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DEQ addresses water quality concerns at Jackson Parish Watershed meeting

BATON ROUGE – On Monday, March 19, scientists from the Department of Environmental Quality participated in a meeting with the Jackson Parish Watershed District to discuss the status of Caney Lake, located near Chatham in Jackson Parish.

Caney Lake is scheduled for an intensive sampling and inspection program this summer. The lake is currently listed on the impaired waters list because two samples (out of a total of 36 since 1999), showed elevated levels of bacteria. Bacteria are not unusual to “wild waters,” or waters that are not treated for swimming such as pools or hot tubs, according to DEQ Environmental Scientist Chris Piehler.

“Caney Lake is one of the cleanest water bodies in the state,” Piehler said. Bacteria are naturally occurring and found nearly everywhere. When it rains, bacteria and other materials are washed into our waterways.”

Piehler also told members of the Watershed District and the public who attended the meeting that the fish were safe to eat and that there were no swimming advisories listed for Caney Lake.

“All freshwater fish swim in waters that have bacteria, which is why you shouldn’t consume raw fish,” Piehler said. “Cooking destroys the bacteria. DEQ works closely with other state agencies regarding the posting and publication of swim advisories, and currently, there are no advisories specific to Caney Lake. However, any time you swim in a natural body of water, such as a lake, river or bayou, anywhere in the world, you subject yourself to potential health risks related to bacteria or a variety of other naturally occurring microorganisms inherent within that water body.”

The DEQ discussed a partnership with the Watershed District to promote local participation with environmental protection. “Successful water quality protection is most likely to take root when citizens who reside in a watershed care enough to be involved in preserving their natural resources,” Piehler said. “At Monday night’s meeting, we met several citizens who care about Caney Lake and want to preserve it for future generations. Together, we will work to accomplish that goal.”