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# Eagle keeps an eye out for lake

**UNCERTAIN, Texas** — Perched on a grimy bait-stand bench, beneath a sign that reads “fishing guides available,” a bearded man in an untucked denim shirt watches kids tumble off a dock into coffee-brown murk and boats cruise beneath the curtain of cypress.

At first glance, the sunburned man looks like any other Caddo Lake local.

It's his baseball cap that hints **Don Henley** isn't a typical lake rat.

Instead of faded camouflage, the hat is navy blue, its “LIFEGUARD” logo and Red-Cross emblem framed with: “Off Duty: Save Yourself.”

The rock star and East Texas native has spent nearly 20 years and millions of dollars helping Caddo Lake residents learn to do just that — to band together, arm themselves with scientific data and go to court and Congress to protect the place that the famed rock musician calls his church.

They've succeeded so far. The lake where Henley caught his first fish as a young boy from neighboring Linden is a world-renowned wetland laboratory, thanks to Henley's Caddo Lake



G.J. MCCARTHY: DALLAS MORNING NEWS

**HOTEL CADDO:** Don Henley earlier this month stands on the pier of a bootlegger's cabin on Caddo Lake near Uncertain, Texas. Henley, a Linden native and iconic musician, underwrites the Caddo Lake Institute. The foundation aims to safeguard the lake's ecology and cultural identity.

Institute.

“It's a success story in that we're still here,” Henley says. “And we're making progress, albeit slowly.”

Despite a century of exploitation of the lake, black bears and bobcats still haunt its remote corners.

Alligators and otters and mink glide through its labyrinth of sloughs. Bald eagles and blue herons,

egrets and ibis soar overhead.

Biologists hail Caddo as Texas' most diverse freshwater ecosystem and one of North America's finest bald cypress swamps.

The lake, which is located about 250 miles northeast of Houston, is a place that locals believe has a near-mystical power to help people find or lose themselves.

“You can more or less

leave your troubles on the land and escape back into the cypress swamp,” says resident **Robert Speight**. “You get back far enough and time stands still.” the local man adds

Scientists from around the country visit regularly for meetings sponsored by Henley's institute. One recent Thursday, several dozen gathered in a community center near the lake to share Speight's home-cooked barbecue and discuss research with him and the other locals whom Henley has dubbed “indigenous scholars.”

The locals credit Henley's institute for distilling their fierce contrarianism and love for Caddo Lake into a force.

“They've given us the tools,” Speight says of the institute, “to handle things ourselves.”

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**HOUSTON CHRONICLE**

For information on delivery, billing or how to become a subscriber, please call 713-362-7211. The Houston Chronicle (USPS 807-680) is published daily by Houston Chronicle Publishing Co., 801 Texas Avenue, Houston, TX 77002. Basic subscription rate: \$24 per month. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Houston Chronicle, PO Box