

Commissioners Court considers funding for giant salvinia control

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To help control the invasion of giant salvinia at Caddo Lake, the Harrison County Commissioners Court will consider approving additional funding to support Cypress Valley Navigation District's efforts in eradicating the aquatic plant and researching the best methods of control.

Members of the court will discuss the additional funding on Monday during their regular board meeting at 9 a.m. at the 1901 historic Harrison County Courthouse.

Cypress Valley Navigation District is one of many organizations such as the Greater Caddo Lake Association who have launched several efforts to control the problem.

And according to Jack Canson, a member of GCLA, the lake is in a critical stage right now with more than 6,000 acres on the Texas side covered by the invasive aquatic plant. It's so critical that U.S. Congressman Louie Gohmert shared his concerns during a town hall meeting here, hosted by the Republican Party of Harrison County.

"Hopefully all of y'all go out to Caddo Lake at least time to time. It is one of the greatest treasures, I think, in the country," Gohmert said to the crowd. "But, in addition to it becoming more shallow, because of all the vegetation that goes to the bottom, the giant salvinia is really taking over."

Gohmert said, fortunately, the research facility stationed at Caddo Lake Wildlife Refuge is coming along, and has proven that the weevil program seems to be the most effective method of control right now.

"The weevils seem to be a pretty sure thing, but it's just going to take an awful lot," he said. "This rain that's been done can keep some boat paths open, but it's not going to take care of the problem."

Gohmert said the people at Caddo Lake are doing absolutely everything they can to come together, but he would like to see the National Invasive Species Council step in to help as well.

"There is a National Invasive Species Council, whose job under the law, is to coordinate efforts to stop invasive species, and all that we can find so far that they've done is at least annually have a conference (where) they get together in nice surroundings and talk about it," he said.

“So, what I’m going to be doing this fall is making a demand on the NISC, that you start doing what you are created to do, start coordinating efforts,” Gohmert said of his plans to push for more help.

The Congressman said if the giant salvinia isn’t controlled, lakes across the south are going to be unusable.

“Caddo Lake ought to be the spot where we can show what can be done and then say, ‘OK, all the lakes that are starting to get some giant salvinia, this is how you deal with it, this is what we learned at Caddo Lake,’” said Gohmert. “So, I’m hoping we’re going to make this a proving ground for what works.

“Caddo Lake is too much of a treasure to let it go,” he said.

In addition to considering additional funding to help with the fight against giant salvinia at Caddo Lake, the commissioners court will also consider approval of five additional employees at the jail annex.

The additional staff is being requested by Sheriff Tom McCool. The sheriff told the commissioners court during a meeting in August that he would probably need more jail staff soon to accommodate the increase of inmates.

At the time, the population of inmates, including those taken in from Cass County, had significantly boosted over a one-week period.

“Due to the fact that we took in 96 inmates this past week and only were able to release 69, we had a net increase of about 30 prisoners over a week period of time,” McCool said at the time, adding that he expected many of the inmates to be incarcerated there for a prolonged period.

“Obviously, if those numbers stay at that level, we’ll be forced into a situation of looking at additional (staff),” he said then.

In other business, the commissioners court will take action to fill the unexpired term of Justice of the Peace precinct one, which was vacated by Westy Meisenheimer, who resigned to take the position as the new police chief in Waskom.

Other items on the agenda include:

Consider approval of the final plat for the subdivision Towering Oaks Phase V in Precinct 3 and the road construction and maintenance bond for the subdivision;

Consider action to adopt a resolution approving the inclusion of Kaufman County into the membership of the NET-RMA;

Consider approval of a SAVNS grant contract between the Office of Attorney General and the county for a period of one year commencing on Sept. 1, and terminating on Aug. 31, 2014;

Consider approval of an engagement letter with Pattillo, Brown & Hill LLP to provide Harrison County audit services for the year ending Sept. 30, 2013;

Consider approval for out-of-state training for a taser instructor in Texarkana, Ark., Sept. 17-18 as requested by the sheriff's department.