

Ore City fined \$26K for water violation

By Glenn Evans gevans@news-journal.com | Posted: Wednesday, September 24, 2014 4:00 am

The state environmental commission in Austin is scheduled today to weigh an agreement with Ore City allowing a \$26,000 fine for wastewater violations to instead boost an ongoing water quality study at nearby Caddo Lake.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality will take up Ore City's request in Austin this morning. The city is asking, in an agreed order signed by Mayor Glenn Breazeale, to allow it to give the fine to the Caddo Lake Institute for its monitoring of water quality in the wetlands.

The fine arose from the arrival of a food producer that overtaxed the city's wastewater treatment plant, City Secretary Gail Weir said. The result was roughly four months, in 2013, in which discharges of ammonia nitrogen from the sewage plant into the Cypress Creek basin exceeded levels considered healthy.

In excessive amounts, ammonia nitrogen harms aquatic life and lowers the oxygen content of water.

"We didn't anticipate the effect that they had on our plant," Weir said. "They made some adjustments on their end, as far as treating the waste before it comes to us. The industry was very cooperative with us in helping."

Few city wastewater treatment plants are equipped to handle industrial waste unless it is pre-treated before arriving at the city facility. Kilgore faced the same challenge, and threat of state action, a few years ago.

The agreed order, if approved in Austin today, is not admissible in any civil lawsuits against the city regarding the excessive discharges at the plant. That is a typical element of such agreements.

The water quality monitoring program at the Caddo Lake Institute is at least a decade old and is under the direction of East Texas Baptist University biologist Roy Darville. It now includes monthly monitoring of six sites in the Caddo Lake wetlands.