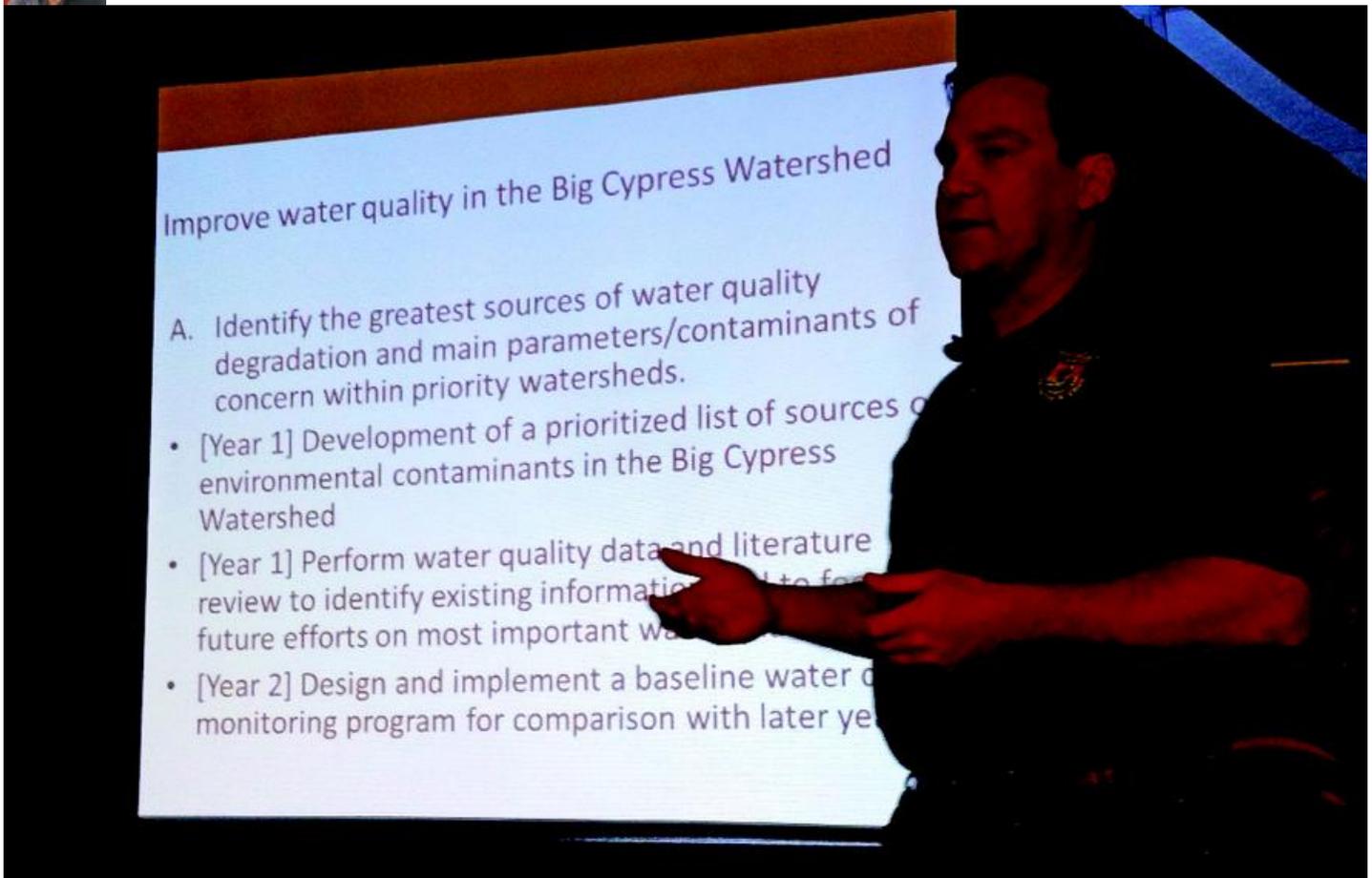


Residents hear update on paddlefish project during World Wetlands Day



By Caleb Brabham
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KARNACK - Celebrating the 45th anniversary of World Wetlands Day, members of Texas Fish & Wildlife and Caddo Lake Wildlife Refuge gathered at the Karnack Community Center to give an update on the various wildlife projects in ongoing development.

Project leader for the Texas Fish & Wildlife Mike Montagne was the first to speak, giving an update to residents on the ongoing efforts to re-populate paddlefish in Caddo Lake.

"We are about to start phase two of the paddlefish project. We have initial funding from the Army Corp of Engineers. We learned some things from the first phase; a lot of fish came to the (spillway to Lake of the Pines) and stopped," Montagne said, estimating about 60 percent of the fish ended up at the spillway. "They're still there. They're still alive."

Montagne said in the spring the hope is to catch the paddlefish and transplant them to Lake o' the Pines and watch what the fish do from there.

"The thing we don't know is what the adults are going to do," Montagne said. "We put in juvenile fish because that's all we can get our hands on. At this point these same fish are going to be about four years old this spring ... we're going to catch them, reopen them up and put a new tag in."

Montagne said the older, larger fish will be able to hold larger batteries that will last around four years, allowing TFWO to track where the fish go to spawn once they are released.

Gary Endsley, director of Collins Academy in Jefferson, also spoke on World Wetlands Day activities

"We are the education arm of the Big Cypress Habitat restoration," Endsley said. "We're here to celebrate World Wetlands Day, but we're going to do more than celebrate. Over the next month we're going to help habitat and wetland areas here at the refuge and the wildlife management area in (Jefferson) at the park and some private land."

Endsley was true to his word the next day taking Collins Academy students to plant 400 trees at the Caddo Lake Wildlife Refuge in Karnack. Endsley specified the next project would be planting seedlings on the wildlife management area from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Feb. 10. The next event will be replacing Chinese Tallow with native trees from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Feb. 17 at the Historic Jefferson Railway. The final project will be planting more trees from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Feb. 17 at the Port Jefferson History and Nature Center. To sign up contact Endsley at endsley961@gmail.com or call (903) 665-2900.

Additionally, Paul Fortune, chair of the Restoration Advisory Board gave an update on the ongoing dispute between the Army and the EPA over the cleanup of the Longhorn Ammunition Plant.

"I represent the RAB, which sets up quarterly meetings with the Army the EPA and other regulators," Fortune said. "They give us information concerning the cleanup out here. (But) for the last three years we haven't gotten much information because the Army and the EPA in a dispute over the level of groundwater cleanup at the LAP.

"Because of that, the Army has decided they're not going to do anything," Fortune said. "Rather than any cleanup going on it's been mostly monitoring and sampling going on. I wish I could give more information on the dispute. I talked with the EPA and they said they are still waiting on the Army to respond to them with what they are going to do. I reported on this a few months ago and I said then there is no end in sight and that's the way it is right now."

World Wetlands Day is celebrated on Feb. 2 to mark the International Convention on wetlands when 160 nations signed a treaty to protect the wetlands within their boundaries.

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