

Congressmen take tour on Caddo Lake, seek solution to invasive plant

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Dr. Randy Westbrook holds a piece of giant salvinia as he shares hopes that people will take notice of their boats and trailers to prevent its spread to more lakes across the country.

MARSHALL — Boaters are being asked to stop giant salvinia from spreading, as no method for eradication has been found.

Texas lawmakers also believe in prevention, and boaters who transport giant salvinia on their boats or trailers are subject to get a ticket.

“The violation will receive a citation for people who transport it,” said Texas Game Warden Todd Long, who serves Harrison County. “We’ve been trained and are watching for this.”

Long said the ticket is a misdemeanor and has a fine from \$25 to \$500 on a first offense.

State and federal officials toured Caddo Lake after holding a hearing on the problem of giant salvinia in local lakes. The lake’s shallow depths prevented the group from touring most of the lake.

While it was not the vast carpet seen in past years, officials did find small clumps.

U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert of Tyler said he was pleased to discover the giant salvinia weevils are a cost-effective method for controlling the plant and noted \$35,000 could buy 1.3 million of them.

“I still get a little nervous about introducing new things to kill something that was not here,” Gohmert said.

“They’ve got to get the weevils out early and in numbers so that they eat it faster than it grows, like a contest for if they will eat it fast enough,” said Randy Westbrook, an invasive species prevention specialist.

U.S. Rep. John Fleming of Louisiana also toured the lake.

Fleming is chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs, which heard testimony from experts in a morning meeting in Shreveport.

Texas Parks and Wildlife official Ross Melinchuk said Texas has budgeted \$750,000 for 2010-11 to manage invasive aquatic plants.

“State funding has now been eliminated for fiscal years 2012-2013, and the department is reliant on federal grants and partner cost-share to support these activities,” Melinchuk said.

He said prevention is the least expensive form of treatment.

“We cannot solve the problem on the Texas-side without solving it on the Louisiana-side,” said Rick Lowerre, president of the Caddo Lake Institute. “We need to be getting the people involved in cleaning boats.”

Game Warden Darrin Peoples pointed out the areas on a boat where giant salvinia may become wedged between it and trailer, including the skids.

“We’re making sure people clean their boats and trailers before they leave the lake,” said Long. “We also have signs posted at every public boat ramp.”

Even one tiny frond of the invasive aquatic fern can spawn more of the “green monster.”