

# THE UNCERTAIN NEWS

"In Wilderness Is The Preservation Of The World." Thoreau

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## \$4 Million Dollar Deal Saves Caddo Outback

The *Uncertain News* is very privileged to print this exclusive interview with Richard Bartlett, who in 1995 and 1996 was chairman of the Nature Conservancy of Texas. He was vice-chairman in 1993 when the Nature Conservancy acquired the 7,000 acres of Caddo Lake that is now the Wildlife Management Area. He is one of the leading environmental conservation advocates in Texas and his work with the Nature Conservancy has affected Caddo Lake tremendously.

Bartlett is also author of the book, *"Saving the Best of Texas"*, published in 1995. This turned out to be a very popular book for lovers of wild Texas natural landscapes, and the first edition sold out. It is now in the second printing. In this book he explores and savors many of the special spots that have been protected by the Nature Conservancy, including preservation areas in the Gulf Coast marshes, the Davis Mountains of West Texas, the South Texas plains, the Post Oak Savanna, the Blackland Prairies and the Piney Woods. In research for this book he roamed through 100,000 miles of Texas backroads, but Bartlett's own favorite special place is right here at Caddo Lake. This is where he hangs his hat.

Many hunters and fisherman are familiar with Bartlett's first book, *"The Sportsman's Guide to Texas"*, published in 1988 with co-author and partner Joanne Krieger. His personal beliefs in environmental conservation came about during five decades as an avid sportsman.

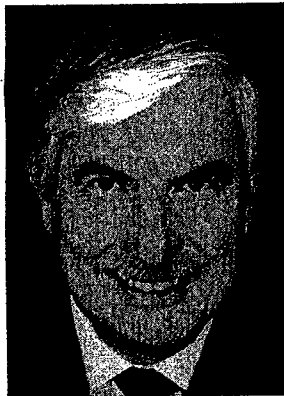
Bartlett is vice chairman of Mary Kay Cosmetics, has served as its president, and has guided the marketing strategies of this highly profitable company since 1973. As a businessman, sportsman and environmentalist, his special gift is to weave together the ideas and enthusiasms of people from differing walks of life into a partnership approach to conservation of nature.

On a beautiful April evening with Richard Bartlett at his Caddo Lake home, on a porch overlooking the Big Cypress, with wife Joanne

Krieger ensconced on a settee, *Uncertain News* editor Jim McMillen recorded this interview:

"If we did not have the 7,500 acres under protection, Caddo Lake would be a much different place to live," Bartlett said.

"I was a swamp rat when I was a boy growing up in central Florida," he said. "We lived



The Nature Conservancy's Dick Bartlett, Caddo Lake advocate and author of *"Saving the Best of Texas."*

between Ft. Pierce and Stuart and behind us was a great swamp area, a wetland that enchanted me as a boy. I could hear the deep bass profundo of bull alligators serenading me as a boy. In the years that have passed since my boyhood, I have watched it all go away. It's gone. Now it's all asphalt and concrete. A place I treasured and loved is completely gone.

"Without protection this ecosystem of Caddo Lake could be gone in just a few decades. It does not happen overnight, but in my lifetime I've seen places like Caddo dredged, channelized and bulldozed. A good example of such destruction is the Kissimmee River in central Florida. So the issue here is the survival of Caddo Lake as one of the most beautiful and

important wetlands in the world," Bartlett said.

The Texas Nature Conservancy stands out as the leader in this work to protect the wild outback of Caddo, but some of the real heroes have been local people, private landowners, who wanted their property to become part of a conservation plan. The fascinating details are in the Caddo Lake chapter of *"Saving The Best Of Texas."*

Prominent among these local people is Robert McCurdy, who owned 471 acres up Kitchen's Creek and on Goat Island. His donation of this property to the Texas Nature Conservancy in 1990 started a domino effect. A mosaic of land was pieced together, small parcel after small parcel, to assemble this preserve. According to Bartlett's book, more than forty landowners of twenty-eight tracts were linked in the process. A key acquisition was the 3,600 acre Chew Estate, some of it purchased, some of it donated.

Many partners were involved in this 7,000 acre conservation campaign, some private, such as Texas Nature Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited, and some public such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, North American Wetlands Conservation Council, and Texas Parks and Wildlife, which already owned the 500-acre Caddo Lake State Park.

The actual cost was \$3,854,674.00, or about 3.8 million dollars. Count in the gift value of land and services donated, and creation of the Caddo wetlands preserve totals out to a \$4 million value.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is the administration and law enforcement agency of this 7,500 acres, now called the Caddo Lake State Park and Wildlife Management Area, and technically this land now belongs to that agency. But the actual share of the cost paid by TPWD was 1.3 million, or about 1/3 of the total. It turned out to be a heck of a deal for

(see \$4 Million, pg. 3)

# \$4 Million Dollar Deal (continued from pg. 1)

the people of Texas and especially for the people of the Caddo Lake area.

"My interest in this when it all began was the waterfowl," said McCurdy. "This is one of the great roosting grounds for migratory waterfowl and also woodducks. The lake's fingers and sloughs contain a lot of flooded water oak, an abundance of acorns. That's one of the principal feeding grounds for the ducks," McCurdy continued, "I hope Caddo can someday return to the spooky, mysterious wildness that haunted me."

"Caddo was, and is, a place accustomed to being left alone," Bartlett said. "Down through the decades it has been a place truly isolated from many of the problems caused by humans. But times were changing and Caddo's way of life was destined to disappear. Irreplaceable hardwood bottomlands were being cut at an alarming rate, often illegally by timber thieves. Pileated woodpeckers were being shot for sport. Habitat was shrinking for rare and endangered plants, fish and animals. The quality of Caddo, the natural beauty, was in serious danger of deteriorating rapidly.

"Caddo Lake is something rare and valuable," he said. "We as people have no way to estimate the value of Caddo. We are very good at placing a value on oil or timber, automobiles or beans, things that can be marketed, but we are not very good at putting a value on our environment.

"And we can't put a value on something else," Bartlett said. "We can't calculate the value of what the lake does for the human spirit. Out there in Caddo is something that is salutary to the spirit. What Caddo does is provide a service to the human spirit.

"Most of us are city people", he said. "We spend about 80 percent of our lives indoors, sealed away from

nature. It's hard to listen to nature through the blare of a television set. Then there's the daily duel with Texas traffic out there on the asphalt and concrete. It's hard to listen to nature through the increased complexity of our lives, too.

"Many of us have disconnected from nature, and if so, we have disconnected from ourselves. That's not uncommon in today's crazed world. We must go to the land and look and listen. Caddo has such a silent elegance. It is absolutely wonderful in helping people reconnect, to see that linkage between themselves and nature. People are part of the ecosystem, and Caddo is one of the most beautiful ecological areas in the world."

"Dr. Clark Hubbs of the University of Texas is one of the world's leading experts in fresh water fishes. He says that Caddo, with over 60 species, has more diversity of native fresh water fish than any other place in Texas. We know that 300 bird species visit the watershed during the year, and Caddo provides critical nesting habitat during the breeding season. This is an area of tremendous wildlife richness."

Bartlett praised the local community conservation base. "We have a lot to be proud of," he said. "We have fought and won a pitched battle against the Daingerfield Reach, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project that would have connected the Red River with Lake O' the Pines, chewing a huge hole through the romantic beauty of Caddo Lake. Obviously the canal was an awful idea that would have destroyed the Caddo ecosystem. It is not easy to defeat such projects when politically driven, but the many friends of Caddo Lake fought back with a protest campaign that could not be ignored.

"One of my favorite quotes is from Dudley Warner, who wrote for

the Hartford Courant in the late 1870's. He said, 'Public opinion is stronger than the legislature, and nearly as strong as the Ten Commandments.'

"The defenders of Caddo Lake have made much progress using the strength of public opinion. Many people here have fought the good fight to protect the lake, and we all are indebted to them. But there are always new assaults and new battles to be won or lost. Although much of Caddo has been conserved, the quality of the ecosystem is still very endangered. There are many challenges. The conservation story of Caddo Lake is just beginning. There is so much more we can do to help conserve the absolute wonder that it is."

**Most water snakes  
are  
non-poisonous.**

*Cypress  
MOON*

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