

## East Texas News

### Caddo Lake: Exploring the internationally renowned wetland

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CADDO LAKE, TX. - After a second round of flooding at Caddo Lake, water levels are dropping. According to the National Weather Service, the lake is at about 174 feet above sea level.

Rick Michaels has deep roots at Caddo Lake. His family has been there since 1919 and is very familiar with Caddo's past. "There was no Lake O' the Pines. There was no Toledo Bend, no Sam Rayburn. None of the Corps lakes were even in existence then. If God didn't make it, it wasn't here," Michaels explained.

People from all over the country would fly into Caddo to hunt and fish. "When I was a little kid my grandfather used to tell me stories about duck hunting. They had one boat for the hunters, one boat for the decoys that were all alive and one boat for the kill. There was no limit no anything," Michaels recalled.

"This was the very first place in the world where an offshore well was ever drilled. It was called over-water oil drilling and it was drilled here by Howard Hughes' father," Michaels revealed. And people still come, but not just to hunt and fish but to just experience the only large natural lake in Texas.

"When the water level is down, if you go next door to the restaurant by my house, you'll go in there and there are people from China, people from India, Australia, people from France, England, they come here from all over the place," Michaels said.

Much of that is due to Caddo being declared an internationally protected wetland in 1993 under the RAMSAR Treaty. Since 1971, there has been a conference held every three years to designate new protected wetland sites worldwide. Caddo is the only declared site in Texas.

"We get a lot of attention because of some of our noble residents and folks that have an interest in the lake, like Don Henley who brings a lot of folks from the National Geographic Channel the Nature Channel, and publications from all over the world, which is good. Because when people see Caddo they appreciate it more and they start having the same feelings about it that we do," Michaels stated.

So it's not just residents that want the lake protected. "I grew up thinking that this was my lake. Well, it's not my lake it's his lake and your lake and that guy's lake right there but, you know, everybody that loves Caddo Lake thinks it's their lake. It's a personal thing. It's a love affair," Michaels concluded.

He says if you visit Caddo once, you'll come back to what Don Henley of the Eagles refers to as his "Church." Caddo has one of the largest flooded cypress forests in the United States. The lake was artificially altered by a dam built in the early 1900s. The lake level is still about 6 feet above normal, but it is dropping.