

By: Telford, Hughes, Merritt,
Keffer of Dallas

H.C.R. No. 171

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1 WHEREAS, Caddo Lake, the "ethereal," hauntingly beautiful
2 body of water that has played such a crucial role in the life of
3 Northeast Texas, constitutes one of the state's most precious
4 natural assets; and

5 WHEREAS, Caddo Lake was formed about 1800 when the Great
6 Raft, a massive logjam on the Red River above Shreveport, caused
7 waters to back up and overflow; today the shallow lake, with its
8 bayous, sloughs, and open water, covers roughly 30,000 square
9 acres; approximately one-third of the lake is composed of cypress
10 swamps, where trees 250 to 400 years old stand draped in Spanish
11 moss; and

12 WHEREAS, Before it was dammed in the early 1900s, Caddo Lake
13 was the only natural lake in Texas, and it is believed to be the
14 largest lake in the South; during the mid-19th century, before
15 Texas experienced its great boom in railroad building, Caddo Lake
16 was indispensable to the settlement and commercial development of a
17 large section of the state; straddling the Texas-Louisiana border,
18 it formed one of the links in a chain of natural waterways that
19 connected Northeast Texas to the Mississippi River and so to the
20 great urban centers of St. Louis and New Orleans; and

21 WHEREAS, Caddo Lake is rich in historical associations; its
22 shores have been home to an Alabama Indian village and the last
23 Caddo Indian village; Robert Potter, a signer of the Texas
24 Declaration of Independence and a legislator and cabinet member

1 during the period of the republic, also established his residence
2 there; and

3 WHEREAS, Other significant sites on the lake included, in the
4 mid-1800s, Port Caddo and Swanson's Landing, two thriving ports of
5 entry; by the late 1840s, however, these communities had been
6 surpassed in importance by the town of Jefferson, a few miles
7 upstream from Caddo Lake; the westernmost port on the Red River
8 system, Jefferson was for some 30 years the chief river port in
9 Texas, and by 1870 it ranked second only to Galveston in volume of
10 commerce; and

11 WHEREAS, When the Great Raft was finally cleared in the
12 1870s, the level of Caddo Lake fell, bringing an end to its role as a
13 major conduit of people and goods; the lowering of the water level
14 exposed mussel beds, though, and for a time the lake became the
15 scene of a booming freshwater pearl industry; pearling, too,
16 however, passed into history after the lake was dammed in 1914; and

17 WHEREAS, The next industry to develop at Caddo Lake was oil,
18 and the lake became the site of the first off-shore drilling in the
19 United States; today oil continues to be pumped from beneath the
20 lake's waters; and

21 WHEREAS, Blessed with great biological diversity and
22 providing a critical habitat for resident and migratory wildlife,
23 Caddo Lake is one of only a handful of sites across the country to be
24 included on the Ramsar Convention's List of Wetlands of
25 International Importance; the Ramsar Convention, adopted in 1971,
26 is the only international accord dedicated to the worldwide
27 protection of wetland ecosystems; and

1 WHEREAS, Caddo Lake draws researchers from around the world
2 and serves as a living laboratory for area teachers and students,
3 who use the lake to study subjects ranging from wetland ecology,
4 ornithology, and habitat analysis to history and archeology; and

5 WHEREAS, In addition to its ecological importance, Caddo Lake
6 contributes significantly to the area economy; supporting more than
7 70 species of fish and situated on a major flyway, its waters offer
8 exceptional fishing and birdwatching, together with hunting and
9 boating amid some of the state's most unique scenic beauty; some
10 7,000 acres of the lake are owned by the State of Texas and
11 preserved as a wildlife management area, while another 7,200 acres
12 have been set aside as a national wildlife refuge; and

13 WHEREAS, A natural jewel, Caddo Lake has long been an
14 integral part of the life of Northeast Texas, and its
15 environmental, historical, and economic importance is indeed
16 deserving of legislative recognition; now, therefore, be it

17 RESOLVED, That the 78th Legislature of the State of Texas
18 hereby designate Caddo Lake as the First Lake of Texas.