

Dinosaur-era paddlefish once again inhabit Caddo Lake

Red River Radio (KLDN-Lufkin) / By [Kate Archer Kent](#) – March 6, 2014

Close to 50 paddlefish are once again swimming around in Caddo Lake. Scientists and researchers from a half dozen federal and private agencies are collaborating on an effort to evaluate the health of the Caddo Lake watershed, and the dinosaur-era paddlefish will be a leading indicator.



Photo: [The Nature Conservancy](#)

They disappeared from Caddo Lake after a dam was built in the 1950s, changing how water flowed through the watershed. But now, according to the president of the [Caddo Lake Institute](#), Rick Lowerre, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has agreed to change how water is released from the dam so it can more closely mimic nature that directly impacts paddlefish spawning.

“It’s also a test case -- not just for Texas and Louisiana -- but really the whole nation about changing the way the Corps of Engineers operates reservoirs and uses their flood waters, which they trap, and therefore can be used and released in a way that restores and protects habitat,” Lowerre said.

These test paddlefish were raised in Oklahoma and trucked in this week to Jefferson, Texas, for their release. Lowerre says they are all chipped, so the researchers can closely monitor their whereabouts in Caddo Lake and Big Cypress Bayou.

“We’ll have towers set up to receive the signals when the fish pass the towers. So we’ll be able to tell where the fish are going, if they are staying in the system, how they’re doing, where they are moving,” Lowerre said.

Scientists and students from 20 schools are monitoring the fish. The transmitters also provide information on water quality. If the paddlefish fare well over the next six months, according to Lowerre, scientists may decide to introduce thousands of paddlefish to encourage the restoration of this endangered fish and further improve the Caddo Lake watershed.

The paddlefish release project is part of a national effort with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to modernize dam operations at several sites around the country.