

WORKING TOGETHER FOR WETLANDS CONFERENCE
APRIL 25, 1996

SO MANY WETLANDS; SO LITTLE TIME. .
A call for the rapid proliferation of
local wetland science education for local wetland
monitoring, stewardship and mentorship

By Don Henley

I would like to talk to you this morning about what large agencies and small communities can do to stimulate the rapid proliferation of community wetland science programs -- that is, to use local wetlands to educate communities in wetland science and stewardship.

These suggestions are logical extensions of what Senator Wirth has advocated since he joined the U.S. Department of State. He said that the most “bang for the buck” in solving environmental problems of the former Eastern Block countries would result from underwriting local NGOs (non-governmental organizations).

Investing in U.S. Wetland Communities. We believe that the Caddo Lake Institute’s experience proves that this would be an excellent strategy to help small U.S. communities to conserve their wetlands. One of the best uses of scarce environmental dollars in the U.S. is to invest them in local people who enrich community wetland science education, stewardship, monitoring and mentorship.

These investments should be both direct and indirect.

Direct investment should pay the marginal costs of wetland science training for community educators, their colleges and schools plus any local NGO’s they create. These direct investments would enable them to do the following things:

- o To create curricula to teach the wetland science of local wetlands.

- To conduct scientifically-valid, baseline monitoring of the health, and the natural functions and values of these local ecosystems.
- To equip community science educators to act as “mentors” by providing guidance to their local land-owning neighbors.

Indirect investments should accomplish the following:

- They should make technical equipment and facilities of the various agencies accessible to local science wetland educators.
- They should provide technical support by wetland scientists and technology experts.

(Some of the world’s most noted experts are those very same government scientists, field biologists and bureaucrats who have so recently become the whipping boys of today’s fringe politicians and their constituency.)

These “marginal cost partnerships” between local educators and more remote conservation agencies represent “win-win” opportunities for all.

Small community schools and colleges are already funded and charged with the task of teaching scientific methods and the highest and best use of natural systems.

- Yet many people believe that this is not being done effectively by classroom-bound science or philosophically-based, environmental “awareness” courses.
- Very few courses use local ecosystems for field-based natural science training.

- In most cases, educational courses do not provide skills that can inform community decision-making which might alter local wetland functions and values.

Local communities win by receiving such inducements to refocus their already paid-for community resources in order to implement useful wetland science education.

Large agencies also win. They too receive funds and are mandated to accomplish conservation stewardship.

- Few of these agencies can afford to have employees reside in, or even visit, every wetland community.
- Like local communities, government agencies need only re-target existing funding -- such as funding for conservation reserves; ecosystem monitoring; wetland, wildlife and bird habitat programs in order to accomplish numerous agency objectives through such local wetland education enrichments.
- Useful monitoring data can be collected at marginal cost for early warning and agency follow up purposes.
- Agency people can take more constructive roles as technical advisors and mentors, rather than as “revenueurs, ” watchdogs or law enforcers.

The Caddo Lake Institute’s Experience. The Caddo Lake Institute, through its Caddo Lake Scholars Program, has developed such a “win-win” partnership with the Interior Department’s U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, its National Biological Service, the U.S. State Department and the Parks and Wildlife Department of the State of Texas.

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This morning I will not be able to tell you as much as I would like about Caddo Lake, the Caddo Lake Institute, its Scholars Program or its Pathfinder Projects.

- Please go to the Institute's booth.
- Look at the descriptive brochures, the curriculum and monitoring materials which the Institute has created or has assembled from many sources.
- Observe and question master teachers Sara Kneipp, Peggy Byassee and Kenneth Winn and their Wetland Intern students during the breakout sessions.
- Ask to see the Institute's homemade documentary videotape called "The Caddo Lake Scholars Program: Acting globally by acting locally." This video shows how our local schools and colleges collaborated in their academic ecosystem monitoring, their new wetland science curricula and their field training programs.
- It shows the technical support provided by the National Biological Service and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.
- The video also shows the formation of the League of Ramsar Wetland Educators.
- And it demonstrates the Institute's initial joint monitoring relationships (called "Twinings") with other Master Wetland Educators at Ramsar wetlands in the U.S and elsewhere in the world.

The Ramsar Convention is a "window" to the world for small communities. The video suggests how the Ramsar Convention provides a common theme that can connect Ramsar League educators of many cultures -- when they accept stewardship and mentorship roles in their Ramsar wetland communities.

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That is why the Institute places considerable emphasis on the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. It is an excellent vehicle to introduce global sustainability issues to small-community educators and student interns.

- Our course work includes overviews of the Bruntland Report (Our Common Future); IUCN's Caring for the Earth; a Strategy for Sustainable Living and The Rio Summit and its byproducts.
- Our courses explore the importance of NGO action, the Biodiversity and Global Warming conventions and Agenda 21.
- Our courses compare the regulatory CITES Convention on endangered species with the non-regulatory Ramsar Convention on International Wetlands.

This is important information for educators in communities where some uninformed, but locally influential, people regard these topics -- or even the concept of "internationalism" generally -- as vast conspiracies for their own personal oppression and as objects of deep suspicion.

International twinnings and exchanges serve to personalize some hard realities. These include the immense and pervasive cultural and economic obstacles to achieving sustainability, and sometimes even communication. These realities include the insight that thousands of individuals attend hundreds of conferences and technical sessions each year. Their sacrifices only move the global process by "inches per year," when "miles per hour" is what the situation actually requires.

Our wetland "twinnings" are currently underway or, in many cases, are just beginning:

- Some have begun internationally with Kenya, Ethiopia, Hungary, Turkey, Honduras, Australia, Western Samoa, Japan, the United Kingdom and several Pacific Rim locales.

- Nationally, the first U.S. twinning occurred between members of one of our Caddo Lake “Scholars” clubs and their counterparts in an Illinois Cache River Ramsar wetland community.

These twinings will help wetland communities in many ways. For example, they will:

- Establish biological baseline data for their local wetlands. They will do this through monitoring. These are important Ramsar objectives.
- They will inform community decision-making by teaching the actual functions and values of local wetlands, which become science laboratories.
- They will teach Ramsar technical and scientific criteria for wetlands.
- And they will encourage local people to apply these Ramsar criteria to describe and nominate additional wetlands for possible Ramsar designation, public or private.

Agency Action. What can most large agencies do to stimulate effective community action? Agencies must demonstrate a commitment not to dampen local enthusiasm by bureaucratic delay. We believe that the U.S. State and Interior Departments will again show their ability to provide prompt support for our local NGO when they respond to the Caddo Lake Institute’s newest initiatives:

- We hope that their first response will be to join in our nomination of two privately-owned tracts totaling 3,500 acres, for addition to our existing Ramsar site.

- Secondly, we need their help in obtaining Department of Defense concurrence in the Ramsar designation of several thousand acres of forested old growth wetlands, and critical upland catchment areas, which lie within the U.S.-owned Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant. This inactive plant is located on the shores of Caddo Lake.
- Thirdly, we need their assistance in expediting approval of the Institute's proposed long-term leases and options to lease natural areas within the Longhorn facility.
- Fourth, we would welcome any agency assistance that will permit us to promptly occupy these leased lands in order to establish the first U.S. Regional Ramsar Center and an Academy of Wetland Science Education. These new facilities will be charged with the task of using Ramsar principles to expand wetland science education, stewardship and mentorship.
- We would also ask that the U.S. State and Interior Departments request the Ramsar Bureau in Geneva, Switzerland to expedite endorsement of these designations and initiatives.
- And finally, we would seek official authorization of the Institute to help obtain prompt completion for these projects.

We have an excellent track record as a team. In 1993, our public-private partnership expedited the designation of Caddo Lake as the 13th U.S. Ramsar site. In March of 1996, the Institute's plan to expend \$100,000 to develop the Ramsar Center and Academy was included as part of the pledge which the United States Government made at Brisbane, Australia, to advance the goals of the Ramsar Convention.

I am so confident about the ability of our partnership to promptly accomplish these two new objectives that I would like to invite everyone in this room to come to Caddo Lake in October 1996 for official designation of additional private and public Ramsar lands, and kick-off ceremonies for our Ramsar Center and Academy projects.

Community Action. I would like to offer a few suggestions, if I might, to local community educators who want to join in this small community/large agency initiative:

- Your involvement will accelerate this global process. You can best do this by acting locally in ways that I have discussed.
- You can aid the initiative by helping your community organizations teach and use applied wetland science stewardship and mentorship.

Any community entity you choose will do, as long as it suits the locality and you.

The Caddo Lake Institute is only one model. Use or adapt only those elements that suit your local situation. In Ethiopia and Kenya wetland clubs were organized. In Hungary school teachers are cooperating with wetland park scientists. In Kushiro, there is a well-funded International Crane and Wetland Center which supports excellent scientific research.

- Don't wait for the UN, or the Ramsar Bureau, or your national or state agencies or even your local governments to tell how to study and conserve your local ecosystems.
- Your local educators, your knowledgeable citizens and landowners --and you -- are already there.
- Seek out people or businesses who would be honored or concerned enough to perform sponsoring or funding roles in your community.

- Even if there are none, nearly every community has educators and educational organizations whose programs will be enriched by field-based wetland science studies.

As a local NGO, you can perform important roles in your communities which large NGO's cannot justify doing. For example, your NGO can perform any or all of the following roles:

- It can act as an "ecosystem-specific" guardian.
- It can concentrate on local ecological and cultural research, education, and conservation.
- It can act as an intermediary between your local educators and students and their schools and colleges.
- It can learn about and be sensitive to the real or perceived apprehensions of local people -- whether they be educators, students, landowners or business owners.
- It can do the same for local, state and national officials.
- It can be an honest broker and interpreter between these diverse community and institutional cultures and objectives.
- And it can do so in ways that optimize the gains for all participants.

Institute Action. What can the Caddo Lake Institute do? Here are my suggestions as to how the Caddo Lake Institute can accelerate creation of local wetland partnerships between large agencies and small communities:

- It can provide technical advice.

- It can advocate support for your work by agencies and large NGO's.
- It can report on and ask for recognition of your innovations which actually mobilize local people to participate in local wetland management.

The Ramsar program now encourages you to report the value of your local efforts. Previously, the few large NGOs that organized the original Ramsar wetland initiative were the only ones routinely consulted in policy matters. However, in Brisbane that all changed because of effective participation by the rest of the NGO community -- including small local NGOs like the Caddo Lake Institute. To assure their place at the table, they signed a pledge by which they committed themselves:

- To join the Ramsar global wetland conservation effort.
- To advocate that maximum conservation assistance reaches local communities.
- To contribute cash and/or services, as each deems best.
- To keep track of, and render an accounting of their contributions at the next Conference of the Parties in Costa Rica in 1999.

The NGO's who signed the pledge also supported a recommendation from the Contracting Parties asking the Ramsar Bureau to confer with knowledgeable NGO's (such as the Caddo Lake Institute, IUCN, WWF, and the Kushiro Center) in order to enable the Bureau to report on selected model community participation case studies and to recommend community empowerment guidelines. This report is due at the 1999 Conference of the Parties which will be held in Costa Rica.

That is why I hope to see you in Costa Rica at the Ramsar Conference in 1999. I look forward to hearing the reports about how your community joined the vanguard of small communities and large agencies which accelerated the rate of global wetland conservation. Remember, there are only so many remaining wetlands and there is so little time.

Thank you.

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