



BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE 131



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QUARTERLY MESSAGE *from* THE PRESIDENT

2016 BOARD OF DIRECTORS *approve major changes*

Major changes occurred in the Big Thicket Association in my first three years of office; I was not disappointed in my last year, change continues. I am pleased with the response the board members have given and hope you will be too.



In the spring of 2016, the Nominating Committee, after interviews with board members, shared their concerns with the Executive Board. The Executive Board researched their options and in July, took their recommendations to the Board of Directors.

Both recommendations were unanimously approved by the Board.

At the end of July, BTA moved into the Foundation of Southeast Texas, 700 North Street, Suite K, Beaumont 77701, which provides office space for non-profits.

Also, after a month long search, BTA contracted with Lauren Brooks Accounting Firm in Beaumont.

Lastly, the Thicket of Diversity (TOD) moved back to the Field Research Station which will eliminate the expenses of the Brammer House utilities and internet access. Keeping the TOD based in the Big Thicket National Preserve continues to give BTA an essential connection and engagement with the NPS.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Upcoming Meetings and Events

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

The Neches River Rally, a BTA annual fundraiser, presents a fun paddling experience in the Big Thicket National Preserve. Launch at the Saltwater Barrier, 6700 Bigner Road in Beaumont to paddle a stretch of the Pine Island Bayou, Cooks Lake, Scatterman Lake, and the Neches River through picturesque cypress-tupelo swamps. Go to www.bigthicket.org for more information and registration.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

The National Parks of Texas Documentary: In Contact with Beauty, at the Jefferson Theatre, 345 Fannin, in downtown Beaumont. This is a free PBS presentation of the documentary, including a Q&A with some special guests following the film.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1

BTA Annual Meeting will be held at the Visitor Center in Kountze, TX, 9 a.m., in conjunction with the Big Thicket Day Celebration of the National Park Service Centennial, which starts at 10 a.m. Bring the family and enjoy a day of exhibits, entertainment, and hiking.

BIG THICKET NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST NEWS

By *Ellen Buchanan*

The Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust has been busy. With your help, at the end of 2015, we were able to acquire a 43.42-acre parcel in Orange County for \$48,553 and submitted donation paperwork to the National Park Service. Also, the Trust has acquired acreage for six units of the Big Thicket National Preserve from a 45-acre tract at the confluence of Beech and Village Creeks to property at Baby Galvez along with several small-acre parcels from failed subdivisions. These smaller tracts are important as they protect stream corridors and floodplains and close gaps in the National Preserve boundaries.

We are currently partnering with the National Parks Foundation to use \$215,000

of mitigation funds from the Department of Justice for land acquisition to add to the National Preserve. The Foundation pays for land acquisition costs only and is responsible for all appraisals, title insurance, closing costs, and environmental due diligence costs.

The Trust has identified four strategic properties for acquisition from willing sellers. One is a 61-acre parcel in Orange County adjacent to the preserve and the Neches River. The three other tracts (119 acres) in Hardin County are adjacent to the Preserve and Big Sandy/Village Creek. One landowner is donating half of the purchase price of their property. These parcels serve to protect our water resources as well as ecologically significant hardwood forest

habitats and the integrity of the Preserve boundaries. The properties also offer direct access for visitors.

Our identified land costs are more than the available National Parks Foundation funds. Our goal is to raise \$68,500 to cover the remainder of land acquisition costs plus due diligence. Your support is essential to our success. Please donate online today by visiting www.bigthickettrust.org or mail your donation to P O Box 1049, Kountze, TX 77625 and support our established goal of conserving our land and water resources. Thank you.





THE ROY E. LARSEN SANDYLAND SANCTUARY PRESCRIBED BURN AND LONG-SEPALED FALSE DRAGON-HEAD TRANSPLANTING

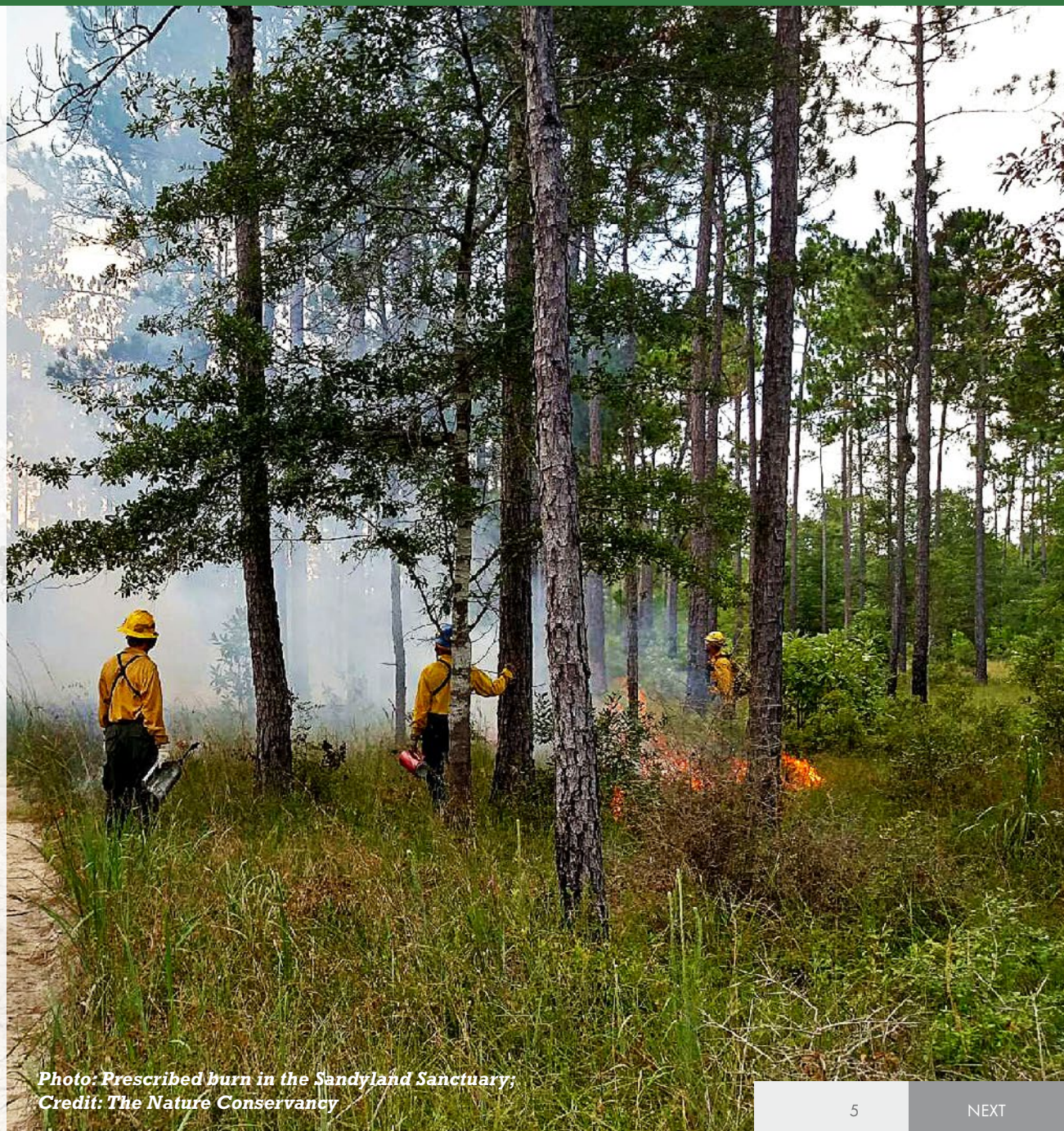
By Wendy Ledbetter

Staff members of The Texas Chapter of The Nature Conservancy completed a 90-acre prescribed burn on the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary to benefit the grassy understory, forbs, and wildflowers in this open upland pine and wet pine savanna communities. This was a growing season burn during the historical lightning time of year, to promote top kill and reduce invasive woody shrubs. The wet savanna also harbors the state rare Chapman's orchid. Assisting with the burn operation were Gus Schaefer and Frank Sylestine of the Big Thicket National Preserve along with TNC's summer interns. It was a training exercise for them; it was their first burn!

The Sandyland Preserve received 30 transplants of Long-Sepaled False Dragon-Head (*Physostegia longisepala*) which were placed in the wet longleaf pine savanna habitat. Although this is

not the ideal time of the year for doing herbaceous relocations, the Texas Department of Transportation was conducting a construction project, so the move was needed. TNC staff will provide extra care for these beautiful, showy plants to see them through the dry summer months as they typically are found in wet roadside drainages and bloom in the springtime.

For the second year, the Forest Program of TNC has hosted a GLOBE summer intern. This program provides college students with a 10-week experience in their field of interest. Kelli Greene assisted with prescribed burning, vegetation monitoring, freshwater mussel surveys, aquatic surveys, data entry, and stewardship maintenance. Kelli is from Ruston, Louisiana and will be pursuing her Master's degree in the fall. We thank Kelli for her time and effort.



*Photo: Prescribed burn in the Sandyland Sanctuary;
Credit: The Nature Conservancy*



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LETTER FROM THE WHITE HOUSE

OUR HISTORY

Big Thicket Association President, Jan Ruppel, accepted a framed letter dated September 7, 1974, from Shawn Davis, Executive Director of the Southeast Regional Planning Commission. Written by President Gerald Ford and sent to Congressmen Charles Wilson the letter expresses formal appreciation for Congressmen Wilson's hard work and dedication in getting the legislation passed in the House of Representatives to establish the Big Thicket National Preserve. Mr. Davis was Congressmen Wilson's Aide when the preserve resolution passed. The Big Thicket National Preserve Texas and Big Cypress National Preserve Florida are the first National Preserves in the nation.



Photo by Bruce Walker, BTA Executive Director



Photo: Close up of the head and leg of the amphibious creature retrieved from a crayfish trap, Credit: Mona Halvorsen



Photo: Full size picture of the creature, Credit: Mona Halvorsen

BIG THICKET OF DIVERSITY FIELD NOTES:

SALAMANDER

By Mona A. Halvorsen, Director

The Big Thicket National Preserve has many primary investigators for whom I serve as a co-investigator to collect specimens for research. I often scoop, net, and trap species other than my target in crayfish traps. Yesterday brought one such surprise when I scooped up a very long, eel-like creature among the five catfish, one small perch, and two crayfish in the trap. I tried to remove the curious creature with a leather glove, but it was so slimy that it soaked my glove which made it impossible to get a firm grasp on the creature. Finally, I removed my glove and held my breath, grabbing the animal near its head to pull it through the small opening of the crayfish trap.

Although its head and mouth looked like a shark, the creature had four, tiny legs with three toes on each leg, which it was using to try and push itself away from me. Photographing it became a comedy of errors, but I finally snapped a couple of pictures that at least would help identify the wiggling beast. My cohort, Edward Realzola, a whirligig beetle researcher for the Thicket of Diversity project, identified the animal as an amphibian, and not an eel. I carefully put it back in the Little Pine Island Bayou and made sure it was able to swim away before leaving.

I sent the photos to the Chief of Resource Management at Big Thicket National Preserve for identification. He contacted Brad 'Bones' Glorioso, USGS Ecologist, who is conducting herptile studies in the Big Thicket N.P., Beaumont Unit, who identified the catch as a salamander.

'Bones' Glorioso stated that the animal is "a big Three-toed Amphiuma. You can just make out the tiny legs. They are fun to watch in the water, moving their tiny legs as if they are actually helping them move along. Although not really aggressive, these guys can give pretty nasty bites, as their teeth are like shark's teeth. They will even grab on to prey and twist their body around and around (like a croc's death roll) in order to break a piece of flesh off. As you likely observed, they are hard to handle due to their copious amounts of slime. Amphiumas eat plenty of the siren that I mentioned, and other things like crawfish, fish, etc. In turn, adult Mud snakes, a most beautiful serpent, feed nearly exclusively on amphiuma and siren. Amphiuma are very common in more permanent waters, but they can be found in even less than permanent waters, as they have the ability to aestivate in a cocoon-like state in the mud of a dried waterway until the waters fill it up again."



NEWS FROM THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

THE TEXAS LONGLEAF TASKFORCE REPORT

ON FIELDTRIP, GRANT, COST SHARING SUPPORT,
AND UPCOMING CONFERENCE

By Wendy Ledbetter



*Photo: Long-Sepaled False Dragon-Head, **Physostegia longisepala**;
Crédit: Jason Singhurst*



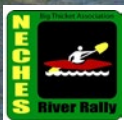
*Photo: Electroshocking fish for the aquatic survey;
Credit Larry Belles*

The Texas Longleaf Taskforce hosted a field day on RMS and Alabama-Coushatta Tribal lands. Over 70 landowners and resource professionals gathered to tour the 400-acre restoration project and to discuss longleaf pine management and restoration. Topics for the day included the conversion of loblolly stands to longleaf stands, herbicide application, invasive plants, the importance of understory plants, and available cost-share programs. Elliott Abbey of the Alabama-Coushatta Indian Tribe shared with the group the history and craft of basket making using longleaf pine needles.

The Texas Longleaf Taskforce along with the Texas Longleaf Implementation Team; a smaller working group, have been awarded two grants from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation to assist landowners with longleaf management, tree planting, site prep, prescribed fire along with education and outreach. The grants encompass

both the Big Thicket and Longleaf Ridge areas of East Texas. Since 2014, a total of \$1 million in grant support has been award to these projects. For more information on cost-share opportunities contact Wendy Ledbetter, Forest Program Manager at wledbetter@tnc.org

The Texas Society of Ecological Restoration conference will be held from November 11-13, 2016 in Livingston, Texas at Camp Cho-Yeh. Wendy Ledbetter, Forest Program Manager, The Nature Conservancy, will be the keynote speaker for the event. Field trip options to the Sandyland Preserve, the Big Thicket National Preserve, and Hardwood Bottomlands will be available. This conference is for anyone interested in discussing, learning, and collaborating to ensure ecological restoration efforts in the State of Texas succeed into the future. For more information on the conference go to: <http://gmthomaseco.wix.com/txser2016>



*Photo: Neches River Rally Logo,
Credit: Big Thicket Association
Photo: Paddlers launching at the
2015 Neches River Rally,
Credit: Carl Knight*

NECHES RIVER RALLY

By Bruce Walker

Grab a paddle; it's time to register for the Saturday, September 10, 3rd Annual Neches River Rally. This 4-mile trail from Pine Island Bayou to Cooks Lake and Scatterman is a BTA sponsored canoe and kayak rally that offers families a leisurely excursion into the cypress-lined swamps of the Neches. Paddlers should meet at the Lower Neches Valley Authority, Salt Water Barrier, on Bigner Road with five staggered launch times beginning at 8 a.m. This year, Big Thicket Association is hosting this annual paddling experience in appreciation of the National Parks Centennial in the Big Thicket

National Preserve. Entry fees start at \$35 for single paddlers and include lunch, official event T-shirt, goodies, and local entertainment.

The rally takes paddlers along one of the most popular trails in Southeast Texas; the "Cooks Lake to Scatterman" paddling trail designated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is an Official Texas Paddling Trail. The trail follows the Pine Island Bayou, Cooks Lake, Scatterman Lake, and the Neches River through a cypress-tupelo-fern forest in the Big Thicket National Preserve. It is a

unique loop-style trail which eliminates the need for a shuttle with a single put-in and take-out point. Both private and rental canoes and kayaks are allowed. However, rental arrangements with outfitters must be made before the event. There will be no on-site rental availability day of the event.

The Neches River Rally, a family friendly event. Entry fees and sponsorships help support the Big Thicket Association's mission of promoting conservation, environmental education, and scientific research in the Big Thicket National

Preserve. The Neches River Rally appreciates the generous support of its partners: Lower Neches Valley Authority, Port of Beaumont, TOTAL, WestRock, JK Subaru, American Valve & Hydrant, Bernsen Law Firm, Beaumont Convention and Visitors Bureau, and members of Big Thicket Association. For more information or to register for the Neches River Rally, log-on to www.bigthicket.org, or call the Neches River Rally office at 409-790-5399. Follow us on Facebook at Neches River Rally.



HIKE THE THICKET

By Bruce Walker

Every month in 2016, the Big Thicket National Preserve and the Big Thicket Association organize Ranger-led hikes in honor of the National Park Centennial. Everyone, especially new visitors are invited to participate in these Centennial hikes. The 2016 Centennial Hiking Series started in February and will continue to occur on the first Sunday of the month through the end of the year. Staff and volunteers from both organizations have guided fellow explorers along the unique network of trails found in the Big Thicket. These hiking treks are part of Big Thicket National Preserve's Explore Your Thicket Centennial Club initiative.

Our goal is to lead a series of hikes on portions of the over 40 miles of improved trails within the preserve. So far this year, the Centennial Hikes have hosted over 80 hikers on six different trails including Woodlands, Beech Woods, North Turkey Creek, Middle Turkey Creek, Beaver Slide, and Birdwatchers Trails. This is a unique opportunity for hikers and Big Thicket enthusiasts to experience the natural beauty of our National Preserve. Anyone interested in participating in these hikes and other Centennial events should call the Big Thicket Visitor Center at (409) 951-6700.



*Photo: Intrepid hikers on the Beaverslide Trail in the Thicket.
Credit: Bruce Walker.*



*Photo: Intrepid hikers on the Beaverslide Trail in the Thicket.
Credit: Bruce Walker.*



LAMAR UNIVERSITY RECEIVES RESCUING TEXAS HISTORY GRANT

By Penny Clark

Lamar University recently received a Rescuing Texas History Grant from the Portal to Texas History to digitize and upload to the Portal, The Pine Needle, a weekly Hardin County newspaper published between 1964 and 1968. Lamar University has a rich collection of Big Thicket resources, but lacks a complete run of the newspaper and with the help of the Sam Houston Regional Library, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, patrons will be provided with access to all the newspapers.

Houston Thompson, an attorney, started the newspaper to fight what he believed was the power and control of the lumber industry in the Hardin County area. He used the newspaper to influence Hardin County politics and promote the establishment of a Big Thicket National Preserve. Thompson believed that Big Thicket tourism would give the region a second economic focus.

The Pine Needle served as a promotional vehicle for the Big Thicket Association and contained a column by Geraldine Watson entitled, "The Big Thicket: It's Past, Present and Future." The column informed readers about the Big Thicket's fauna and flora, sawmill history, folklore, and the activities of the Big Thicket Association. Although Thompson's goal for the newspaper was political, it also documented local activities of the businesses, schools, and churches.

Photo: The Pine Needle, Big Thicket String of Pearls, Credit: Lamar University

Photo: The Pine Needle, 3,000 Attend Annual Big Thicket Gathering, Credit: Lamar University



BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

Partner in Preservation





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WEB SITES

Big Thicket Association
www.bigthicket.org

Big Thicket National Preserve
www.nps.gov/bthn

East Texas Black Bear Task Force
www.bttf.org

Conservation Fund
www.conservationfund.org

Gulf States Mycological Society
www.gsmso.org

National Audubon Society
www.goldentriangleaudubon.org
www.houstonaudubon.org

National Parks Conservation Association
www.npca.org

Native Plant Society of Texas
www.npsot.org

Nature Conservancy
www.nature.org/texas

Outdoor Nature Club, Houston
www.outdoornatureclub.org

Sierra Club Golden Triangle Group
www.sierraclub.org/goldentriangle

Texas Conservation Alliance
www.texascons.org

Village Creek State Park
www.texasstateparks.com

BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION MISSION

The purposes for which the Big Thicket Association is organized are

- » To work for the preservation of the flora, fauna and historical culture of the Big Thicket area
- » To promote the conservation of natural resources and natural history of the Big Thicket area, and education for same
- » To maintain and perpetuate, so far as possible, the many species of trees, plants and animals found in the Big Thicket area, and to do whatever else may be done to preserve for posterity the abundance of flora and fauna and natural beauty with which this area has been endowed
- » To promote and to fund research contributing to knowledge of the Big Thicket area
- » To publish or support publication of cultural and scientific Big Thicket literature
- » To promote the welfare of the Big Thicket National Preserve

For more information about the Big Thicket Association and upcoming events, please **click here** to visit us online.

FOLLOW US

