

CADDO LAKE NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER CADDO LAKE ASSOCIATION AUGUST 2007

Caddo Lake Under Siege State of Emergency Has Arrived.

Giant salvinia is overtaking large areas of Caddo Lake right now. If current rates of expansion are not halted soon by massive intervention, the ecological devastation and impact on recreation and even property values will be vast.

We have received tremendous support and encouragement from Texas Parks & Wildlife officials, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, and other agencies. They are doing what they can to help with the resources they have. What we need is for them, and our community groups, to get more and better resources.

It is time for everyone to call on all elected officials from Louisiana and Texas and urge that the states and the federal government wake up to the magnitude of this problem at Caddo Lake and other lakes and provide an appropriate level of emergency response. State Senator Kevin Eltife, and State Representatives Bryan Hughes and Stephen Frost are already helping. Congressman Louis Gohmert is very committed to helping. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison has also helped.

But we are going to need a lot more help, and fast. And that means we need you to let them know you appreciate their efforts. And we need you to contact other elected officials in Texas and Louisiana and urge them to get on the ball.

Currently, our situation is comparable to a rural volunteer fire department combating a raging forest fire that is spread across 32,000 acres in two states.

New infestations are spreading all over the lake daily. Many shoreline property owners in the Jeem's Bayou area in Louisiana can no longer get their boats out of their stalls or fish off their docks. Almost the entire eastern side of Big Green Brake is so thickly matted with giant salvinia that even Go-Devils can no longer move through it. Large rafts of giant salvinia are threatening the city of Vivian, Louisiana's water supply intakes.

In Big Green Brake alone, an estimated one-half square mile of spawning grounds has been lost to the world's worst invasive aquatic plant. Nothing lives under giant salvinia. The plants block out all sunlight and deplete all dissolved oxygen from the water. (See photo: Big Green Brake 8/02/07.)

In Texas, the fight against giant salvinia has largely been in the capable hands of the Cypress Valley Navigation District and the Texas GCLA. This is that rural volunteer fire department, scrounging equipment and supplies to hold the line. They are doing what they can but they can't beat back this monster plant by themselves no more than three guys with a garden hose can beat back a 32,000 acre forest fire.

Two new dimensions to the fight against giant salvinia at Caddo Lake must begin immediately.

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The President's Corner

I hope that by the time you read this, the dog days of August will be coming to an end. Unseasonably mild and wet weather has broken the 2 + year drought and keeps Caddo well above normal summertime levels. July saw lots of rain and the water got high enough to make some folks in the lower areas sweat, but all the water did was give us a good flushing out and recharged the backwater areas.

Since our last issue the Cypress Valley Navigation District has completed the 2 mile barricade across the lake and it is performing as expected. Although the barricade is stopping 95% of the Giant Salvinia from spreading to the western parts of the lake, some salvinia did get here before the barricade was finished. Para professional spray teams along with TPWD spray crews are currently seeking out these infestations and knocking them back. The barricade is also patrolled every day, weather permitting, and any salvinia found is removed and properly disposed of.

Boaters Beware! Giant Salvinia can hitch a ride on your boat and your trailer! Please take a few minutes to inspect your boat and trailer for these aquatic hitchhikers. Remove any vegetation you find so you do not spread salvinia to other ramps or other lakes. Boats and trailers are the main way this stuff migrates from lake to lake. It is against Federal and State laws to transport salvinia. Texas recently updated their laws to make it a ticketable offense if you are found with any invasive species on your vehicle. First offense is a \$500.00 fine. That would surely put a damper on your fishing trip.

Labor Day is almost here and that means...Annual BBQ time! We will have the GCLA Barbeque on Saturday September 1st at Crip's Camp. Come on out and join us for some fine food and catch up on the latest happenings around the lake. See ya there!

Robert Speight

IT'S BBQ TIME



The annual GCLA BBQ will be held Saturday, September 1st at Crip's Camp. Serving will begin around 11:00 AM and last until 2:00 PM or until it's all gone. BBQ and all the fixin's will be available at the ridiculously low price of \$8 per adult and \$5 for each child 12 and under. Pack everyone in the car and enjoy great food and great company.

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GCLA Web Site

www.caddolakenews.net

GCLA's web site is evolving into our primary vehicle to provide information to our members and to the general public. Check out our site for the latest information and let us know what you like and what else you would like to see. It is a work in progress.

(...Siege, continued)

One of these new dimensions can be accomplished locally. The other will require the commitment of significant federal or other multi-state resources. They are:

One: boat road openings in the Caddo Lake Giant Salvinia Containment Barricade must be tightened. The protected western area of the lake must be better protected.

Two: massive containment and control operations must begin soon on the Louisiana side of the lake, where infestations are rampant. The contaminated area must be cleaned up

CLOSING BOAT ROAD OPENINGS:

There are two large openings in the barricade, one at Boat Road C near Miller's Point on the north shore and the other at Boat Road A near Swanson's Landing on the south shore.

CVND/GCLA Weed Wardens are removing giant salvinia and water hyacinth from the barricade and chasing down and spraying new infestations daily. But as the huge infestations in Big Green Brake and Tar Island continue to expand, doubling in volume every 5 to 7 days, tens of thousands of plants migrate westward every time the winds blow from Louisiana to Texas. Too many of these plants are finding their way through these wide openings.

Also, bass fishermen chasing trophies, duck hunters working on blinds, and sightseers are moving in and out of these infested waters and helping to disperse giant salvinia into the boat roads. Every time a boat blows through one of the openings at high speeds the job of tracking down migrating giant salvinia on the western, protected side of the lake gets tougher.

CVND is now considering a proposal to erect new containment structures at these openings that will require boaters to reduce their speed. Ample warning buoys and signs will require boat operators to reduce speed and boaters will be asked to check their boats to make sure plants are not clinging to the boat or engine before entering the protected area. Transporting giant salvinia in any fashion without a permit is illegal and punishable by a \$500 fine. (see photo giant salvinia on boat & trailer)

Boaters must become aware that when they go west through boat roads C and A, they are leaving a contaminated zone and entering a protected one – and they must behave accordingly.

MASSIVE CONTAINMENT & CONTROL OPERATIONS IN LOUISIANA:

A little over one year ago, when giant salvinia was first reported in Caddo Lake, a group representing CVND, Texas GCLA, and the Caddo Lake Institute made a presentation in Oil City, Louisiana to a large group that included many residents of the Jeem's Bayou area and a number of state and local agency officials.

That proposal called for a containment barricade across Jeem's Bayou where an infestation of 300 to 350 acres of giant salvinia had developed. Had that barricade been erected, and the other recommended prevention measures been put into place, we would not be facing the state of emergency we face today. Unfortunately, there were no state or federal resources available to take those steps – and efforts to generate a community-based response did not gain traction.

When January 2007 flooding washed hundreds of acres of giant salvinia out of Jeem's Bayou and into Big Green Brake and Tar Island, a community-based response took shape around CVND and GCLA on the Texas side. Harrison County Judge Richard Anderson convened an urgent meeting that created a guiding council to raise funds and provide management oversight. \$65,000 was raised from Harrison County, the City of Marshall, Northeast Texas Municipal Water District, CLI, CVND, AEP/SWEPCO and Lone Star Steel. These funds, along with over 1,000 contributed volunteer hours of labor, provided the resources to build the two-mile long containment barricade and support the Weed Warden Spray & Removal initial operations.

Judge Anderson, CVND Chairman Ken Shaw, GCLA President Robert Speight and others, including Caddo Lake's best friend in Austin, governmental liaison specialist V.A. Stephens, lobbied the legislature for funds to continue the Caddo Lake giant salvinia control program in Texas waters. With the unwavering commitment and hard work of State Senator Eltife and State Representatives Hughes and Frost, \$120,000 per year was earmarked for Caddo Lake boat roads with the understanding that CVND's primary tasks are maintaining the barricade and suppressing infestations west of the barricade.

This model community effort, partially supported by CLI and U S Fish & Wildlife Foundation, has made it possible for us to still save the western half of Caddo Lake from being overwhelmed by giant salvinia. But it can only hold the line for so long, and of course it does not attack the source of the problem, the huge and rapidly expanding infestations in Louisiana.

Most estimates of the cost of arresting the giant salvinia at Caddo Lake are in the \$1.5 million a year range. To stop the expansion and beat back infestations will require federally funded projects and the cooperation of Texas and Louisiana agencies.



Big Green Brake 8/02/07



Giant salvinia on boat & trailer.

U.S. Representative Louis Gohmert (1st District, Texas) has been among the first in Congress to recognize the magnitude of this threat to Caddo and other lakes and the need for federal funding. He is working with federal agencies to find immediate help. He is working with our local groups to develop ideas for future appropriations. (Congressman Gohmert will make a fact-finding tour of Caddo Lake August 29 and tour CVND/GCLA operations.)

U. S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison has also assisted this effort by helping to obtain \$40 thousand dollars of U.S. Fish & Wildlife funds to support Spray & Removal operations.

Their efforts so far are commendable and we are confident they will increase as the true magnitude of the giant salvinia emergency at Caddo Lake becomes more and more apparent.

All members of GCLA and all who love and care about Caddo Lake should be contacting our senators and representatives now, state and federal, and in Louisiana as well as Texas.

We are going to ask a lot from them. And it won't be inexpensive.

But what is the cost of losing Caddo Lake?

Check www.caddolakenews.net often for updates and for contact information on Texas and Louisiana elected officials.

Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge Update

Mark Williams, Manager of the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge, has been instrumental in acquiring US Fish and Wildlife Service funding for the Caddo Lake fight against giant salvinia, with a challenge cost-share agreement of \$40,000. Through Williams, the FWS has made a commitment to support GCLA's effort to control the weed, both financially and through use of the facilities and equipment of the FWS. The Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes the gravity of the threat of salvinia and is partnering with Texas Parks and Wildlife, CVND, and GCLA to fund research into control of the plant.

The CLNWR is getting closer to the official opening every day, according to Jay Webb, President of the Friends of Caddo Lake NWR. There are boundary issues remaining with the Army preventing full public access at this time, he said, but signage and deconstruction of the remaining Thiokol infrastructure are underway now. Presently, there is limited public access. Recently, four members of the Youth Conservation Corps, Stephanie Winn, Chance McKinley, Eric Hunter and Rob Bramlett, spent 8 weeks erecting boundary signs, maintaining and marking roadways within the Refuge, all necessary preparations for opening. Nationally, the YCC are local youths between the ages of 15-18 who learn about conservation while being paid for their work on various Refuges during the summer. The program offers first-time employment for many teenagers across the country, often in rural settings where job opportunities are limited. Because the unique geography of the Caddo Lake Refuge makes adequate signage a necessity to help visitors from becoming lost in the 8,000 acres, the four workers performed a valuable service.

The Refuge and Caddo Lake Institute are preparing to co-host the November meeting of the International Ramsar Convention, which is scheduled to convene at a new CLNWR Visitors Center on Nov 2-3. As many as 30 participants from countries around the world are expected to visit and tour Caddo Lake, stay in the guest houses in and around Uncertain, and experience East Texas hospitality as they attend presentations on wetland conservation. The new Refuge Visitors Center is under construction and will be ready for the Ramsar participants, courtesy of FEMA. Two 14 X 64 mobile homes were moved into place recently and modifications to convert them into classroom and public use areas are to begin soon.

In keeping with the educational mission of the Refuge, two Universities have been conducting research at the Refuge this summer. Stephen F. Austin has both a bat study program and a black bear census project underway and UT-Tyler is conducting a herpetology study (no bears yet, lots of
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(...Refuge Update, continued)

snakes and bats). Some of the participating students are housed on the Refuge during research periods, and all have use of the Administration office facilities during their studies. As education is a primary function of the Refuge system, any school group is welcome and urged to contact the Refuge manager, Mark Williams (903-679-9144), if they wish to utilize the Refuge facilities and property.

Webb says the Friends of CLNWR hope to increase volunteerism and membership in the group to support the Refuge programs and personnel, and urges anyone interested to contact the Friends group at www.caddofriends@hotmail.com. Volunteers will be instrumental in getting the Refuge open to the public and many levels of involvement and positions will be available.

See you at the barbeque

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