

Caddo transfer memo in limbo

Posted: Wednesday, January 9, 2013 4:00 am

By Glenn Evans gevans@news-journal.com, Longview News-Journal

KARNACK — The memo is in the mail, nine months after the Army and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced they'd agreed on terms turning over the shuttered bomb factory on Caddo Lake to the wildlife service.

A copy of the memo, which will govern the transfer of the final 1,400 acres to the wildlife service for a nature refuge, might or might not have made it to the service's regional headquarters in Albuquerque, N.M., long ago. No one at the headquarters can find it, the outgoing refuge manager said this past week. On Tuesday, during a meeting of the residents' committee overseeing cleanup of the contaminated Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant site, committee co-chairman Paul Fortune said local Army representatives had re-sent the memo to New Mexico.

The memo is important because it will transfer the final 16 tracts to the federal agency while the Army continues cleaning the Superfund Act site. Fortune and others on the local committee say it also will contain assurance to Fish and Wildlife that the long-term cleanup will occur.

The memo also governs transfer of the final 3.2 billion gallons of water rights still in Army control. Fortune and his committee, called the Restoration Advisory Board, have been adamant that the land and water transfers include no loopholes that could allow third parties to gain control of the 8,416-acre Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

The agreement between the Army and Fish and Wildlife was struck in April, prompting a celebration at the next-door Caddo Lake State Park. But Fortune learned late in 2012 that the final draft from the Army never reached the federal agency.

He said Tuesday that his co-chairman on the advisory board, Army representative Rose Zeiler, sent the Army draft again this past week and hopes for verification it reached the proper desk soon. Tuesday's advisory board meeting also stood out from past meetings in the Superfund cleanup update presented by the new contractor doing the work. Aecom Environmental took over planning and executing the cleanup five months ago from Shaw Environmental, which pulled out in the spring without public explanation.

The News-Journal is awaiting a public information request seeking information about the Shaw contract that was sent to the Army in the summer.

"This is so much more helpful," Dawn Orsak, assistant to Caddo Lake Institute President Rick Lowerre, told Project Manager Dave Wacker after his Tuesday presentation. "That (Shaw) graphic was just blocks of letters, of acronyms."

Wacker's presentation precedes public hearings at 6 p.m. today in the Karnack Community Center regarding cleanup proposed for two sites.

The first is a half-acre tract where a wastewater treatment plant operated. Below-ground plumes of perchlorate — used in bomb-making — bubble 40- to 140-feet below the surface. Some contamination already has been removed by scooping up the dirt on the relatively small tract, Wacker reported. "The only thing left to deal with is the groundwater," he said.

The second tract, a 275-acre site where solid rocket motor fuel was manufactured, has eight plumes of perchlorate, volatile organic compounds, heavy metals even trinitrotoluene — better known as TNT. Wacker said there is too much land simply to haul away the dirt, but the eventual cleanup plan will either cap the site, use wells to pump contaminants away or some combination.

He also assured the residents board that, although Goose Prairie Creek skirts the site's southern tip on its way to Caddo Lake, contaminants inside that site are remaining there.

"The plumes associated with the site are still way within the boundary of the plant itself and not coming in direct contact with Caddo Lake," he said.