

Sen. Hutchison Applauds Agreement on Caddo Land and Water Rights Transfers

April 20, 2012

WASHINGTON –Today, U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) issued the following statement on the news that an agreement had been reached on Caddo land and water rights transfers: "During the last six months, I've worked very hard to bring together the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Army on finalizing a land and water rights transfer to the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Today, I'm pleased to announce that the groups have reached a responsible long-term agreement, which will enhance one of the natural treasures of our state and our nation.

Harrison County Judge Hugh Taylor and Commissioner Jeff Thompson, as well as Representative Louis Gohmert, provided great assistance in securing this important outcome for Caddo Lake."

Key Points:

- On April 18, 2012 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and the U.S. Army met to discuss ongoing issues related to the transfer of lands and water rights (transfer) from the Longhorn Army Ammunitions Plant (AAP) to the Caddo Lake NWR.
- Both Agencies agreed to proceed with the transfer of additional lands and associated water rights in 2012, and the Army will be responsible for all Land Use Controls associated with properties transferred to the Service.
- Both agencies agreed to sign a Memorandum of Agreement to allow the Service to perform maintenance on environmental sites with Army funding.
- Additional lands identified in Environmental Condition of Property (ECOP) 6 and associated water rights will be provided to the Service for review and potential transfer to the Caddo Lake NWR.
- Both parties agreed to sign a permit for 15 years for the Caddo Lake NWR to manage remaining lands under the Army's jurisdiction as part of the Refuge.
- Both parties agreed to prohibit surface entry for mineral extraction with the exception of two areas previously identified for entry and lease.

Background: ·

- On October 19, 2000, the Service approved the establishment of the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge on portions of the approximately 85,000-acre Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant in Harrison County, Texas. The Refuge purpose is the management, conservation, and protection of migratory birds and other fish and wildlife. This bottomland hardwood forest ecosystem provides essential habitat for a diversity of migratory and resident wildlife species in Texas.
- Caddo Lake NWR contains some of the best examples of mature flooded bald cypress forest in the United States and includes cypress trees nearly 400 years old. The Caddo Lake wetlands also support one of the most diverse plant communities in Texas.
- The wetlands of Caddo Lake are very important to migratory bird species within the Central Flyway. The area supports one of the highest breeding populations of wood ducks, prothonotary warblers, and other birds in the United States.
- The Army must complete environmental actions before land may be added to the Refuge.

Current Status:

- The Service continues to work with the Army, the public, and partners (e.g. the Caddo Lake Institute) on management and conservation of the Caddo Lake ecosystem.
- The Caddo Lake NWR has minimal staffing and helps oversee management of the Neches River NWR as well.
- Public interest and support for the Caddo Lake NWR and the Army's continued cleanup efforts, and transfer of lands and associated water rights remain high.