

Question of which land being sought raised during hearing

[By JULIA ROBB, Special Projects Editor]

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Supporters for a proposed industrial site adjacent to the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge spoke first at a public hearing held at city commission chambers Monday night, but they were soon inundated by those who opposed the proposed site.

Industrial site opponents also charged that supporters are now making it plain, through a map published Sunday in the Marshall News Messenger and in verbal comments, that the land they want has already been conveyed to the refuge and is not owned by the U.S. Army.

Texas Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison has held up the conveyance of about 2,500 acres of land from the Army to the U.S. Department of the Interior, land the Army was scheduled to transfer to the refuge (which the Department of the Interior owns), ostensibly to see if it was suitable for an industrial site.

But industrial site spokesman Sam Moseley confirmed Monday, after he spoke at the meeting, that he and others who support the industrial site do want land already belonging to the refuge.

That land is in the southwest corner of the old Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant land.

Moseley said he and businessman Tommy Whaley, who first created the industrial site idea, have never tried to conceal they want land already in the refuge.

Lake resident Ken Shaw told the crowd that Moseley, Whaley and County Judge Wayne McWhorter are not making a claim on land the army already owns, "Therefore, the commissioners court should vote at once to notify Senator Hutchison and the Army that there is no controversy regarding the status of those lands at all and they should be transferred to the Department of the Interior, as scheduled..."

Wildlife Refuge Manager Mark Williams said in his presentation that he and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (which is under the Department of Interior) were told the land transfer was held up because industrial site proponents wanted to explore the possibility of legislatively transferring the remaining Longhorn acres, the acres that had not been transferred to the refuge, to another public entity for development.

Moseley was first speaker at the hearing and he told Harrison County Commissioners and a packed commission chambers – plus a large crowd that stood outside waiting to get in – that Longhorn's sister plant in Webster Parish, La., also closed when Longhorn closed and that plant site has become a thriving industrial park.

The Louisiana industrial site has produced about 400 jobs, he said, adding that Harrison County's median income is 17.5 percent below the state median.

Harrison County can have a wildlife refuge and an industrial park, he said.

Moseley also argued that although critics have said the industrial park would be too far from major highways and other amenities, officials created Alliance Airport north of Fort Worth, also in a rural area, and it has thrived.

Restrictions can be placed on industry so it does not harm Caddo Lake, he said, also denying that he and other industrial site supporters have an interest in selling timber from the proposed 2,000 acre site, or using water rights that could come with the land.

Jim Pedison argued stringent regulations on proposed industry would prevent harm to the lake or refuge, Jim Taylor said the real danger to the lake is lack of water which is turning it into a marsh and Charles Heimerding – a former substitute teacher in Karnack schools – said Karnack needs jobs.

Thereafter, however, dozens spoke against the refuge, building their arguments with facts and figures.

Williams told commissioners that the Department of the Interior expects visitors to spend \$1.9 million per year in the refuge area and that would generate \$394,000 in tax revenues.

William Huddleston said he had worked for years at Longhorn and the industrial site would have to be built in an area subject to flooding and in the hardwood bottoms that drive the animal populations around the lake, thus harming them both.

A member of Longview's economic development board argued that building an industrial site at the Lake would dry out the creeks that feed the lake.

Mary Kay Vice President Dick Bartlett said businessmen who are looking for sites on which to build are attracted by places that have amenities such as wildlife refuges, suggesting that the refuge should be kept intact.

Dr. Lee Guise said that no industrial plant owners and managers would want to build in a place that has no infrastructure to support them.

Shaw argued that the commissioners vote on the subject, due today, would not satisfy the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Congress would not vote to take public land away from a wildlife refuge.

"Support for Caddo Lake is so strong and so widespread throughout regulatory bodies and environmental and conservation groups that even the president of the United States, George W. Bush, expressed concern for Caddo Lake when he recently asked visitors from Marshall, 'Are you protecting Caddo Lake?'" Shaw said.

Another industrial site opponent said most soil in the industrial site area is not suitable for building on and another cited still existing pollution as a hindrance.

Sam Canup, mayor of Uncertain, argued for tourism as something to sustain the Caddo area and the county.

Several people who live in Karnack said they favor the industrial development over nature issues.

The hearing was orderly and civil and numerous county deputies attending for security purposes were not needed.

At deadline, a line of people were still waiting to speak.

Almost 200 people attended and some left when they could not get in the door.

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