

ETBU PROFESSOR DR. Roy Darville sniffs the water in the Turtle Shell section of Caddo Lake on a recent morning. **Tim Zielenbach/News Messenger**

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

ETBU Professor Roy Darville to present report to Ramsar meeting

By N.B. CANSON
News Messenger

About 1,000 delegates from over 115 countries will learn more about Caddo Lake this week when ETBU biology professor Dr. Roy Darville travels to Spain to present a report at an international wetlands conference.

Darville, chairman of the biology department at East Texas Baptist University, will attend the "Eighth Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention" in Valencia, Spain to discuss the efforts of the Caddo Lake Clearinghouse to get the Texas Commission on

Environmental Quality to conduct a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) action at Caddo Lake.

The Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, is an intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and "wise use" of wetlands and their resources, Darville said.

"'Wise use' means it's quite okay to use wetlands in a sustainable manner that won't cause long-term problems," Darville said. "Ramsar does not want to lock up the wetlands and throw away the key.

"Human use of wetlands — like fishing, bird-watching, eco-tourism — we support human use," Darville said, "We can use the wetlands wisely and do it with the future in mind."

Caddo Lake and its wetlands was designated a "wetlands of international importance" in 1993 and is currently one of only 18 Ramsar sites in the U. S., Darville said.

A biologist and teacher, Darville is equally at home in the classroom, in the laboratory or in the field. In his five-year Water Quality Study of Caddo Lake, he has identified unfavorable trends in low oxygen levels, acidity, and the presence of mercury and other heavy metals in sediments.

"We need a comprehensive study that will provide data on the health of the lake. It's a requirement of the Clean Water Act to study any body of water that does not meet water quality standards.

"My data suggests that Caddo doesn't meet those standards, but we

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need more data," Darville said. "There is a TMDL under way at Lake O'the Pines right now. All the data is being collected for analysis," he said, "We need this at Caddo."

The international attention at the Ramsar Convention is both welcome and beneficial Darville said, but he emphasizes that "local management of the lake and wetlands is the key to their survival."

He believes in getting people involved in environmental decisions at the local level.

"The participatory approach, that's what life is about," he said. "We can't sit in a chair on the sidelines and wait for someone in Washington or Austin to tell us what to do. Sure, we need national standards and regulations. But we need to be involved locally. People need to be part of the decision-making process if we expect people to abide by environmental rules."

This is Darville's second time to attend an international Ramsar Conference of the Parties. In 1996, he participated in the sixth Conference, held in Brisbane, Australia.

At that meeting, Darville and Dwight Shellman, President of the Caddo Lake Institute, proposed a recommendation that encouraged "local and indigenous people to become involved in the management of their lands or wetlands."

The resolution was adopted by the full conference and has led to increased emphasis on

local involvement of resource management in Ramsar sites throughout the world.

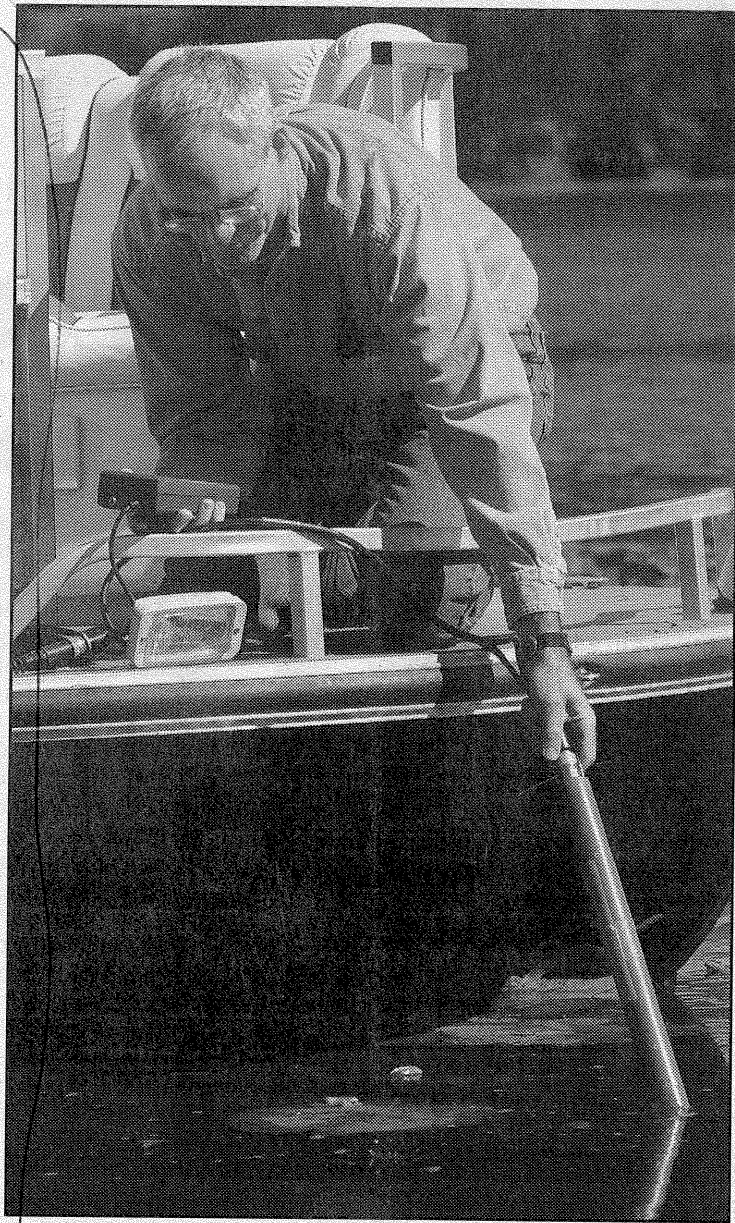
"The Caddo Lake Clearinghouse is an apt demonstration of that grassroots principle," said Darville. "Local people at the lake have brought their knowledge and their skills to the Clearinghouse. I learn a lot from them. Locals are playing a large role in determining the future of Caddo," he said.

"I really believe that one person can make a difference," said Darville. "When local people take this kind of management approach seriously, the world and wetlands in particular become better places for all."

About eight delegates from America will attend this year's Ramsar meeting in Spain. The U.S. delegates are typically drawn from the Department of State, which administers the Ramsar Treaty, and from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. There are 133 Contracting Parties to the Convention, with 1198 wetland sites designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.

In addition to participating as a non-voting observer at the Ramsar convention, Darville will lead a two hour workshop titled "Overview of 10 Years Work at Caddo Lake," focusing on past, present and future protection activities at Caddo Lake.

Darville and Shellman will conduct a wetlands management workshop and Shellman will report on the CLI's



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ETBU PROFESSOR DR. Roy Darville uses a water quality meter to collect data in the Goose Prairie section of Caddo Lake.

research and education activities, as well as its role in organizing the Caddo Lake Clearinghouse.

Current issues affecting Caddo Lake, including its

dispute with the city of Marshall will also be reviewed.

For more information about the Caddo Lake Clearinghouse and the Ramsar Convention visit www.caddodefense.org.