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Longhorn Army Ammunition land goes from

Refuse to Refuge

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News Messenger photos by
Christian Fuchs



A WATER LILY BLOOMS amongst the hyacinth of Caddo Lake. The hyacinth, a non-native plant, is so thick in some places that boats are unable to pass through without becoming ensnared.

By GAIL K BEIL

News Messenger

Steve and Jean Werneke made their way slowly through the low hanging trees of pristine Harrison Bayou, part of the 7,200 acres of Longhorn Army land that will become part of a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuge, if all goes as planned.

But there is much to do between last Friday, when the successful negotiations were revealed and hanging up an "open for visitors" sign.

About 10 days ago, issues tying up negotiations between the U.S. Army, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the Caddo Lake Institute were finally resolved. It doesn't mean that a wildlife refuge will open in the near future, said Dwight Shellman, president of the Caddo Lake Institute, and the chief negotiator.

As Shellman narrated some of the snares along the

way during his four years of negotiations, it sounded like years of "Go ask your mom — Go ask your dad." Depending on the level and department of either agency, he could get an agreement to partialize the 8,500 acres in the entire Longhorn plant holding. But it might not hold when he reached the next level of hierarchy or a different department, he said.

Getting only the "good land" was important, because some of it contains areas contaminated enough they were dubbed "Superfund Sites" several years ago.

Some agreement also had to be reached regarding the many buildings scattered over the grounds. Some were insulated with asbestos, others sided with it. Most of the laboratories, manufacturing buildings and office buildings will be on no use when U.S. Fish and Wildlife and CLI turn the place into a research center and game sanctuary. However, who would remove them was another problem. Shellman said the U.S. Army will remove them, according to the agreement announced Memorial

Day.

Now that those matters are resolved, the next step is an environmental review.

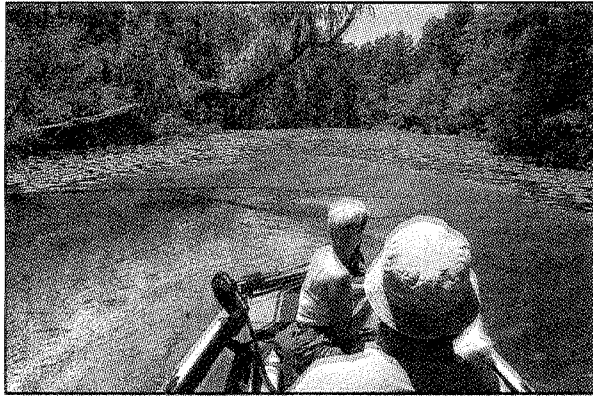
"U.S. Fish and Wildlife and CLI got a \$100,000 grant to make the National Environmental Policy Act-required studies," said Shellman said. "My hope is we can do it this fall."

As Shellman explained it, the NEPA study is one to determine the impact of turning the 7,200 acres from a defunct defense plant into a wildlife refuge. Once that study is finished, an overlay of the refuge area will be adopted.

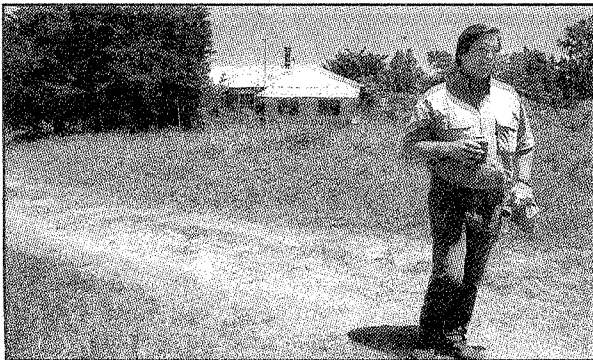
"At that point, it will become a part of the National Refuge System," he said.

A number of years ago, Don Henley and the Caddo Lake Institute leased 1,400 acres that included Starr Ranch and the Harrison Bayou area. Shellman said that lease will become a part of the wildlife refuge. However,

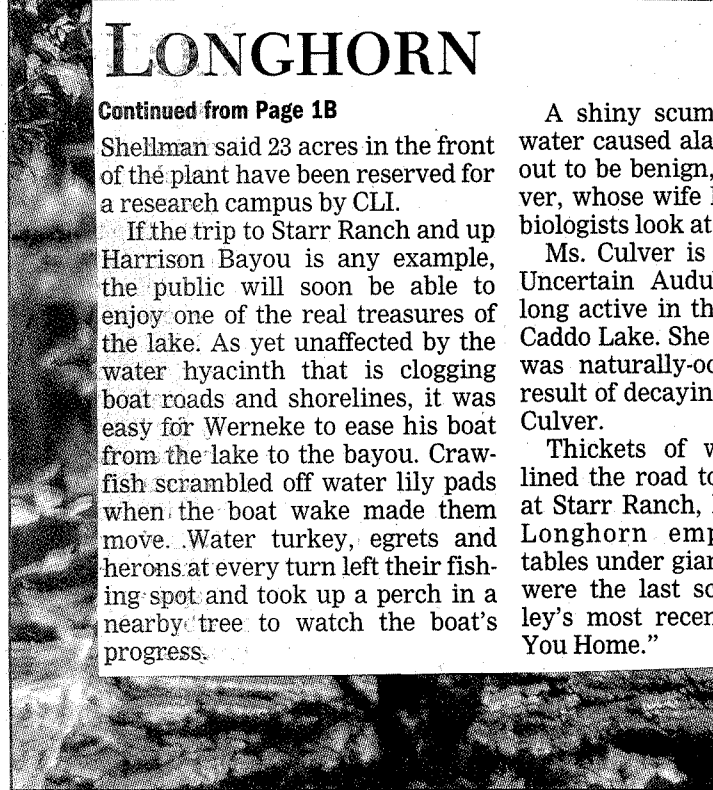
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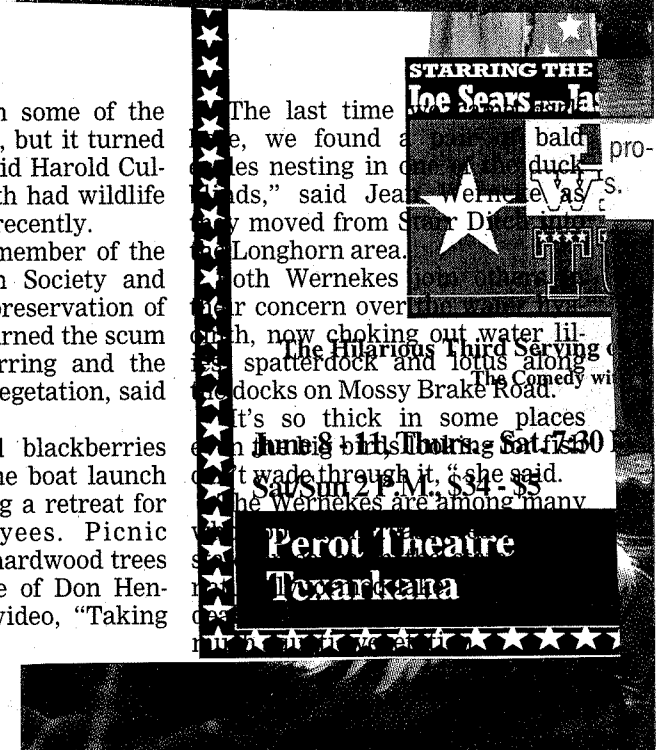
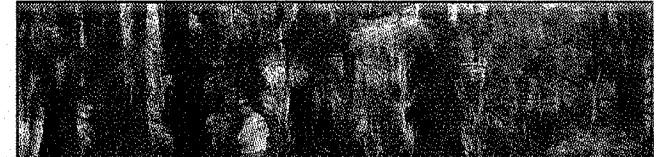
JEAN WERNEKE watches from the bow as her husband Steve steers through Harrison Bayou, part of the 7,200 acres of Longhorn Army land which may become part of a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuge.



STEVE WERNEKE walks the worn path leading from Caddo Lake past the Starr Ranch.



A BLUE HERON suns itself on a log alongside Harrison Bayou.



AN EGRET takes to the air when a boat comes too close to its perch on the shores of Caddo Lake.

LONGHORN

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Shellman said 23 acres in the front of the plant have been reserved for a research campus by CLI.

If the trip to Starr Ranch and up Harrison Bayou is any example, the public will soon be able to enjoy one of the real treasures of the lake. As yet unaffected by the water hyacinth that is clogging boat roads and shorelines, it was easy for Werneke to ease his boat from the lake to the bayou. Crawfish scrambled off water lily pads when the boat wake made them move. Water turkey, egrets and herons at every turn left their fishing spot and took up a perch in a nearby tree to watch the boat's progress.

A shiny scum on some of the water caused alarm, but it turned out to be benign, said Harold Culver, whose wife Ruth had wildlife biologists look at it recently.

Ms. Culver is a member of the Uncertain Audubon Society and long active in the preservation of Caddo Lake. She learned the scum was naturally-occurring and the result of decaying vegetation, said Culver.

Thickets of wild blackberries lined the road to the boat launch at Starr Ranch, long a retreat for Longhorn employees. Picnic tables under giant hardwood trees were the last scene of Don Henley's most recent video, "Taking You Home."

STARRING THE
Joe Sears and **Jas**

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Sat/Sun 2 P.M., \$34 - \$85
he Wernekes are among many

Perot Theatre
Toxarkana