

Big Thicket Reporter - #101

Sept-Oct 2009

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BIG THICKET CELEBRATES 45TH / 35TH ANNIVERSARIES

Preserve Hosts Open House for Administrative Headquarters

Big Thicket aficionados will gather at the Preserve Visitor Center / Headquarters on October 10 to celebrate anniversaries. The event will begin at 9:00 with a BTA membership meeting followed by the program with speakers including public officials, conservationists and scientists. The BTA meeting is open to the public and our annual awards will be presented at that time.

Among invited speakers are Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison and Rep. Kevin Brady, both of whom supported funding to acquire land authorized in the 1993 Addition Act as well as funding for the Visitor Center and Headquarters offices. NPS officials from Washington and Denver are expected to attend. Former Cong. Charles Wilson has also been invited.

Among confirmed speakers are Dr. Pete Gunter, former president of BTA and Chair of the former BT Coordinating Committee; Dr. Dale Kruse, President of the Executive Council,

Thicket of Diversity; Dr. Carl Knight, Eastfield College; and Andy Jones, Texas Director, The Conservation Fund...

Ribbon-cutting for headquarters offices occurs at 11:30. After the ribbon cutting and tour of the new facilities, lunch will be available, and we will enjoy music by Sabine Bluegrass of Lumberton..

The Big Thicket Association formed October 4, 1964 with the goal to create a national park that would not only protect a biologically diverse resource, but also enhance the local economy. Big Thicket National Preserve was approved by Congress (PL 93-439) and signed into law by President Gerald Ford on October 11, 1974.

Other Events

1:00 PM - Alabama-Coushatta Indian Dancers: The colorful and talented Indian Dancers will perform at

1:45 PM -America's Best Idea, the Ken Burns Film sponsored by National Parks Conservation Association, will be shown in the Visitor Center auditorium.

In between events, visit:

Exhibits: Dr. F.E. Abernethy's Neches River Exhibit of aerial photographs will be on view.

Powerpoints: Follow the chronology illustrating the history of the BTA (1964-2009) and the National Preserve (1974-2009).

AWARD WINNERS

The Awards Committee recommended and the directors approved the following awards for 2009, which will be presented during the Big Thicket Day program on Oct. 10.

Thomas Lubbert Superior Achievement Award this year goes to Lamar Funderburk. The award recognizes Preserve employees with at least three years service, outstanding performance, significant contributions and dedication.



For thirteen years Lamar served the Preserve as a Maintenance Mechanic. During this time the workload has been heavy with fewer people doing more. He served as Acting Chief during the absence or vacancy of the Facility Manager position. Lamar acquired a reputation as the preserve's expert "Chef Lamar"! Beyond Big Thicket, he served as a Wildland Firefighter and later as Fire Equipment Manager in other parts of the country. (1988 - 2003)

R.E. Jackson Conservation Award: Brandt Mannchen's wide-ranging services in behalf of environmental protection may not be known by all of his colleagues, but his work is well known to many public agencies -- US Forest Service, National Park Service, US Corps of Engineers, a multitude of Texas agencies -- TCEQ, TWDB, TxDOT, etc.



His services to conservation and the preservation of our natural heritage would be difficult to catalog. His keen mind, boundless energy and extraordinary dedication have resulted in voluminous, informed and specific comments on dozens of issues. Among the issues addressed were forest management, endangered species, pollution, public lands, oil and gas exploration, coastal resources, and transportation issues -- writing amazingly detailed reviews and comments on environmental impact statements, forest management plans, proposed agency rules, and other requests for public comments. Among the agencies that have benefited from his work are Sam Houston National Forest, Big Thicket National Preserve, Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge, Guadalupe Mountain National Park, Big Bend National Park, and Davy Crockett National Forest.

Distinguished Service Award honors Dr. Richard Harrel, Professor of Biology, Lamar University, and long-term President of Clean Air and Water, Inc. This award recognizes the forty years of research, field studies, and publications that have added significantly to baseline biological data for the Big Thicket Region. Among the agencies benefiting from his work are the Big Thicket National Preserve and the Nature Conservancy. In addition the work completed by his graduate students has contributed enormously to the information available about the streams and rivers of southeast Texas.



This long period of service has resulted in a cleaner, less-polluted environment through his leadership in the Clean Air and Water group. Because of him and his colleagues, the Neches River was "cleaned up" to benefit water users and recreational activities. Their monitoring of permits on Pine Island Bayou and Village Creek yielded additional benefits for the

environment.

Life Membership Presentation: The BTA proudly presents to Eddie Arnaud of Lumberton a life membership in the Big Thicket Association. Arnaud's generous gift of 600 acres to the Big Thicket National Preserve reflects a strong commitment to protecting plants and wildlife in these remarkable wetlands. BTA joins Big Thicket National Preserve and The Conservation Fund in acknowledging our profound esteem and appreciation for this extraordinary generosity.

According to officials, the values of protecting the property extend to recharging an aquifer beneath Beaumont and filtering the runoff of the heavily developed area around Parkdale Mall before entering the Neches River.

Arnaud, a Beaumont fireman, acquired the property in 1995 and later decided to set up the property as a wetlands mitigation bank. In an Enterprise article reported by Sarah Moore, Arnaud said that it's almost impossible to maintain pristine wetlands alongside Southeast Texas' heavy industry. He added, "I wouldn't trade our refineries for anything, but at the same time, we've got to protect the few wetlands we have left."

PARTNERS PRESERVE PYRAMID MAGNOLIAS

The BTA board of directors voted unanimously to make efforts to protect a 300-acre tract in Newton County that contains several populations of the rare *Magnolia pyramidata*. BTA appealed to ten conservation groups to partner with us in forming a committee to raise funds, acquire the property, and draft a management plan. Details are incomplete, but stand by for more information.

DIVERSITY DISPATCH

TAXA TALLY TO DATE: Over 7700 specimens in 15 different taxonomic groups have been identified; over 30 new species known to the preserve; 57 new species known to the state of Texas; and 3 brand new to science!

BIODIVERSITY FIELD TRIPS and SEMINARS:

Dr. Chad Hargrave, Assistant Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, of Sam Houston State University will present on Oct. 3 a 45-minute seminar on the fish diversity and stream ecology of Big Thicket National Preserve. This training will benefit volunteers who participate in a 40-mile, 4-day canoe trip on the Neches River in December.

Dr. Larissa Vasilyeva will conduct a workshop to train volunteers on collection techniques and

field identification of Pyrenomycetes fungi. The workshop is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, October 3.

Dr. Vasilyeva arrives from Russia and will be in residence from October 1st through October 15th. An initial survey of pyrenomycetes in the Big Thicket National Preserve during a previous visit (August 2-13, 2007) ... Vasilyeva collected specimens in seven preserve units.

Approximately 140 specimens representing 48 species (with some identifications still tentative) were collected. Even such a brief survey of the fungi revealed a number of interesting species, including some that were new to science.

For more events and updates, visit our website:

<http://www.thicketofdiversity.org/BTA/Calendars/events.shtml>.

Check out our Facebook page. <http://tiny.cc/TODFacebook>

CONSERVATION OUTLOOK

FRIENDS OF NATIONAL FORESTS AND GRASSLANDS IN TEXAS

by Betty Russo

Friends of the National Forests and Grasslands in Texas recently formed to encourage the U. S. Forest Service to make these national assets more accessible and user-friendly for the public. The leaders in the effort include Richard Donovan, Jonathan Gerland, and Rufus Duncan.

"To support, preserve, protect, expand, promote and enhance the forests and their use for recreational, educational, and scientific purposes for the benefit of people and nature," is the bold mission statement that will guide the organization's efforts. Approximately 600,000 acres of National Forests and Grasslands exist in Texas. These public lands, containing unnumbered places of historical and cultural treasures, unique beauty, and an abundance of species of birds and wildlife, often unknown and unused by the public.

The friends group is a high priority of the Angelina County Green Infrastructure Plan participants. All the counties and communities within the region will join in the effort to protect these outstanding natural resources. A membership drive is now underway. Please call 832-401-1633 to join this new effort.

BEARS RETURNING TO EAST TEXAS

by Paul Davidson

Aug, 17– Bears are being seen in East Texas for the first time in 50 years ... Designated as a threatened species, the Louisiana black bear (*Ursus americanus luteolus*) is making a comeback with help from the BBCC and its partners. BP America joined with the Black Bear Conservation Coalition (BBCC) to support its bear work in East Texas... donating a truck for use in a project to study bear population and habitat in southeast Texas.

The research study will be conducted by Dr. Christopher E. Comer of Stephen F. Austin State University. The three year study will determine occupancy and distribution of black bears in southeast Texas, examine demographics, and assess the suitability of forested habitats to identify priority locations for bear habitat. This baseline assessment will provide critical data for long-term management of this federally threatened species. The 2.5 million acre study area includes the southern portion of the Pineywoods, the Middle Neches and Lower Neches River Corridors, and the Big Thicket National Preserve...

“The recovery of the black bear and the conservation and management of its forested habitat will benefit a whole suite of other species including bats, neotropical birds, and support broader wildlife biodiversity and watershed management of this region,” said BBCC Chairman Nathan Garner...

The BBCC and the ETBBTF encourage interested parties to visit our newly updated website at www.bbcc.org and become a member of this home-grown success story. East Texas

Media kits are available at www.bbcc.org/etbbtf/press.aspx. The BBCC/ ETBBTF also offers educational materials for teachers and classroom use at <http://www.bbcc.org/etbbtf/teachers.aspx>.

To report a bear sighting in East Texas and request Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) investigate, call 1-800-792-1112, or (903) 566-1626 ext. 221. To report a poached or injured bear in Texas, please call Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) Law Enforcement 24 hour Poaching Hotline at 1-800-792-4263.

PRESERVE OVERVIEW

by Ann Roberts

Village Creek Cleanup

BTNP Ranger Johnny Stafford appealed to Piney Wood Outfitters owner David Martin to help cleanup Village Creek resulted in both trashy results and great fun! David Martin recruited help

including Eric Thomas, Silsbee; Terry Thomas, Silsbee (who brought along Popeye the Dog); Shawn Pierce, Lumberton; Chris Corbello, Kountze; and Debbie Hanna, Kountze. They joined Preserve staff including Stafford, Beth Kearn, and Jessica Diller. The group spent eight hours from Baby Galvez to US 96 gathering cans, bottles, and assorted junk. The fun part was getting acquainted, enjoying the creek, and spotting wildlife --including a small beaver.

Local groups are working to establish a Texas Paddle Trail on Village Creek. According to Martin, NPS says Village Creek ranks number one in Texas for canoeing, and number seven for canoeing in the U.S. He pointed out that the Creek was featured more than seven times in the last six months in national and state media.

"Orphaned" Wells EA

An August 12 Preserve news release reports that an EA is online in compliance with NEPA to plug orphaned oil and gas wells and to reclaim abandoned wellpads and access roads in the Preserve. This is an American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 project. The scoping brochure is online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>

There are 17 orphaned oil and gas wells that were abandoned prior to the Preserve's establishment. Two plugged wells in the Neches River pose environmental risks and are a navigational hazard; they were formerly on land but the riverbank eroded. Fourteen wells are improperly capped and need re-plugging. Well pads need restoration

Trunkline Gas Pipeline EA

Another news release on Aug. 17 reports a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the proposed Trunkline Gas Co. 100-1 pipeline replacement and removal within the Lower Neches River Corridor Unit, which was available for public review June 25-July 25. A special use permit will be issued to remove 104 feet of suspended pipe within the Neches River and buried within the west bank, and abandon the remaining pipe buried within the river bed and in the east bank, allowing for removal of potentially hazardous suspended pipeline.

(<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bith>)

EVENTS

Sept. 26 - National Public Lands Day - Trinity River NWR and their Friends group / trash cleanup at the SH 105 Trinity River bridge, Saturday, 9:00-11:00 Stuart Marcus at 936-336-9786.

Sept. 26 - Ghosts of Texas Past, Heritage Village, Woodville, 7:00-9:00 PM

Oct. 1 - "Birds and Bottomlands," Houston Audubon, fundraising gala honors TCA, Ellen & Buddy Temple, former Cong. Charles Wilson and The Conservation Fund

Oct. 3 - "Fish Diversity and Stream Ecology" seminar, Dr. Chad Hargrave (SHSU); Workshop on collection and field identification of pyrenomycetes, Dr. Larissa Vasilyeva, BTNP Field Research Station, Saratoga (936-274-1181)

Oct. 9 - Thicket of Diversity Executive Council, 10:00 AM, Field Research Station, Saratoga

Oct 10 - BTNP and BTA Anniversaries / Big Thicket Day / Headquarters Dedication, 9:00-4:30

Oct. 11 - "Big Sit" at Champion Lake pier to count birds, Trinity River NWR (936-336-9786)

Oct. 16-18 - Harvest Festival, Heritage Village, Woodville

Oct. 23-25 - Sierra Celebration @ Martin Dies, Jr. State Park

Nov. 7 - Texas Conservation Alliance Annual Meeting, Trinity River Audubon Center, Dallas

Nov. 14 - Mushroom Walk, led by David Lewis, TWiG leader