

THREATS TO CADDO LAKE WETLANDS

CHANGES WILL OCCUR

Over the last 400 years, the wetlands at Caddo Lake have changed slowly at times and dramatically at other times. Some changes were natural and some man-made, and changes will continue. In the future, growing demands for water, invasive species,

and pollution could be the most significant of the man-made changes threatening the health of the Caddo Lake wetlands. The good news is that there are ways to reduce these threats.

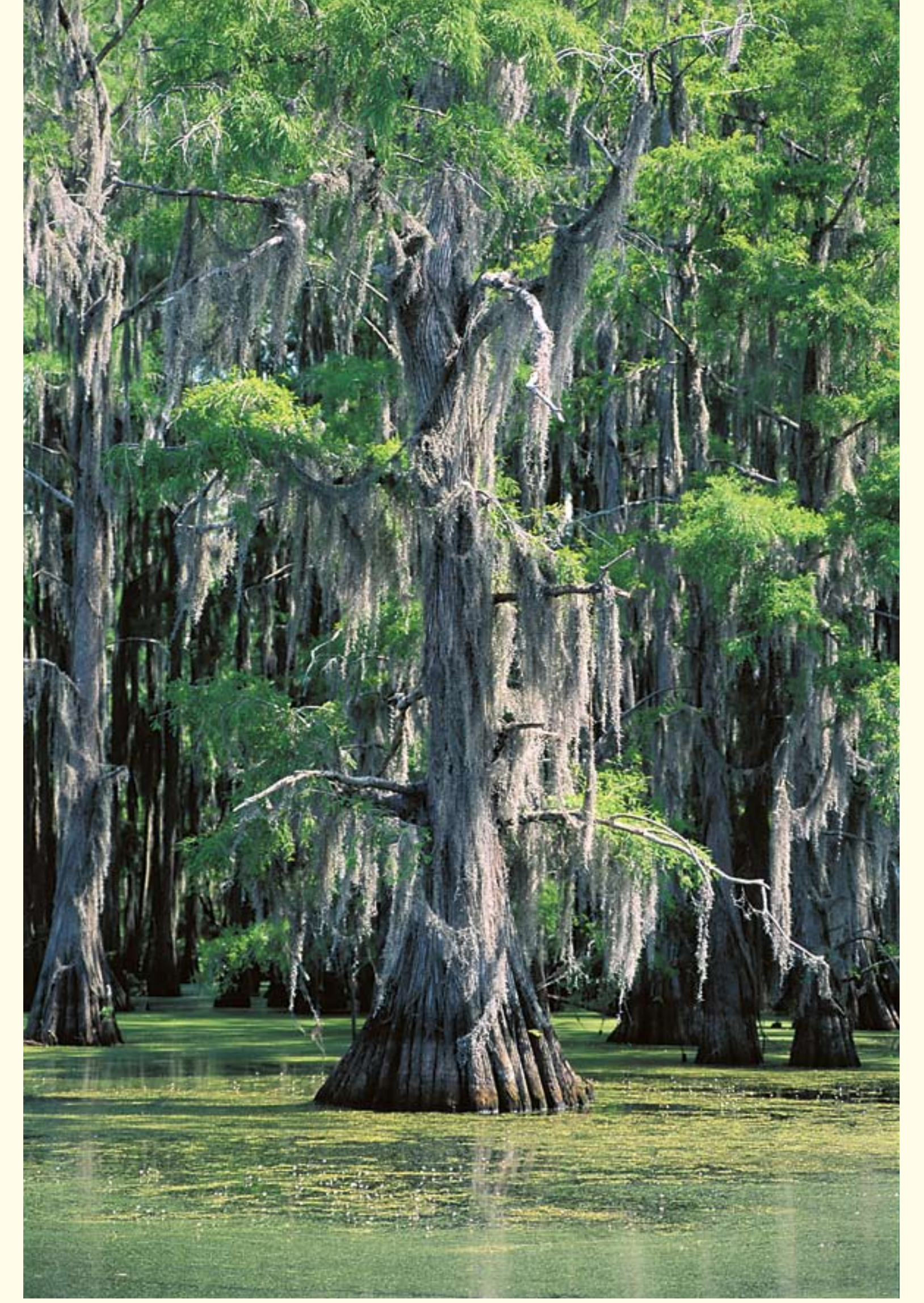
PAST CHANGES AND IMPACTS

A great log jam on the Red River apparently created the first large lake. In doing so it both flooded thousands of acres of existing wetlands and created thousands of acres of new wetlands. When the raft was removed in the 1800s, lake levels dropped, again changing the areas of wetlands dramatically. Then, when a dam was added in the early 1900s, many wetlands were again flooded and new wetlands were created.

These changes affected the vegetation and wildlife. For example, there are few young cypress trees at Caddo Lake. There are 400 year old cypress trees which likely started their life before the great raft.

There are also 100 year old cypress trees, which germinated after the raft was pulled but before the dam was added. There are plenty of cypress seeds, but cypress trees cannot sprout and survive in water. They need dry conditions for months to survive in their early stages. They do not get such conditions in a relatively constant level lake.

More recently, invasive species have limited cypress regeneration. Nutria will eat young trees and Chinese tallow trees will shade them out, even in wetland areas that do dry periodically.

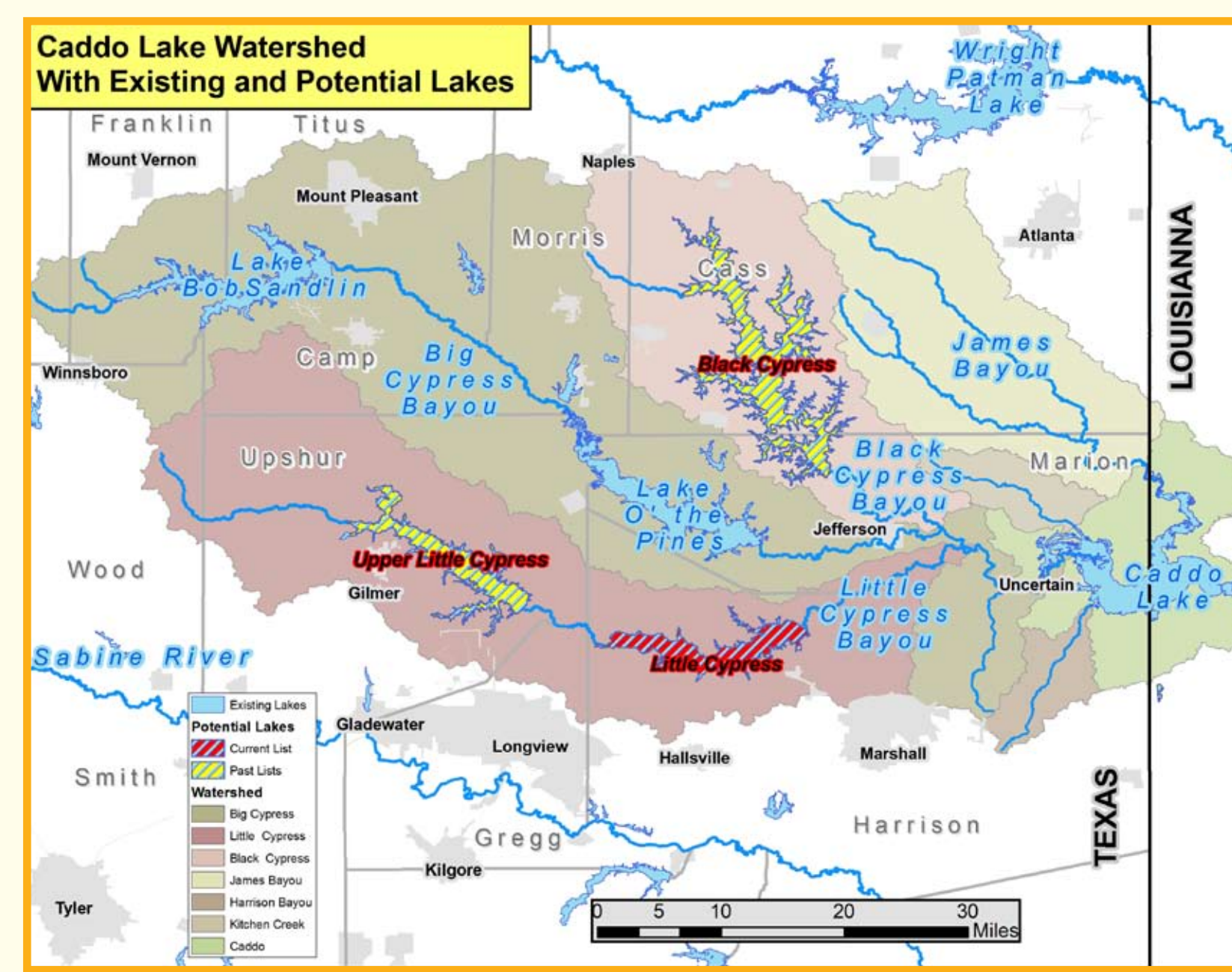
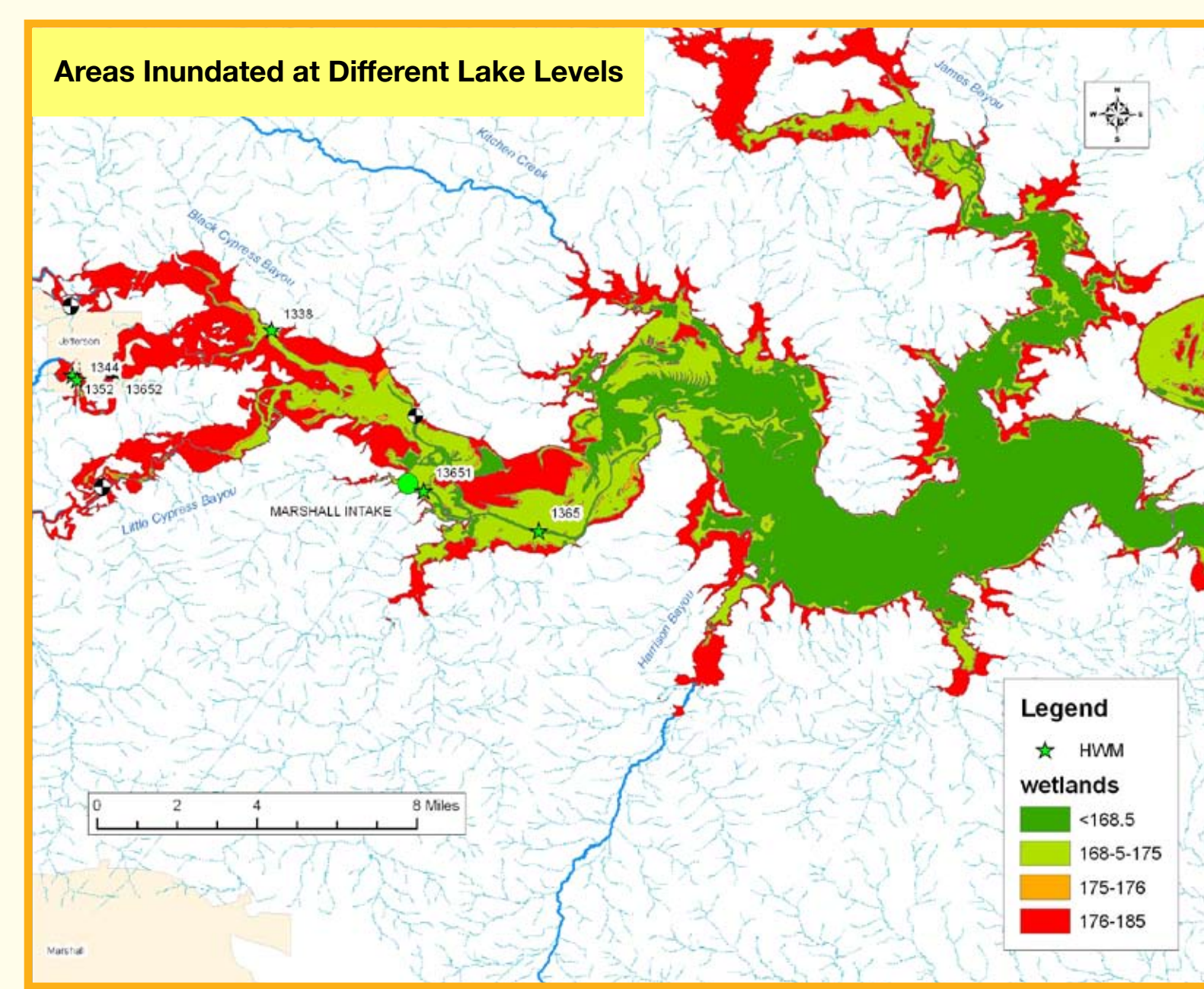


REDUCTIONS IN FLOOD AND LAKE LEVELS

Many of the wetlands that currently surround Caddo Lake are above normal lake levels. They need periodic inundation to survive. Upstream dams or large diversions of water from Caddo can reduce the water levels needed for such flooding.

While some of the wetlands at Caddo have been affected by the existing dams, most remain healthy today because Little Cypress, Black Cypress and James Bayous do not have significant dams. They can provide natural flood flows that refresh the wetlands.

There are also no significant diversions of water from Caddo Lake. In the past, dams were proposed for Little Cypress and Black Cypress Bayous and large diversions of water from Caddo were considered. Luckily, none of these proposals seem likely in the near future.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Water conservation is one key to reducing the need for more dams and diversions. You can also join with others working in public meetings to protect the natural "instream flows" to the wetlands of Caddo Lake for the long-term.

INVASIVE SPECIES



The wetlands at Caddo Lake, like most around the world, are at risk from invasive plants and animals.

Some invasive species, such as Chinese tallow, were brought here on purpose. Others are here because they were carried unintentionally to the U.S. from their native countries. With few predators or natural controls here, many invasive species have spread and now threaten the wetlands at Caddo Lake.



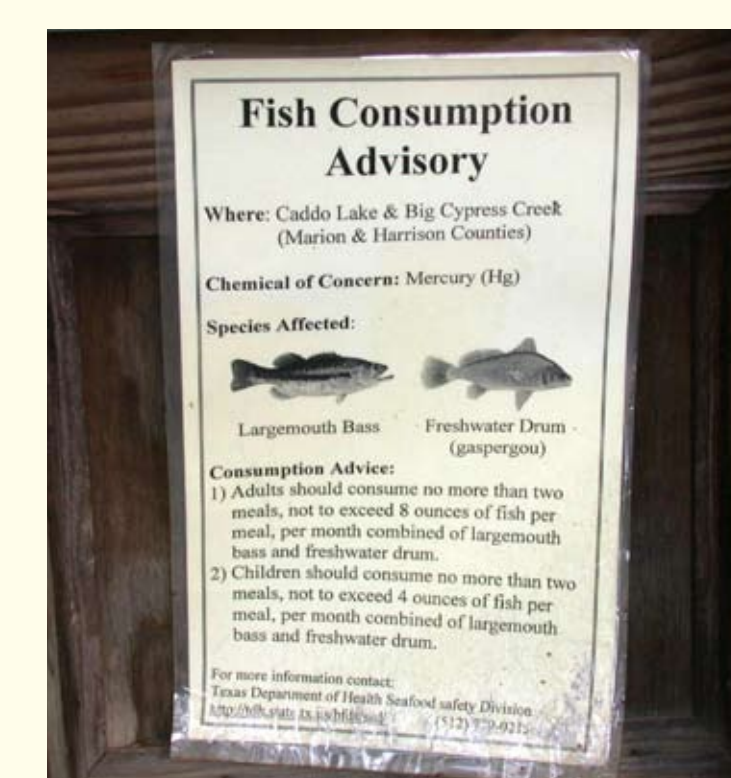
Giant Salvinia was first found in Caddo Lake in 2006. It now creates problems for fishing and boating in many parts of the Lake. You will see signs warning of this problem at boat ramps.

WHAT YOU CAN DO Learn to identify invasive species and the problems they create. Avoid buying, planting or using invasive plants. Clean your boat and trailer of all plants before leaving a boat ramp.

POLLUTION

One of the most important services wetlands provide is maintaining water quality by filtering out pollutants. While there are a number of pollutants that are a threat to the Caddo wetlands, mercury is getting most of the attention. It is found naturally in some soils, and, in small amounts, is not a problem for wetlands systems. In larger amounts, however, it can be toxic.

The levels of mercury in certain fish at Caddo not only threaten the health of those fish but also the health of people who eat those fish, especially children. Thus, the state of Texas has posted fish consumption warning signs around Caddo Lake.



Many man-made sources of mercury can contribute to the high levels in fish at Caddo, including coal-fired power plants, improperly managed meters at natural gas wells, switches from older cars, and household mercury thermometers.

WHAT YOU CAN DO Proper disposal of old pesticides, unused paints, motor oil, batteries and other wastes will reduce mercury and other pollutants. Report improper dumping of wastes or other polluting activities. In Texas call (800) 832-8224 or (512) 239-2507. In Louisiana call (888) 763-5424 or (225) 219-3640.