

Kicked out

Public, media barred from Caddo Lake meeting

By **TORU YAMAUCHI**

News Messenger

The public was barred and a News Messenger reporter and photographer were physically ejected from a meeting this morning on the possibility of stocking Caddo Lake with triploid grass carp — though all four county commissioners had been invited.

One of the meeting's sponsors, Vernon B. Lewis Jr. forced the News Messenger's representatives from the meeting room at Cypress Valley Church on Pinecrest and locked the door shutting the public out.

Lewis told the News Messenger that it was a "private" meeting.

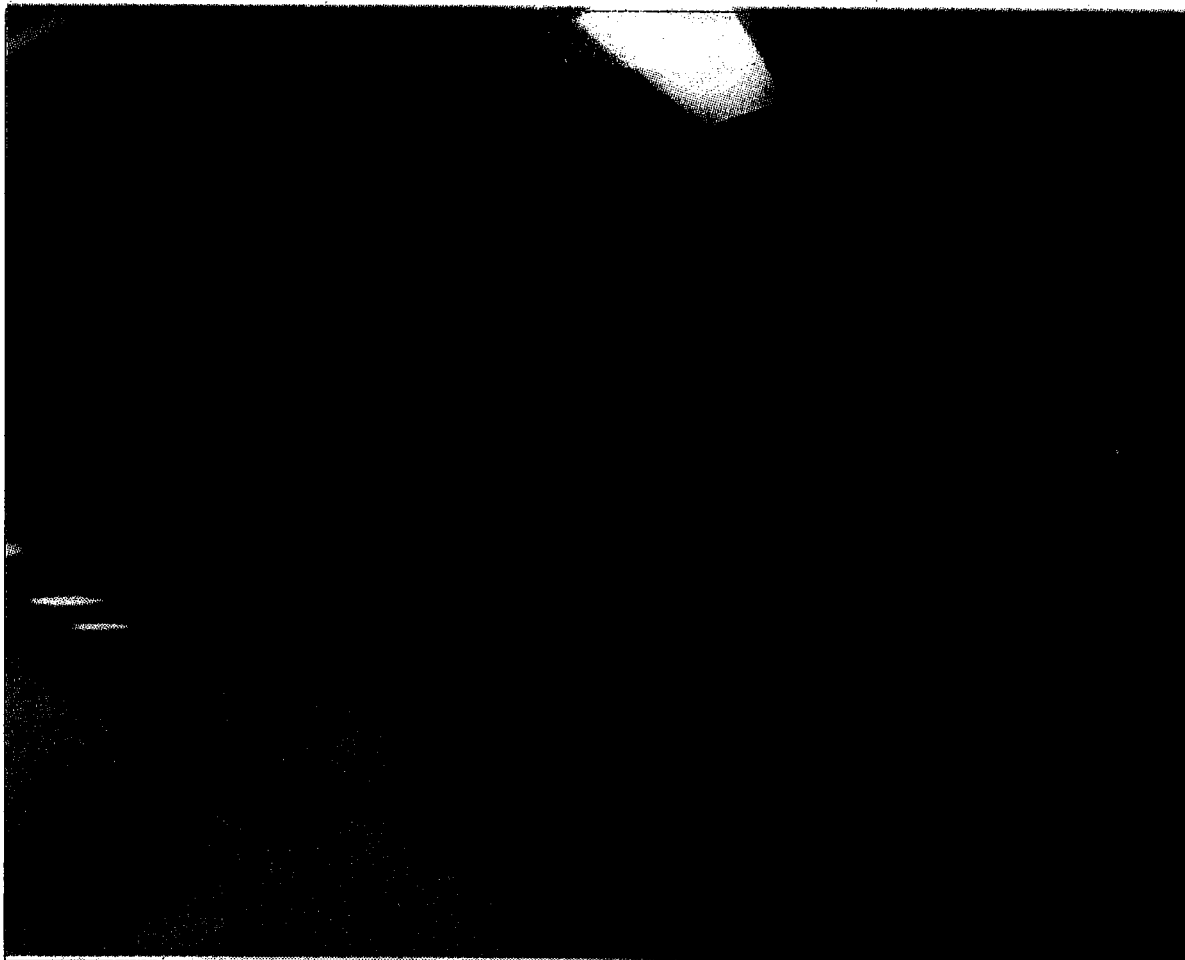
However, all four county commissioners — James Mooney, Charles Bennett, Glen Hobbs and Jerry Armstrong — were on a list of invited participants obtained by the News Messenger. The state's open meetings law requires meetings with a quorum of any publically elected body to be posted and open to the public.

As of presstime, the meeting was still in progress.

Besides Lewis, other sponsors listed on the sheet were Tom M. Wagner and Franklin Jones, Jr.

The handout obtained by the newspaper said the purpose of the meeting was to:

- Assemble representatives from "interested" groups for a round table discussion about the aquatic growth problem on Caddo Lake;
- To discuss control measures, seek a consensus among participants on the most acceptable, effective and affordable solutions;
- Choose a "lead" organization;
- Agree on time lines for near term actions;



Christian Fuchs/News Messenger

THE HAND OF VERNON LEWIS, JR., covers a camera lens as he pushes members of the media out of a meeting about the future of Caddo Lake Thursday morning at Cypress Valley Church in Marshall.

- Discuss measuring, monitoring and reporting effectiveness of optional programs;
- Discuss costs and funding;
- Discuss an offer from sponsors to raise private funds for a "modest" first stocking of triploid grass carp "if it becomes a viable near term alternative."

Harrison County Judge Rodney Gilstrap was not on the list of invited persons, however, when contacted this morning he said he had been invited to attend.

"My schedule didn't let me attend. I had something in the county I had committed to do. So I

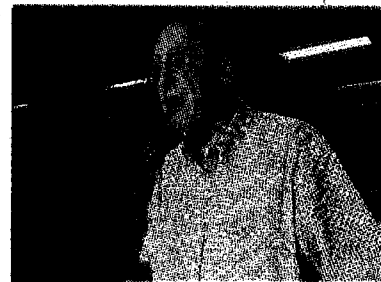
will visit with the commissioners and see what information they can tell me," Gilstrap said.

Gilstrap said he did not know why the meeting would have been private.

A section in the handout labeled, "Sponsor's Views, says, in part:

"The lake as we know it will cease to exist as a 1) navigable body of water and, 2) recreational and fishing lake — if the current rate of growth of aquatic vegetation is allowed to continue for just a few more years.

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Christian Fuchs/News Messenger

VERNON LEWIS, JR., explains that although the meeting Thursday is about Caddo Lake, the public is not welcome at the meeting.

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"When we three sponsors were kids 55-60 years ago and fished this lake with our Dads, the water in front of what is today the Jones and Lewis properties on Caddo was 8-10 feet deep with sandy bottoms. Today these areas are 4-6 feet deep with 3-4 feet of silt. . . .

"The ecosystem of Caddo was

altered forever when the Dam to create the Lake of the Pines was constructed in 1957. . . .

"We will never get unanimity among all of the interest parties on a specific solution. So we must develop a consensus — and we must collectively begin to attack the problem now."

Other invited participants were

John Echols with Greater Caddo Lake Association; Dorothy Grant, Cypress Valley Navigation District; Mike Ryan, Michael Brice, Dave Terre and Earl Chilton with Texas Parks and Wildlife; Hank Jarboe with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Mike Smart with Waterways Experimentation Station; Tom Cloud with U.S. Fish and Wildlife; James Seals and Charles Dugas with Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries; Cindy McGeorge for Congressman Max Sandlin; Dennis North for B.A.S.S; Mike Freeze from Arkansas for Keo Fish Farms, and Jerilynne Wagner, recorder.