

# Caddo land transfer memo still in limbo - The Marshall News Messenger: News

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One year after two federal bureaucracies ended an 18-month stalemate over the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge, the paperwork appears mired at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

At issue is a memorandum of understanding between the Army and Fish and Wildlife Service that the two federal departments argued over from August 2010 to April 2012.

The agreement prompted a community celebration at Caddo Lake State Park adjacent to the 8,416-acre wildlife refuge.

But Paul Fortune, who co-chairs a citizens committee established under the U.S. Superfund Act to oversee cleanup at the Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant, said at the time he would not breathe easy until he saw the signed paperwork.

“And it’s been one year,” he said Wednesday. “And nothing’s happened.”

U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Tyler, who has been a proponent of this and other environmental issues swirling at Caddo Lake, expressed surprise Tuesday that the memo issue had not been resolved. He said he planned to investigate.

There has been progress, of sorts. In January, no one at the Fish and Wildlife Service’s Southwest Regional office in Albuquerque, N.M., could verify they’d received the memo from the Army.

“They actually did receive it,” Fortune said. “Actually, they got it in October of last year. I’ve got a letter (acknowledging that).”

Fortune will share that news to fellow members of the Restoration Advisory Board at 4:30 p.m. today in the Karnack Community Center.

The advisory board, or RAB, also is recruiting members at today’s meeting.

Anyone interested in the refuge and its environmental health is invited to apply regardless of whether they live or own land at Caddo Lake, Fortune said. Applicants can come to the meeting or call Fortune’s Army co-chair, Rose Zeiler, at (479) 635-0110 or email her at [rose.zeiler@us.army.mil](mailto:rose.zeiler@us.army.mil).

All but some 1,400 acres, and 3.2 billion gallons of water rights, at the former Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant have been declared pollution-free and transferred from Army to the to the refuge.

The Army, which owned the munitions plant, and the Fish and Wildlife Service that will own and manage the 2½-year-old refuge, were at loggerheads over that final 1,400 acres until a year ago.

The Army was ready to transfer ownership, but wanted assurance the wildlife service would not refuse it on some environmental technicality.

The wildlife service wanted Army's assurance that any ongoing cleanup of perchlorates, TNT components, heavy metals and other poisons would continue after the ownership transfer.

Meanwhile, the RAB group insisted the memo of understanding make clear no third party could make a play for land if the Army and the wildlife service could not complete the transfer of any parcels.

The 1,400 acres remaining in Army hands are on a dozen separate parcels.

"To me this is a no-brainer," Fortune said of the pending agreement. "Anybody in the real world out here could work on an agreement and get it done. And these guys have haggled over that for years and years and years and years."

On a related topic, Fortune reported he has been pleased with the new contractor the Army hired to do the actual cleanup.

"They are doing a better job of letting the public know what's going on," Fortune said of AECOM, a 23-year-old global provider of professional technical and management support services.

The Fortune 500 company took over from Shaw Environmental Services last fall. Shaw pulled out of its 10-year contract near the halfway mark without public explanation.

A Longview News-Journal request seeking information about the Shaw contract was sent to the Army in fall 2011. There has been no reply from the Army.