



BIG THICKET BULLETIN

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

BTA President travels to Washington, D.C.: Asks for National Park Service Legacy Act support

Mary C. Johnston and Kathy Smartt

Two Southeast Texas residents traveled to Washington, D.C. as advocates for the National Park Service Legacy Act, House Bill HR 2584 and Senate Bill S751. Kathy Smartt, President of the Big Thicket Association (BTA), and her son, Jimmy, both of Sour Lake, were hosted by the National Parks Conservation Association and able to participate in nine congressional appointments.

Most meetings were with legislative staff but the Smartts were able to meet with Congressman Will Hurd and Congressman Lamar Smith in person to discuss the nature of the bill. If passed, the National Park Service Legacy Act would dedicate funding to remedy the national parks' crumbling infrastructure.

Federal funding cuts have resulted in tighter budgets and a deferred maintenance backlog. Half of the overdue repairs are categorized as transportation, such as roads and bridges found within our national parks that are in need of dire repair. The remaining projects include visitor centers, aging water infrastructures, historic buildings, military infrastructures, docks, and other structures in need of maintenance.

Park superintendents currently struggle with insufficient resources to adequately provide care for the places that define our cultural heritage and our national history. The repair backlog continues to grow all the while our park administrators must additionally address visitor safety. Approximately, 330 million travelers visit our nation's parks annually, which significantly impacts local economies.

The National Park Service Legacy Act will be funded from existing mineral royalties collected from resource extraction on public lands and waters.

While on Capitol Hill, Kathy Smartt recounted the benefits of the Big Thicket on its local community and the invaluable research currently being conducted by the Thicket of Diversity at the Field Research Station.

Jimmy, who is now a student at the University of Texas, told tales of his experiences growing up in the Big Thicket with his grandmother, Rose Ann Jordan. Rose Ann served as the Volunteer Coordinator for the Big Thicket National Preserve for 14 years and on the BTA Board of Directors for 15 years. She was an avid birder and participated in many annual Christmas bird counts with the National Audubon Society.

The Smartts have been personally inspired by the region's unique biological and cultural heritage and encourage nation-wide support for the National Park Service Legacy Act to help protect and preserve the Big Thicket and the national parks for years to come.



National Parks Conservation Association Suzanne Dixon (left to right), BTA President Kathy Smartt; Jimmy Smartt, Congressman Lamar Smith, and the Director of Partner and Community Relations at Visit San Antonio Richard Oliver.



Jimmy Smartt (left to right), Congressman Will Hurd, BTA President Kathy Smartt, Suzanne Dixon (NPCA), and Richard Oliver (P&CR San Antonio).



MICHAEL HOKE HONORED WITH NATIONAL GEODETIC SURVEY MONUMENT

On Wednesday, June 7, 2017, a group of colleagues and friends gathered to dedicate a National Geodetic Survey monument in honor of the memory, educational commitment, and life of Michael Hoke, first Managing Director of Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center.

The geodetic survey monument was donated by several of Michael Hoke's colleagues at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Lamar University, and the JASON Project of Southeast Texas with whom he worked for many years in numerous science programs dedicated to inspiring students to broaden their understanding of science and the environment.

These survey monuments are objects placed to mark key survey points on the Earth's surface and usually numbered. They are most frequently used by land surveyors to accurately identify locations and elevations for purposes of construction, boundaries, etc. Official geodetic survey monuments are registered in the National Geodetic Survey Database through detailed GPS coordinate triangulation which is then submitted for review and approval. The geodetic survey monument is typically accurate globally to less than 1 inch.

In this case, Michael Hoke's friends and colleagues chose to name the actual monument location in the database as "Michael Hoke." Forevermore, as

long as surveyors utilize this publicly accessible survey monument, they will report the location as "Michael Hoke."

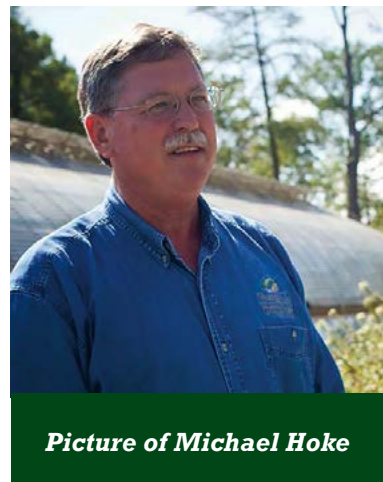
The "Michael Hoke" survey monument can be found on the ground at the end of the brick wall just before the crosswalk on Park Avenue leading into Shangri La Gardens. The only other official National Geodetic Survey monument in Orange, Texas, is located at the First Presbyterian Church.

In addition to the "Michael Hoke" monument, Shangri La Gardens staff has added a card to the Field Trip App to provide more details about Michael Hoke and the survey monument in his honor. The Field Trip App allows visitors to enjoy a detailed virtual tour of Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center utilizing this GPS-driven application.

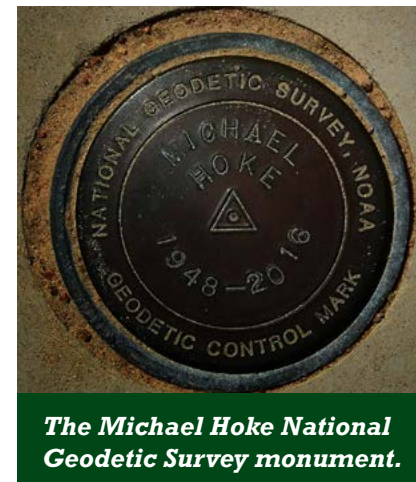
Shangri La Gardens Director, Rick J. Lewandowski says, "Michael Hoke dedicated his adult life to preserving nature and teaching generations of students to be kind to their world. Until his death, Mr. Hoke continued to teach all who met him the importance of making the world a better place through the many science programs and collaborations he conducted in Southeast Texas. We may have lost Michael Hoke, but this wonderful gift given by his friends and colleagues will remind future generations of his total commitment to his community."



Family, friends, and colleagues at the Michael Hoke survey monument on the grounds at Shangri La Gardens.



Picture of Michael Hoke



The Michael Hoke National Geodetic Survey monument.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

August 17, 2017

Paddle the Big Thicket. Explore the waterways of the Big Thicket on a free ranger-led canoe trip, 10 am. Location variable, contact the Visitor Center Kountze, Texas. Register (409) 951-6700.

September 6, 2017

Full Moon Night Hike in the Big Thicket under a full moon. Free, Register for time and place at the Visitor Center Kountze, (409) 951-6700.

September 16, 2017

Paddle the Big Thicket. Explore the waterways of the Big Thicket on a free ranger-led canoe trip, 10 am. Location variable, contact the Visitor Center Kountze, Texas. Register (409) 951-6700.

September 27, 2017

Paddle the Big Thicket. Explore the waterways of the Big Thicket on a free ranger-led canoe trip, 10 am. Location variable, contact the Visitor Center Kountze, Texas. Register (409) 951-6700.

October 6, 2017

Full Moon Night Hike in the Big Thicket under a full moon. Free, Register for time and place at the Visitor Center Kountze, (409) 951-6700.

October 14, 2017 Big Thicket Day, at the Visitor Center, 6102 FM 420, Kountze, Free and open to the public, 9:30 am.

November 4, 2017

Full Moon Night Hike in the Big Thicket under a full moon. Free, Register for time and place at the Visitor Center Kountze, (409) 951-6700.



NATURE CONSERVANCY NEWS

Longleaf pine gets second chance at Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary Nature Conservancy property in east Texas opens daily

By Pam LeBlanc, American-Statesman staff

Credit Pam LeBlanc. Shawn Benedict Manager at Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary and a Longleaf Pine bough.

The following is part of an article from the My Statesman, Austin American-Statesman, published July 11, 2017. Read the full story: <http://www.mystatesman.com/travel/longleaf-pine-gets-second-chance-roy-larsen-sandyland-sanctuary/UnAdPpux47vnKhqAAzgh6L/>

The young longleaf pines that populate the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary look vaguely like Cousin Itt from the old television show “The Addams Family.”

The trees’ slender branches all wear pine-needle pompadours, and they’re the stars of this Nature Conservancy preserve, set aside in 1977 to conserve and protect the diversity of this part of East Texas.

A 90-million acre swath of longleaf pines once stretched across the Southeast United States, from Florida to Texas. The area was heavily logged at the turn of the century, though, and most were harvested for use as lumber, turpentine and shipbuilding. By 1930, nearly all the virgin timber was gone. Non-native species like slash pine and loblolly pine were introduced, and today less than 3 percent of the longleaf forest remains.

The preserve is working hard to help the longleaf pine, which grows tall and can live as long as 400 years, rebound.

“That’s where we really concentrate our work here,” says preserve manager Shawn Benedict, waving his hands to indicate the shaggy-topped, widely spaced pines. “This is what East Texas is supposed to look like.”

The Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary is located about 30 minutes north of Beaumont at 4208 Texas Highway 327 directly east of the Village Creek Bridge.

KOUNTZE SCHOOL FIELD TRIP TO THE BIG THICKET

By Mary C Johnston

The Every Kid in the Park Program is a National Park Service initiative organized to encourage every fourth grader in the United States to visit public lands.

Millions of acres of national parks, historic structures, cultural artifacts, ancient forests, and clear blue lakes are waiting to be explored. The Every Kid in the Park project will help engage and create our next generation of park visitors, supporters, and advocates.

On May 16, the entire fourth grade of Kountze Intermediate School visited the Big Thicket National Preserve. Approximately, 100 students and their teachers joined 14 environmental experts who led guided hikes on the Kirby Nature Trail and taught learning sessions in the Sundew Trail pavilion.

Students learned to identify leaves, made rubbings and prints of leaves, and played leaf matching picture-games by “leafing” through field guides.

“Ma Thicket,” AKA Kountze teacher Cathy Johnston, appeared to plant the seeds of stewardship in young minds. She encouraged students to cherish the remaining pieces of the Big Thicket to ensure its future.

The Every Kid in the Park field trip received funding from the National Park Foundation and from a grant to The Brown Foundation. Support from various environmental organizations, including the Sabine Neches Chapter of Master Naturalists, the Big Thicket Association, the Thicket of Diversity, and the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust was provided by volunteers.



Kountze teacher Cathy Johnston as “Ma Thicket” speaking to Kountze Intermediate School students.



Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust Ellen Buchanan speaks to students prior to hiking trails in the Big Thicket National Preserve.



Photo: NPS photo of a Whooping Crane

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE NEWS

US ATTORNEY'S OFFICE, EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS

Jefferson Co man convicted of killing Whooping Cranes going to prison

A 20 year old Beaumont, Texas man was sentenced to federal prison for violating the terms of his probation in the Eastern District of Texas, announced Acting US Attorney Brit Featherston today.

Trey Joseph Frederick was sentenced to five years of federal probation in October, 2016 after he pleaded guilty to a violation of the Endangered Species Act. In Jan., 2016, a Texas Game Warden received two calls reporting that two Whooping Cranes had been shot on Blair Road in Jefferson County. Further investigation revealed that Frederick had been seen in the area with a hunting rifle and claimed to be hunting geese. Federal agents contacted Frederick at his home where he admitted to killing the cranes.

Whooping Cranes are a species of migratory birds in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range, and therefore an endangered species as defined by the Endangered Species Act, making it unlawful to capture, kill, trap, or collect Whooping Cranes, or attempt to engage in such conduct in the United States.

Today, Frederick was back in federal court facing charges that he violated the terms of his probation for, among other things, using an AR-15 assault rifle to hunt from a roadway in Jefferson County, Tex. The terms of Frederick's probation specifically prohibited him from owning or possessing firearms, ammunition or any other dangerous weapon. Frederick is also prohibited from hunting or fishing anywhere in the United States. During his court appearance today, US Magistrate Judge Zack Hawthorn sentenced Frederick to 11 months incarceration to be followed by a one year term of supervised release.

Acting US Attorney Featherston made the following statement, "Trey Frederick was given the opportunity of probation when he was first convicted of killing two federally protected whooping cranes. Apparently, Mr. Frederick did not appreciate the leniency he was given, and today, he learned the consequences. Mr. Frederick will now have 11 months to contemplate his actions."

This case was investigated by special agents with the US Fish and Wildlife Services, Office of Law Enforcement and Game Wardens with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and prosecuted by Assistant US Attorney Joseph R. Batte.



BOATER SAFETY AT THE BIG THICKET

In nearly five years, the Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor and Resource Protection (VRP) staff built a valuable partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard, Marine Safety Unit out of Station Sabine Pass, and local Texas Game Wardens in addressing boater safety.

These agencies face problems like the lack of life jackets or personal flotation devices (PFDs) use and impaired boater operations on the waterways. This Fourth of July the VRP staff proactively contacted hundreds of boaters on the water with a positive message focused on boater education and awareness.

They brought their message of ‘Operation Dry Water’ to the Preserve’s southernmost unit which is a complex series of waterways, river channels, and bayous usually filled recreational boating and fishing enthusiasts. The unit provides some unique challenges due to its numerous access points and its proximity to Beaumont’s urban center.

VRP staff informed boaters about the use of proper safety equipment and encouraged the use of all styles of PFDs while working side-by-side with the US Coast Guard personnel. Together they conveyed a strong water safety message to each boater they met over the five-day holiday.

Operation Dry Water is a nationwide law enforcement program with a mission to reduce the number of alcohol-related accidents and fatalities by fostering a stronger and more visible deterrent to alcohol use on the water. Alcohol is the leading contributing factor in recreational boating deaths in the United States. Since its inception, Operation Dry Water has seen alcohol-related incidents reduce from 19 to 16 percent in frequency. More information about ODW is available at www.operationdrywater.org.



Coast guard personnel flank NPS Ranger on Fourth of July weekend Operation Dry Water boater safety weekend.



Texas Game Warden, NPS Ranger, and Coast Guard personnel.



CONGRATULATIONS

BIG THICKET EMPLOYEE HONORED FOR HEROISM

Big Thicket National Preserve Superintendent Wayne Prokopetz is pleased to announce that on Tuesday, July 4, Park Ranger Michael Hughes was honored with a Department of Interior Valor Award, for outstanding performance and bravery while responding to the 2016 flooding throughout in Southeast Texas.

Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke presented Ranger Hughes with a citation during the Department's 2017 Independence Day celebration in the Main Interior Building in Washington, DC.

The citation of Valor awarded to Ranger Hughes cites his heroic efforts to rescue local Southeast Texas residents from rapidly rising waters and extreme flooding conditions.

Using his meticulously developed skills as a motorboat and airboat operator Ranger Hughes is credited with performing multiple rescues throughout the late night hours.

"I am proud to serve with Ranger Hughes," Superintendent Prokopetz said. "The dedication and selfless devotion demonstrated by Ranger Hughes and many others in the hours and days after the flooding events in May of 2016 are what makes all of us proud members of this community."

A lifelong resident of Tyler County, Ranger Hughes has worked for the National Park Service (NPS) for the past 15 years. Prior to joining the NPS, Ranger Hughes served his community as part of the Tyler County Sheriff's Department for 12 years.

"Especially on the Fourth of July, when we are celebrating the birth and the greatness of our nation, to have people that go above and beyond the highest traditions of service, self-sacrifice, I was honored to give the awards of Valor today and recognize them for a job well done," Secretary Zinke said.



BT Hero Ranger: Big Thicket National Preserve Ranger Michael Hughes (left) and Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke.



NPS trail logs.

NEWS FROM THE BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE: THE SUNSET OF THE TRADITIONAL TRAIL LOG

Along thousands of miles of hiking trails, in parks across the country, hikers were once encouraged to self-register in trail logs, recording who they were, where they were from and who they were hiking with.

In the early 1900's, the culture that was created around hiking embraced this norm, but 100 years later, our world has changed. Today our visitors check-in on Facebook and Snapchat, instead of using a written log. At the Big Thicket National Preserve, we once used trail logs in an attempt to understand the number of visitors coming to the park and what trails they were using, but that too has changed.

In late 2015, park staff began installing new underground traffic counters, designed to track the number of cars entering key day-use-areas, trail-head parking lots and other parts of the preserve. As a replacement to the trail logs, these counters provide a more reliable data point for understanding the amount of use happening in each area.

By 2016, the Kirby Nature Trail a newly installed traffic counter revealed that more than 66 percent of our visitors were skipping the traditional trail log. And, by the end of 2017, more than 14 traffic counters will be installed throughout the preserve.

These tools will help to better understand how many visitors are currently using the park and what areas they are visiting. The counters are meant to be inconspicuous, in hopes that by minimizing any awareness of these devices, we can decrease vandalism. Knowing how many visitors use a part of the park and how the amount of use changes from month-to-month helps us more successfully manage the preserve.

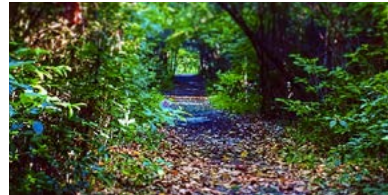
The remaining trail logs will disappear from the preserve by the end of 2017 along with the removal of some of the brochure boxes, while others will be repaired and replaced. In the coming years, we strive to improve the interpretive and way-finding signage along many of the park trails and at the day-use-areas. All of these tools will help use better serve the park visitors and create a positive, memorable experience in the preserve.



BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

Partner in Preservation

#BIGTHICKET





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WEB SITES

Big Thicket Association
www.bigthicket.org

Big Thicket National Preserve
www.nps.gov/bt

East Texas Black Bear Task Force
www.blackbear.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.npsca.org

Native Plant Society of Texas
www.npsot.org

Nature Conservancy
www.nature.org/tx

Outdoor Nature Club, Houston
www.outdoornatureclub.org

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

Texas Conservation Alliance
www.texasconservation.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.

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