

Meeting will focus on long-term effects of drought on Caddo

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The effects of the lingering drought in East Texas on Caddo Lake and the Big Cypress Basin are among environmental factors being considered by scientists, water managers, community members and other stakeholders meeting in Jefferson today and Wednesday.

The event is the latest in a series of environmental flow workshops covering the Northeast Texas watershed region that began in 2004 and will be held in at the Jeffersonian Institute, 120 East Austin Street. It is open to the public, according to Caddo Lake Institute spokeswoman Dawn Orsak.

Organized by the Institute and The Nature Conservancy, the workshop will examine technical aspects of biology, hydrology, hydraulics and water quality – called the building blocks of ecological flows, Orsak said. The focus will be on helping to ensure adequate water for people and wildlife in the Big Cypress Basin and Caddo Lake area for years to come, she said.

Participants will review the work done in these areas to date and make appropriate adjustments to the current recommendations for environmental flow regimes and the state reservation of water. The workshop also will focus on adaptive management and provide the opportunity for participants to determine the full set of indicators of success that will guide longer term management.

The workshops originally were developed to help protect freshwater ecosystems by advancing water policies and management approaches that secure adequate water flows in rivers, lakes and wetlands.

Caddo Lake and Big Cypress Bayou are part of the Sustainable Rivers Project, a national partnership between The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to protect river ecosystems downstream of Corps dams while still providing for the other purposes of the facilities, according to Ryan Smith, freshwater ecologist for The Nature Conservancy of Texas.

“The Sustainable Rivers Project partnership has advanced approaches for balancing the many needs we have from our nation’s rivers, and the Caddo Lake partners should be proud of the role their work has played in this,” Smith said.

Environmental flows are much on the minds of Texas water experts these days, according to Richard Lowerre, president of the Caddo Lake Institute.

“The ultimate goal of the Environmental Flows work is to determine how much water is needed to maintain the ecological health of Caddo Lake and its tributaries as habitat for animals and plants while supplying adequate water for human needs such as drinking water and recreation,” Lowerre said.