And that lake simply cannot support any more stress."

The Eagles' singer will host a Shreveport, La., benefit concert Thursday to bankroll a defense fund for the lake, a primeval expanse of shallow pools, sloughs and cypress swamps stretching 21 miles along the Texas-Louisiana line.

The institute he founded almost a decade ago to protect Caddo is leading the fight against Marshall's bid to tap the lake and sell 5.5 million gallons of water daily to a private power plant.

Mr. Henley said he will wage a national campaign if needed, mirroring his successful fight in the early '90s to stop development and preserve Henry David Thoreau's Walden Woods and Pond in Massachusetts.

"If I have to do a benefit concert every week, that's what I'll do" he said.

Memories of the lake

Mr. Henley's love affair with Caddo began with fishing trips with his father, explorations of a place that retains a timeless, near-Edenic wildness and mystery despite a century of oil exploration, watershed diversion and other human intrusion. Mr. Henley

regularly slips back to Caddo. He owns property on both sides of the lake. There, he said, he can fish, visit friends and just be.

"That's where I can see and understand the divine hand of creation," he said. "It's not just a pretty swamp."

About the time he began campaigning for Walden, he also began working to preserve Caddo. In 1987, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers resurrected a decades-old proposal to dig a barge canal through the lake. Mr. Henley asked an environmental lawyer and former county commissioner he'd befriended in Aspen, Colo., to see what could be done.

With his backing, lawyer Dwight Shellman organized scientists, environmentalists and residents. In December 1992, the Corps conceded the project was environmentally unjustified.

The following October, **Caddo Lake** was declared a wetland of international importance, a designation held by only 15 U.S. sites.

Mr. Henley formed the **Caddo Lake** Institute to support scientific study and local efforts to protect Caddo's ecosystem, an array of animal and plant life unrivaled in Texas. After the Army closed an ammunition plant operated since the 1940s at the lake's edge, Marshall business leaders touted the site as an ideal industrial park.

But Mr. Henley's institute had other ideas. It signed a 30-year lease in October 1996 to use 1,400 acres of the site as a preserve and research center.

Rumblings that Mr. Henley and his institute were unwelcome outsiders circulated in Marshall. That talk escalated last summer when the city unveiled a plan to sell water from Big Cypress Bayou, just upstream of Caddo, to the Entergy Corp. to cool a proposed gas-fired electrical plant.

"When you have something in your back yard, you fail to appreciate it after a while. It's taken for granted. And that's what's happened here," Mr. Henley said. "This is about bidness with a capital B. This is about a good ole boy network that runs Marshall, Texas, and it's about them trying to boost their city in ways that are detrimental to every other community in the area."

Defending their plan

Marshall officials insist that their plan wouldn't harm Caddo. They promised to create a fund to buy water from Lake O' the Pines, upstream of Caddo, to replace what Entergy took from the watershed during dry spells.

City officials also contend that they had nowhere else to turn for water for future growth; the town of 25,000 is northeast Texas' only major community solely dependent on natural stream flow.

"I don't feel like we are the bad guy," City Manager Frank Johnson said. "We feel like we have no choice at this moment in time."

A hydrologist hired by the institute contended that large parts of the lake could dry up in droughts and that the city's mitigation fund was too small to weather a long drought. Mr. Johnson said that officials believe the fund was adequate, though he concedes that there is no guarantee that it would replace what the city takes.

Lake advocates took their fight to the Texas Natural Resource and Conservation Commission. Marshall had asked the agency to amend its water-rights permit to allow the sale of water from Big Cypress to industry.

Battle wages on

Concerned about a long fight, Entergy signed a water contract in January with Longview. But the battle over Marshall's proposal continues, in part because the company won't say whose water it will use.

Marshall officials remain hopeful that Entergy will choose them. Commission officials say Marshall's request will likely be approved because it is viewed as a routine change to existing water rights.

The request does not rise to the level where it requires an environmental assessment or formal hearing, commission officials say.

Mr. Henley said he is ready for all-out legal war. His opening salvo is the Shreveport concert.

Shreveport has rights to half the water flowing through the lake and relies on it as a secondary water source. Shreveport officials say they are concerned, in part because Texas never notified them about Marshall's plan and has not answered requests for input.

"It's unfortunate that it's come to this, but we have no choice," Mr. Henley said. "Our mandate and our promise to the people who live around that lake is and always has been that we will protect; we will do what is best for the lake."

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