



Les Hassell/News Messenger

WITH CADDO LAKE as his backdrop, musician and Linden native Don Henley spoke Saturday about the importance of preserving and protecting the lake.

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In the long run, Henley says Caddo an important resource

By **RACHEL STALLARD**
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CADDO LAKE — As a former member of the rock group The Eagles, Don Henley might advise his fans to “take it easy,” but he is impassioned about one love in his life — the beauty of Caddo Lake. “People may not realize this lake is in eminent danger of either an oil spill or a hazardous chemical spill because of the railroads and highways that run through the watershed area and directly over the lake itself,” said singer/songwriter Henley, founder

of the Caddo Lake Institute, a sponsor of the program.

Henley, a native of Linden who grew up around Caddo Lake, spoke Saturday to mark the culmination of a three-day Caddo Lake disaster response practice drill involving 20 local, state and federal organizations.

“Several oil wells were drilled in and around the lake. There are also pipelines running underneath the lake,” he added. “There are still functioning oil wells around the lake and we need to be prepared because it’s not ‘if’ a spill occurs,

it’s ‘when.’”

“This spill response program is the first of its kind in the nation for an inland body of water,” Henley said. “It is intended to serve as a model for other areas throughout the United States.”

“Today is about bringing together state and local and federal agencies, along with local students and teachers to launch a coordinated training and monitoring effort to protect the lake from spills.”

The havoc an oil spill would wreak on the delicate ecosystem of

Caddo Lake is what Myron Knudson, Superfund Director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, was present to protect against.

“We can only do so many things in a minimum amount of time in the event of an emergency,” he said. “We would want to protect the breeding grounds and the nursery areas first.”

In order to do that, an agency in Louisiana with a Geographic Information System would be notified to determine where the areas needing the most protection are located.

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CADDO

Henley stresses need to preserve natural resources at Caddo Lake

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According to Knudson, his department conducts a practice drill similar to this one once a year in his coverage area including Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas and New Mexico.

"Our job is to protect the public health and the environment; we are here because this is a sensitive area," Knudson said. "An activity like this one allows us to gain information on how we need to respond on the federal level. It also allows the local groups involved to see who their counterparts would be, and who can help them in the event of an emergency."

The three-day event started with a mock train-derailment dumping oil into the lake area. In the first day of activities, Dennis Engdahl, Harrison County fire marshal and a hazardous materials responder, gauged the severity of the situation

and requested help from the other agencies. The groups met together and determined the railroad was responsible for sending a crew in to clean up the spill, but local, state and federal agencies were called upon to minimize the damage, according to Knudson.

The second day consisted of tabletop exercises, where the groups involved met to discuss solutions.

"It was just like conducting a war game, only it was an environmental game," Knudson said. "We studied, how do we work together to clean up this spill?"

By the third day, the agencies were gathering and submitting reports of their solutions.

Knudson added only local authorities can call for assistance, making Engdahl's role vital to the program.

"When I get on the scene I would

notify the various agencies of what we needed," Engdahl said. "As the situation escalated, I would escalate the response."

"The spill we practiced this weekend would have taxed our state, federal and local services immediately, and I would call on them for help."

"It wouldn't take that long to determine the magnitude of the situation on our hands," he added, citing support from the sheriff's office, firefighters and local agencies.

Henley's love for the lake stems from an early fishing trip his father and fishing buddies took him on in the '50s, where he caught his first bass.

"Since then, I have been fortunate enough to travel all over the world in my musical career," he said. "It has given me a new insight and a heightened appreciation of

wetlands in general and Caddo Lake in particular."

In 1992, Henley brought his friend, Dwight Shellman, to the lake to fish. He is now part of the Institute.

"We realized Caddo Lake, although it looked beautiful to the untrained eye, had a lot of problems beneath the surface," Henley said of the polluted lake. "We tried to come to some conclusions of how to make the entire watershed healthier, in turn, we also came to improve the condition of Caddo Lake."

"Education and a heightened awareness in the local area as far as the wetlands function, is our best tool for healing and protecting the lake," he added.