

Stephen F. Austin State University

May 3, 1993

Hon. Bruce Babbitt
Secretary of the Interior
of the United States of America
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Secretary Babbitt:

I am writing to you on behalf of those of our faculty and students who are participating in the Caddo Lake Scholars Program initiative of Mr. Don Henley.

Our university was one of the three founders of the "Caddo Lake Scholars College Consortium", which was organized by Mr. Don Henley to conduct the Caddo Lake Scholars Program. Invaluable and indispensable enrichment of the consortium program was provided by personnel of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); its Lafayette Louisiana Wetlands Research Center, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Historical Commission's Department of Antiquities Preservation. We hope this consortium and its Caddo Lake Scholars program will continue to incorporate more government expertise and advocacy with the ecological and academic commitments which exist in all of the small colleges and universities which surround Caddo Lake.

Although the Caddo Lake Scholars program has just begun, we have been profoundly impressed with our collective responsibility to protect and preserve--for research and public education purposes -- the unique biological laboratory of the Caddo Lake wetland system. As Virginia Burkett of the WSFWS Wetlands Center recently commented Caddo Lake sheer size and bio-diversity make it "the best of what's left" of our vanishing hardwood bottomlands.

Caddo Lake is a wetland system of international, not just local, importance. Caddo Lake's bio-diversity permits present levels of residents and visitors to co-exist with numerous endangered and threatened species of plants and animals, and a wide range of flora and fauna indigenous to this ecoregion. Caddo Lake's international importance also arises from its role as a critical nesting, resting and breeding waystation which supports international migrations of our diminishing neo-tropical birds, and other migratory game and non-game birds.

Locally Caddo Lake's Wetlands system provides us with the benefits of natural wetlands: biological water purification, contaminant degradation, and flood control. Present levels of game, fishing and recreational uses are sufficiently non-intensive to preserve the system while providing substantial benefits to our local economies.

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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But we believe that far greater dividends may accrue to our local educational institutions, our communities and their economies (and indeed to the world) by immediate initiation of a phased plan for the careful preservation and wise use of Caddo Lake's wetlands as a nationally and internationally renowned bio-diversity preserve and research center.

We therefore recommend the following as important, immediate "first steps" of such a program:

1. Category I Habitat. Prompt USFWS classification of Caddo Lake as a Category I habitat area, as more specifically proposed in the recommendation to USFWS Region II by Supervisor Rogers (forwarded March 18, 1993.)
2. Ramsar Treaty Designation. Prompt designation of the same area as "Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat", under the 1971 Ramsar Treaty. Please consider this letter our nomination for such status. We incorporate by reference the existing USFWS materials referred to above. We believe these reflect compliance with the purposes and criteria treaty. Our reading of the treaty reflects that it will not curtail rights of private ownership and will encourage wise use of this resource in ways which preserve the natural integrity of this bio-system.
3. Caddo Lake Bio-Regional Bio-Diversity (Research & Teaching) Center. The Department of the Interior should establish on the shores of the Caddo Lake, within the initial treaty area, a "Bio-regional Bio-diversity Research, Teaching and Outreach Center."

Initially, this Center should be a field branch of the USFWS Lafayette Louisiana Wetlands Research Center. Initially, it should be situated within available existing facilities of the Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant, where operations are scheduled for curtailment in 1993. The Center should be authorized and budgeted for permanent operation. A 1974 initial appropriation should be sufficient to pay marginal costs of land and facility occupancy. In addition there should be an initial program budget of at least \$500,000, for the purpose of supporting a local staff of a half a dozen scientists and support personnel. They should be asked to prepare programs to conduct multi-year bio-regional ecological characterizations, research, preservation and outreach activities which are based upon Caddo Lake ecological and cultural values.

Consideration should be given to selection of a permanent facility in depressed areas of Marion or Harrison County, if the site can be readily added to the Ramsar treaty area, or associated wildlife refuges.

4. Outreach functions. The eventual range of "outreach" functions of the Center should include: (1) Staff job descriptions which include meaningful "adjunct" teaching and mentoring functions. These should be targeted to encourage or respond to the regional bio-diversity visitor centers based on these values (3) research and teaching spaces and programs available for participation by local environmental studies and career training programs; (4) research, teaching and learning spaces and programs for other federal and state environmental and cultural agencies, and visiting scientists and educators, and (5) "environmental equity" programs, i. e. training of the minority and economically disadvantaged people of our region to enter and participate at all levels of the environmental career training and work.

We pledge ourselves to enrich our environmental, ecological cultural and minority studies to target these local and regional objectives and populations. We believe that this approach provides more of what these populations need than conventional and often incompatible, public works "trickle down" construction programs.

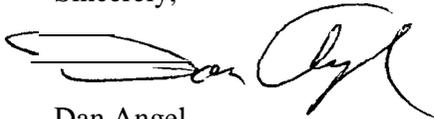
It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of targeting the Center's outreach and enrichment programs to our local institutions (as distinguished from distant mega-universities or private research institutions.) This feature is essential if our local communities and institutions are to value, and fulfill their roles as advocates and protectors of the natural systems of Caddo Lake.

5. Enlargement of Caddo Lake Scholars Program We are ready to continue with Mr. Henley to enlarge and refine the Caddo Lake Scholars Program. It could eventually include not only all of the educational systems and institutions surrounding Caddo Lake, but also a wider population of "champions" -- regional, national and international visitors who become our partners in the preservation and exploration of the mysteries of this remarkable natural laboratory.

We have forwarded copies of this letter to our respected member of Congress, Mr. Jim Chapman, and to our Senators John Krueger and Phil Gramm, with our individual requests for their support and help. Informational copies have also been forwarded to President Clinton and Vice President Gore, and other indicated parties, for the same purpose. Consortium members who wish to participate in this initiative are forwarding similar letters.

We have also asked Mr. Henley and Dwight Shellman (his colleague in this endeavor) to deliver this letter to you and to the other addressees, and to communicate our willingness to consult with you and the other participating members of our consortium before the current appropriation process proceeds much further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Angel", written over a horizontal line.

Dan Angel
President

cc: Dr. Janelle Ashley
Dr. Scott Beasley
Dr. Jack McCullough