



State to spray herbicide in Caddo Lake

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News Messenger

At the urging of lake residents and State Sen. Bill Ratliff, an effort to reduce the water hyacinth now choking Caddo Lake is planned within the next three weeks by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

With early planning still going on as of Wednesday, Texas Parks and Wildlife officials said they hope to begin treatment within three weeks with a non-toxic herbicide, 24D, and a mechanical "harvester" which shreds the hyacinth.

Tony Martin, director of water utilities

for the city of Marshall, said Parks and Wildlife had not contacted his office about the proposed treatment. Marshall draws its drinking water from the Big Cypress River, which is one of the bayous that feeds Caddo Lake.

Martin said he is not worried about the chemical and said he would be in touch with Parks and Wildlife officials.

"If what they were doing was harmful, I'm sure they would have called," Martin said. "Because they haven't, I'll assume what they are doing will remain safe for Marshall residents."

A non-indigenous plant introduced in

the 1950s, water hyacinth has spread rapidly throughout Caddo Lake due to the mild winters. Many fear the hyacinth, which has already choked off boat roads, will destroy the lake if it goes untreated.

"Texas Parks and Wildlife talks about how there was nothing that can be done," Attorney Tommy Whaley said. "Caddo is the largest fresh water lake in the U.S. They decided it wasn't their job to treat it. (Treatment) needs to be done."

After being contacted from local groups urging treatment, State Sen. Bill Ratliff went to the Parks and Wildlife Department and convinced them to begin

treatment.

"It is (Parks and Wildlife's) job," Whaley said. "State Sen. Ratliff told them that."

Ratliff was unavailable for comment. Parks and Wildlife officials said they plan to combine mechanical harvesting with chemical treatment to remove the hyacinth, which currently covers 2,000 acres of Caddo Lake.

The chemical herbicide, 24D, has been used on Caddo Lake and around Texas for 25 years and poses no health risk, said Phil Durocher, director of inland fishing

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for Parks and Wildlife.

"In 25 years, I don't know of any health problems caused by 24D," Durocher said. "We've never had a problem with it."

Durocher said the hyacinth problem has "reached critical mass."

"Water hyacinth is not good for anything," Durocher said. "It blocks boat access and makes everything underneath it a desert by using up all the oxygen."

Durocher said Parks and Wildlife had treated hyacinth annually until five years ago. At that time, Parks and Wildlife relied on grants from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to fund treatments. When the Corps pulled funding, Parks and Wildlife could not afford its treatment options for

Caddo.

Parks and Wildlife will use recently available funds from a federal grant, wildlife funds and endangered species funds to support the operation.

Durocher said the harvester will shred the hyacinth into pieces small enough to sink to the bottom of the lake. The herbicides, mainly 24D, will be spread by airboat and plane on the remainder of the hyacinth.

Once the harvester has reached all the areas it can, chemicals will be distributed. Because of the density of Caddo's tree canopy in certain areas, Durocher said the main means of chemical dispersal will be via airboat.

Due to the multitude of trees, stumps and shallow water in Caddo, Durocher said the harvester

will not be able to access as much of the hyacinth as he would like.

Mike Ryan, district fishing supervisor for Parks and Wildlife, said a trial usage of the harvester will begin when machines arrive next week.

"The harvester is not as controversial, but it's not as efficient in cost benefit," Ryan said. "There's not easy answer. There's pluses and minuses each way we would go."

Treating an acre of hyacinth with the herbicide, 24D, will cost \$20, while the harvester will run \$300-\$700 an acre, Durocher said.

The actual course of treatment is still in the planning stages, and Parks and Wildlife is searching for the most economically viable options, Durocher said.