



BIG THICKET BULLETIN

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ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE BIG THICKET NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST IN 2017

By Mary Catherine Johnson, Treasurer

The Big Thicket National Heritage Trust is established to protect the natural heritage of the Big Thicket and preserve thicket land and waters for future generations. The Trust accomplishes this primarily through donation or purchase of land from willing sellers. Landowners sometimes choose donation for possible tax benefits.

In 1999, a few concerned citizens gathered around a kitchen table to establish a conservation non-profit organization using established land trusts as their guides and mentors. Brent Arsement, of Kountze, was the Trust's first president. Since these early days, the Trust acquired 241 acres through both purchase and donation. The properties are conferred to the National Park Service for inclusion in the Big Thicket National Preserve boundary.

In 2017, the Trust acquired 28 acres, including 25 acres of slope forest with a pine and hardwood mix along Village Creek. An additional three acres adjacent to Hwy 69, north of the Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center, increases the Preserve buffer and view shed.

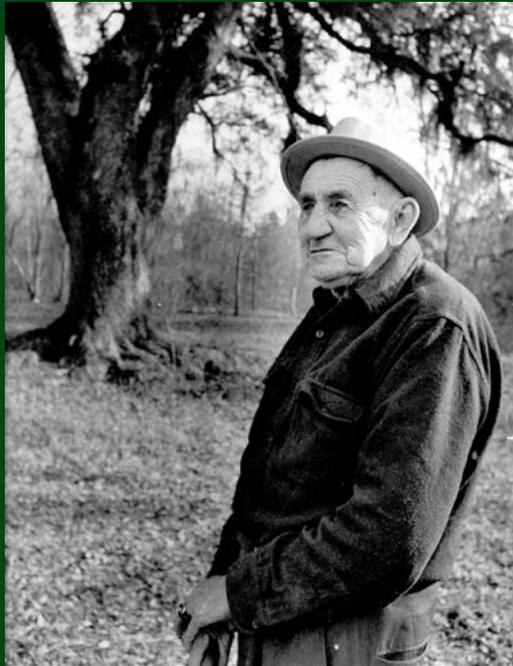
The Big Thicket National Heritage Trust is committed to educating the public on land trusts and quality stewardship practices. Trust members opposed the construction of the proposed Hwy 105 Toll Road and Loop 299, in Vidor, in partnership with a coalition established to save the region's floodplains and wetlands. Trust members also assisted as trail guides for school hikes in the Preserve. This past year, the Trust received a grant from the Apache Corporation to purchase 5,000 longleaf pine seedlings for planting in the Preserve on MLK Day.

In 2018, the Trust will receive a \$200,000 Recreational Trail Grant from Texas Parks and Wildlife to go toward the purchase of approximately 35 acres and renovation of .80 miles of trail in Tyler County.

Members still convene around kitchen tables and work to protect water quality, wildlife habitat and diversity, and natural communities of the Big Thicket. If interested in joining or supporting this effort, email: bigthickettrust@gmail.com or visit www.bigthickettrust.org for more information.



BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE NEWS



PARK INTERN UNCOVERS LANCE ROSIER'S BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE

By Broghan Sagers

Everything I read about Big Thicket National Preserve from the 1974 National Geographic article and pamphlets begins with vivid depictions. I will do the same as we celebrate the preserve's 43rd birthday to commemorate all those who played a part in preserving this Southeast Texas treasure.

The smell of upland pine forests fills my nose as I reach the hidden fishing hole along the Woodlands Trail and eagerly await the entering the damp dense canopy along the eastern portion of the trail, where the tupelo and sweetgum trees grow. Walking here is like stepping back in time. The very history is embedded deep within every inch of the land. My ever-present

companion canine stiffens and spins around to meet the sound of small critters scurrying among the old pine plantation behind us, and I am drawn back across the centuries to the present again.

Out of all who worked to create the Big Thicket is Lance Rosier, whose childhood meant hunting flowers in the woods; whose education was unorthodox, and whose time as a guide for the 1936 Biological Survey of the East Texas Big Thicket Area changed everything.

Rosier's lasting contribution is not just the 26,000 acres unit of the Big Thicket named for Lance, but also his careful cultivation of a community. The decedents of those who laid claim to the land from squatter rights offered familiarity with the area, while the scientists and journalist documented and shared the unique diversity of the park. Rosier's knowledge of the land and dedication to establishing Big Thicket as a national park brought people from all walks of life to the community; a community that has proven to be as enduring and vibrant as the preserve itself.

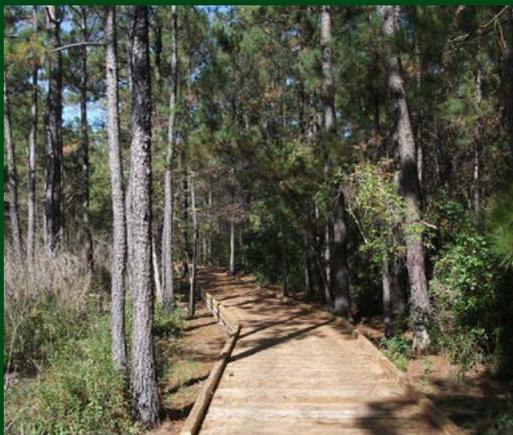
There is certain serendipity to celebrating the history and life of Big Thicket National Preserve. It offers a subtle nod to the belief in the supernatural that is as deeply embedded in the history of Big Thicket as the largest tree's roots. Wild stories of black panthers armed with the ability to scream with the voices of women brought out so many armed ghost hunters that the locals didn't go outside at night for fear of being shot. The thrill of the mysterious supernatural shiver is a large part of the intrigue and history of Big Thicket.

The mission of Big Thicket National Preserve is to mold the next generation of stewards who find their calling midst the melange of habitats and cacophony of vibrancy. The most special thing to Big Thicket is that it is there for you to enjoy and explore.

Above: Flower

Top Left: Lance Rosier at his birthplace in the Thicket around February 1970.

Bottom Left: Sundew Trail in the Big Thicket National Preserve.



NECHES RIVER ADVENTURES NEWS: INTRODUCING IVORY BILL CAPTAIN FATHER SINCLAIR K. OUBRE

by **Bruce Walker**

The newest Ivory Bill Captain is Father Sinclair Oubre, who joined the BTA team of captains in August after training with other captains and familiarizing himself with the Ivory Bill and the Neches River Adventures program.

Fr. Sinclair is a priest of the Diocese of Beaumont, and a native of Port Arthur, Tex. He attended the University of St. Thomas in Houston and Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, where he received his bachelor's degree. He completed graduate studies in Leuven, Belgium, and was ordained to the priesthood May 10, 1986. In 1997, received JCL in Canon Law at Catholic University in Washington.

Currently, Fr. Sinclair is the Diocesan Director of the Apostleship of the Sea, Director of the Permanent Diaconate Formation Program, and Pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Orange, Tex. He is the Executive Director and Port Chaplain of the Port Arthur International Seafarers' Center, the Chaplain to the Sabine Area Central Labor Council.

On the national level, Fr. Sinclair served as the President of the Apostleship of the Sea of the United States of America from 2001-2013. He also served as the unlicensed deck department member on the US Coast Guard Merchant Marine Advisory Council from 1998-2013. He is a member of the Nautical Institute, and serves as secretary to the Nautical Institute – Gulf Branch.

Fr. Sinclair is a member of the United States Merchant Marine, and holds a merchant marine credential as an AB-Limited, and holds a 100-ton near coastal master's license. He sails through the Houston Seafarers International Union. In 2014, he sailed on the Crowley tug, Ocean Sky, and from May to June, 2015, he sailed on the Crowley tugs, Patriarch & Ranger, taking the barge San Juan on the Jacksonville-San Juan run.

Fr. Sinclair has traveled the world representing the Diocese of Beaumont. He recently returned from the XXIV World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea. Port Chaplains and maritime coworkers from around the world gathered in Taiwan.

When Fr. Sinclair is not piloting the Big Thicket Association's Ivory Bill, you may find him riding a cross country motorcycle tour, one of his other favorite hobbies. Fr. Sinclair said: "The photo is a picture of me and my mid-life crisis solver. It is a Buell 1125CR. It is a much better motorcycle than I am rider."

The Big Thicket Association is proud that we can attract people like Father Sinclair Oubre to assist us with our educational mission.



Father Sinclair



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

April 21, 2018

National Junior Ranger Day, Big Thicket National Preserve, Celebrate with us! Free, 9 am – 1 pm, Free, Visitor Center Kountze, Texas. Register (409) 951-6700.

April 28, 2018

Full Moon Night Hike in the Big Thicket National Preserve, experience the thicket by moonlight. Free, locations and times are variable contact the Visitor Center Kountze, Texas. Register (409) 951-6700.

May 6, 2018

Big Sandy Trail Hike, Big Thicket National Preserve. Join us on an exploration. Free, contact Visitor Center Kountze, Texas. Register (409) 951-6700.



Big Thicket Mushroom Walk

MUSHROOM WALK IN THE WATSON RARE NATIVE PLANT PRESERVE

By Mary Catherine Johnston and Mona Halvorsen

A November mushroom walk on the Watson Rare Native Plant Preserve near Warren was guided by David Lewis, President of the Gulf States Mycological Society. Lewis studied macrofungi for over 40 years and inventoried species for the Thicket of Diversity since its founding in 2006.

Lewis identified over 650 species in the Big Thicket with many new to the Big Thicket National Preserve, new to State of Texas, and more than 20 species new to science.

Established in the 1980's by Geraldine Watson, the Watson Preserve always yields exciting finds including orchids, pitcher plants, and other rare plants.

Some 22 nature lovers participated in the mushroom walk where 38 species of fungi were found and identified, including the *Amanita texosora*, a species new to science. Lewis and his wife, Patricia, have collected, identified, and vouchered over 85 species from the Watson Preserve since 2004.

BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATOR NEWS

Introducing BTA Environmental Educator Terrie Looney

By Jan Ruppel

BTA welcomes Terrie Looney as our new Environmental Educator.

“I had the pleasure of working with Terrie when I taught 5th grade, and our classes traveled to Trinity Bay in Anahuac,” Jan Ruppel, NRIB Chair.

They participated in the Waterborne Education Center field labs on renovated Coast Guard buoy tender boats to explore the wetlands and ecosystems.

“As you will note, her background is diverse and compliments our educational needs,” Ruppel said.

At the end of August 2017, Terrie Looney retired as the Coastal and Marine Resources Agent for Jefferson and Chambers counties after 19 years in a dual Texas Sea Grant/Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service position.

Looney joined Texas Sea Grant after ten years as a certified teacher, applying her experience to enhance her educational and outreach efforts.

Looney began working with the Neches River Adventures several years ago on educational outings for school groups and became a deckhand.

Her experience with ‘on the water education’ began in 1998, when she assisted the creation and development of the Waterborne Education Center in Anahuac.

Looney was also part of the committee with Dr. Bothel to design the Ivory Bill.

She has a long history of taking students into the environment or as Looney calls it: “Hands-on, feet in education.”

Looney is also a coordinator for Camp SeaPort, a Port Arthur-based day-camp offering education about marine career opportunities for local high school students.

Statewide, Looney served as the regional coordinator for the two Texas competitions of the National Ocean Sciences Bowl (NOSB) — the Dolphin Challenge in northern Texas and the Loggerhead Challenge in the southern part of the state. NOSB is a quiz bowl-style competition designed to teach high school students about the oceans.

Looney continues to support the local shrimp industry as a Port Arthur Shrimp Association board member where she coordinates professional development education for shrimp fishermen, including safety training.

Looney is a graduate of Lamar University, in Beaumont, with Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees in Biology, she completed a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Northcentral University in 2015. Her dissertation is on teachers and outdoor education.



BTA Environmental Educator, Terrie Looney



THICKET OF DIVERSITY

THE THICKET OF DIVERSITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2017

By *Mary Catherine Johnston, President*

The Big Thicket Association's Thicket of Diversity (ToD) has surveyed and monitored species in Southeast Texas' rich biological diversity of the Big Thicket since 2006. Last year, 2017 was an active and productive year for the project.

The Big Thicket National Preserve protects 113,000 acres in seven counties: Jefferson, Hardin, Jasper, Liberty, Orange, Tyler and Polk ideal for research. The ToD partners with the preserve and other government and non-government agencies, educational institutions, non-profits, and industry. The information ToD collects is of benefit to land managers in measuring species' variations and ecosystems as a result of climate change.

Researchers from across the state and nation make home-base at the Big Thicket National Preserve Field Research Station, in Saratoga, in 2017. The FRS list of resident scholars is:

- Beth Middleton, of the United States Geological Survey (USGS), conducted fieldwork on leaf litter and seed samples.
- Evelyn Anemaet also of the USGS studied baldcypress.
- Brian Gold, of Texas State University, performed mist netting of birds to study ticks.
- Bradford Westrich, of Texas State University, studied mammalian communities and host richness and parasites.
- Mackenzie Tietjen, of Texas A&M, researched ticks.
- Edward Realzola, of Sam Houston State University, continued his whirligig beetle research.
- Matt Ley, of Colorado State University, followed up on vegetation mapping.
- Scott Clark, of the University of Houston, collected soil for research on *Dictyostelium discoideum* in Texas.
- Alison Tarter, of Texas State University, began a freshwater mussel project partly funded by the ToD.
- Matt Pyne, of Lamar University, initiated alligator research in the preserve, partly funded by the ToD.
- Daniel Bennett, of Stephen F. Austin, started a bee survey in the Big Thicket National Preserve.
- Lauren Dennhardt, of Valley State University, researched plant and fish specimens for an undergraduate diversity study.
- Scott Solomon, of Rice University, led an annual student bioblitz.
- Carl Knight, of Eastfield College, explored 2018 opportunities for Dallas students to volunteer in the preserve.
- Students from St. Michael's College, in Vermont, returned in 2017 for their annual alternative winter break to volunteer with the NPS for six full days.
- Biology students from Sam Houston State College removed litter.





THICKET OF DIVERSITY



The ToD also hosted David Lewis of the Gulf States Mycological Society for two mushroom walks for members, the public, and 130 Kountze High School students on the Kirby Nature Trail and a tour on board the IvoryBill floating classroom.

The Big Thicket National Preserve and ToD presented exhibits on the research in the thicket and helped as judges at the Kountze Intermediate School Science Fair for roughly 270 student projects.

ToD helped in the NPS Every Kid in Park Program bringing along 93 Kountze Intermediate School fourth-graders under the Brown Foundation grant.

Funding for ToD 2017 was facilitated by The Brown Foundation, the National Park Foundation, Kountze ISD and individual contributions. ToD also receives penalty monies from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) enforcement actions.

For more information, contact the Thicket of Diversity Director, Mona Halvorsen, at (936) 274-5898, director@thicketofdiversity.org or visit www.thicketofdiversity.org.



Longleaf Pine Restoration NEWS

MLK Day Service project brings volunteers to plant trees in the Big Thicket Preserve

On Monday, Jan. 15, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, volunteers descended on the Big Sandy Unit of the Big Thicket National Preserve for a day of service. Some 115 volunteers planted longleaf pine seedlings as part of the Longleaf Pine Restoration Project in the preserve. For eight consecutive years, the National Park Conservation Association has sponsored the planting of longleaf pines in the Centennial Forest of the preserve. Thousands of trees have been planted since 2010 with the most recent planting of 10,000 seedlings covering a small fraction of the 300-acre forest. Volunteers from as far away as Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, and across Southeast Texas joining the National Park Service, the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, the Master Naturalists, the Houston Garden Club, the Houston and Dallas Zoos, the Big Thicket Association, and others. Another 5,000 seedlings are awaiting planting donated by the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust were planted this year.





BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

Partner in Preservation

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WEB SITES

Big Thicket Association
www.bigthicket.org

Big Thicket National Preserve
www.btt.nps.gov

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.siclub.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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