

LAMAR RETIREES SAVE FIRST ACRE

Ten Acres Follow from Individual!

At their meeting on January 12, the Lamar University Retirees Association members voted to "Save an Acre" of a 296-acre tract in Newton County with populations of the threatened species Pyramid Magnolia. This was the **FIRST** acre in a campaign to protect the magnolias. Among the retirees were former biology professors William Fitzgerald and Jed Ramsey and three BTA board members. After

the meeting two profs suggested that the acre honor their colleague, the late Dr. Russell Long, who served 17 years on the BTA board of directors. We second the motion!

January 27 the Beaumont Council of Garden Clubs endured a Powerpoint® presentation by your editor — interrupted with numerous glitches. Nevertheless, a wonderfully generous individual

immediately wrote a check for \$10,000 but prefers to remain anonymous. That's going to be Harder than somewhat! But we are not surprised. Among our conservation friends there are amazing folks who CARE about protecting our native treasures!

BTA is so profoundly honored by these gifts.

Walkathon For Pyramids

Dallas community college students under the leadership of Dr. Carl Knight are helping to raise funds to protect pyramid magnolias (MAPY). The students have held a benefit Walkathon, and plan other events.

Aided by grants from the National Science Foundation, Knight encourages students to become scientists and involves them in research projects. He has been bringing students to the Big Thicket since the 1960s, and the NSF grant has allowed him to enlarge and enhance his work using new technologies.



Conversation Outlook

BLACK BEAR MEETINGS

The East Texas Black Bear Task Force met Dec. 15-16 at the Field Research Station in Saratoga. With Chair Chris Comer (SFA) presiding, the Task Force discussed the past 5-year accomplishments based on objectives identified in the management plan and priorities established in 2005.

The two-day agenda included reports on habitat management / fragmentation, conflict management, research, information and education. There were updates on bear sightings, Hardwood Habitat Cooperative Projects, Bear Awareness Day, SFA research projects, and pros and cons of reintroduction. A professional facilitator guided discussion of future plans and priorities. Nathan Garner (TP&W) organized a cookout

Tuesday evening, and Gilbert Adams sponsored the luncheon on Wednesday.

A Black Bear Educators Workshop will be held Feb. 27, 9:00-12:00 AM at the BTNP Visitor Center north of Kountze on US69/287. The workshop will present a general overview of biology and ecology as well as history and current status in Texas. Interpreters will offer a nature walk in the Big Thicket National Preserve. Mary Kay Manning, Interpretive Ranger, is coordinating arrangements for the Workshop. The course offers three hours CE credit. For more information or RSVP: Rachel Rommel, 713-533-6836 - rrommel@houstonzoo.org.

OF RESERVOIRS AND DALLAS

By Janice Bezanson
Exec. Director, TCA

The message needs to reach the people of Dallas, Fort Worth, and surrounding cities, that there are much better alternatives for providing future water supply than building a new reservoir!

Tapping existing underutilized reservoirs for water supply can give the region way more than enough water for future growth. Prime candidates to tap are Lake Texoma, Lake Wright Patman, and Toledo Bend Reservoir.

After the intense drought of the 1950s, the leaders of Dallas and

other area cities did an excellent job of developing water supply for the region so that we no longer need additional reservoirs. However, the potential flow of public money to big public works projects is leading those who would build those projects to advocate more reservoirs anyway.

There are compelling reasons not to build a reservoir unless it is absolutely essential for water supply. Inundating tens of thousands of acres of land devastates people's lives, forcing them off their land and out of their livelihoods. The agribusiness and timber industries are heavily impacted. The people in the area of the reservoir pay a high environmental and social cost.

SEA RIM STATE PARK

Beginning March 1, 2010, Tracy Ferguson will join the TP&W Region 4's team as Superintendent at Sea Rim SP. TP&W continues its master plan and redevelopment phase following the approach used at Galveston Island State Park with an interim operation. When the fiscal controls are complete, the park will begin allowing day-use and primitive beach camping with visitors utilizing self-pay stations. Visitors will also notice new and updated orientation panels, a dune cross-over, and the reopening of the Gambusia Nature Trail which is a ¾ mile boardwalk through the marsh.

Black Bear Educators Workshop (3 Hrs CE Credit)

**BTNP Visitors Center
Saturday, February 27
9:00 am – 12:00**

**RSVP to
Rachel Rommel
713-533-6836
rrommel@houstonzoo.org**

Big Thicket/Sandylands Report, Oct 2009–Jan 2010

by Wendy J. Ledbetter
SE Texas Project Director

Science and Stewardship

Following consultation with the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department eleven freshwater mussel species have been documented by surveys conducted by The Nature Conservancy for the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary in Hardin County. In November 2009 TPWD listed 15 species as threatened for the state, including the Sandbank pocketbook and Louisiana pigtoe. Both of these rare mussels occur in the 8.5 mile segment of Village Creek that traverses the Preserve.

TNC staff conducted a prescribed burn on 200 acres of the western portion of the Grass Pond Unit of the Sandyland Preserve. Conservancy staff Bob Boensch and Shawn Benedict also assisted the National Park Service with a 180-acre prescribed burn on the Hickory Creek Unit of the Big Thicket National Preserve. This work is under the recently renewed Memorandum of Understanding the Conservancy has with NPS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

On the Agenda

Program staff will conduct prescribed burns on several preserves in February and will provide a field tour of the Sandylands for TPWD staff. Ledbetter will be presenting an overview of longleaf

pine ecosystem for the TNC Central Region Science and Stewardship meeting in Corpus Christi in February.

The Conservancy will be coordinating with local partners and the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department in Spring 2010 to dedicate a section of the Texas Paddling Trail on Village Creek from north of the Roy Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary to Village Creek State Park. Information kiosks will be placed at entry and exit points along the waterway.

Fund For National Parks

Excerpts from NPCA News Release

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 2009 (S.2747) requires full authorization of \$900 million annually for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. If enacted, this permanent source of funding would result in significant investments in our national parks,

trails, historic and cultural sites, as well as other public lands ...

In the last decade, LWCF funding for the National Park System has declined from \$147 million in FY1999 to only \$45 million in FY2009. NPS has identified 1.8 million acres of priority land protection needs with an estimated price of \$2 billion. For more information, contact Christina Kamrath at 202-419-3719

Note: The LWCF, established by Congress in 1965, designates a portion of receipts from offshore oil and gas leases be placed into a fund annually for state and local conservation, as well as for the protection of our national treasures (parks, forest and wildlife areas). LWCF has a broad-based coalition of support, including the National Parks and Recreation Association, The Wilderness Society, and the Land Trust Alliance.

Big Thicket Association NEWS



BTA BOARD MEETING

The agenda for the January 9th BTA directors meeting was choc-a-bloc with reports and updates, break-outs for committee meetings, and new business. Financial reports 2009 for the Operating and ATBI-Thicket of Diversity Funds were submitted, and budgets for 2010 were adopted. Among the updates were reports from Ellen Buchanan on state parks; Supt. Todd Brindle,

on BTNP; and President Bruce Drury, on Neches River, Thicket of Diversity, and other on-going concerns.

BIG THICKET NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST

Directors convened at 2:00 PM on January 9 at the FRS to hear updates on properties acquired, in progress, and anticipated.

East Texas Miscellany

G.T. SIERRA'S WEEKEND

About 20 Intrepids showed up for the annual MLK weekend events scheduled by the Golden Triangle group — slightly revised to accommodate cold weather. As always the trip leaders were Gerald Langham and Joe Murphy, and this year the site was Boykin Springs. The group shared stories around the campfires and songs were provided by Dylan Cole.

The group hiked to the Aldredge Sawmill on Sunday and canoed from US 69 near Rockland to R255 (15+ miles) on Monday. One boat capsized at a small rapid, and everyone pitched in to rescue the young folks and their canoe and gear. Langham (as always prepared) produced dry clothing for the victims.

GT Sierra joins a wide range of groups who support the Texas Conservation Alliance in its efforts to get a feasibility study for establishing and Upper Neches Scenic River. At TCA's annual meetitng, Bruce Walker, chair of the group, earned the Conservation Hero Award for 2009!

MORE ...

Gina Donovan's book, *Neches River User Guide*, with Stephen D. Lange and Adrian Van Dellen and a foreword by Andrew Sansom, is now in the bookstores and available



Golden Triangle Sierra Club canoers take a break along the Neches River during their MLK weekend field trip in January.

through TCA @ \$17.95 list \$15.35 to members. Published by the Texas A&MU Press, it is included in the Series "River Books, sponsored by the River Systems Institute" at Texas State University. Gina is Executive Director of Houston Audubon Society, and daughter of Richard Donovan (*Paddling the Wild Neches*)

Dr. James W. Westgate was recognized by the Science Teachers Association of Texas with its prestigious Skoog Cup award for 2009 (named for Gerald Skoog of Texas Tech, the first award winner). The

award recognizes "significant contributions and leadership in the development of quality science education."

Westgate is a Lamar University geology professor and board member of Texas Academy of Science, Texas Energy Museum and BTA. A prolific researcher, his work spans paleontology, paleocology, biostratigraphy, and environmental science. At Lamar, his Texas Environmental Science workshop for K-12 teachers has been held for 14 years.

Big Thicket Expansion

In 2008, Cong. Kevin Brady introduced a Big Thicket National Preserve expansion bill providing for CPR (Connect, Preserve, Revitalize) by adding UP TO 100,000 acres from WILLING SELLERS. The bill provided for new recreational initiatives for visitors. Unfortunately, the map that accompanied the legislation contained approximately 160,000 acres, and a public meeting in Spurger generated an explosion of misinformation. [Deja vu the 1960s and 70s! Those claims proved erroneous and overstated, too!]

Homes would be taken ...

- ! *never mind* about WILLING SELLERS and UP TO language
- ! *never mind* that houses and grass lawns don't have a great deal of biodiversity to conserve
- ! *never mind* that land proposed for acquisition would mostly be forested bottomlands that buffer and protect existing Preserve units

County and school districts would be decimated by tax losses ...

- ! *never mind* that the land is mostly taxed at agricultural rates based on productivity over a 10-year period
- ! *never mind* that a government program reimburses taxing entities with a Payments-in-Lieu-of-Taxes (PILT) program

Indeed, a high percentage of the proposed expansion is FLOODPLAIN — where homes should NOT be sited, avoiding human misery and taxpayer costs while protecting superb wildlife habitat.

Things have quieted somewhat but could erupt again. BTA has put together a Powerpoint® presentation and brochures with collected data on taxes, visitor spending, etc. We would welcome opportunities to visit with groups, particularly in Tyler County.

Big Thicket Expansion Bill

PLEASE ask Cong. Kevin Brady to reintroduce a revised Big Thicket Expansion Bill early in this session of Congress. And ask your groups and friends to do the same. **Contact Cong. Brady:**

By letter: 301 Cannon Bldg. US House of Representatives,
Washington, DC 20515

By phone: 202-225-4901

By fax: 404-225- 5524

By e-mail: rep.brady@mail.house.gov

UPCOMING EVENTS

February 27

Black Bear Educators
Workshop (see story, page 2)

March 20

Dogwood Trail, Woodville
Dogwood Festival, Western
Weekend (for details, contact
Maxine Johnston)

April 17

Nature Conservancy
Preserve: Timberlake, Little
Rocky, Big Thicket Bogs and
Pinelands, led by Wendy
Ledbetter or Bob Boensch
(for details, contact Maxine
Johnston)

May 1

Wilderness Pow Wow, Tyler
State Park (more details later)

May 9 or 16?

Pyramid Magnolias: Schedule
pending information of
blooming

May 22

Seminar on Frogs and Toads
of the Thicket, Dr. Paul Crump
and Rachel Rommel

June 5-15

Eastfield College Summer
Institute, Dr. Carl Knight and
Jessica Silva

June 12

Biodiversity Day (field trips,
displays, demonstrations
(Details next issue)

July 10-11

Village Creek State Park
weekend; Board meeting in
Nature Center (More details
later)

ST. MICHAEL'S VOLUNTEERS

Volunteer students from St. Michael's College in Vermont have made annual trips to Big Thicket to work in area preserves for over 15 years. The college volunteer program is entitled MOVE (Mobilization of Volunteer Effort). This year's group of 11 students arrived Saturday, January 2nd, (staying at the BTNP Field Research Station) and departed January 9th. Deanna Boench, BTNP Fire Ecologist, arranged their schedule.

On Sunday the students were given an "introduction" to the Big Thicket that included a tour of the BTNP Visitor Center and a canoe trip. On Monday the volunteers did maintenance work on the proposed Old Wagon Road Trail in Jack Gore Baygall with Maxine Johnston, who couldn't resist sharing stories; Tuesday and Wednesday, "deconstructed" a boardwalk around the Staley Cabin, supervised by Chief of Maintenance Ray Moore and Lamar Funderburk; Thursday and Friday, planted long-leaf pines at the Nature Conservancy's Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary, supervised by Bob Boensch, Preserve Manager, and Shawn Benedict. On Wednesday night, the group searched for ghost lights on Hardin County's Ghost Road Scenic Drive and County Park. When asked what the group enjoyed most about their trip, the night prowling on "Ghost Road" with Maxine and tree



Students from St. Michael's College in Vermont spent a week in January at BTNP helping preserve staff with maintenance work.

planting with Bob & Shawn tied for first place.

WATER CONFERENCE

Dave Roemer, Chief of Resource Management, and BTA President **Bruce Drury** attended the Sierra Club Water Conference in Houston, Saturday, January 16. The agenda topics included protecting environmental flows, protecting bays, Sabine Lake and Rivers, and water conservation.

MASTER NATURALISTS

The Sabine-Neches Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists offered a series of workshops from

September 2009 to January 2010 for becoming a certified Master Naturalist. **Leslie DuBey**, Chief of Interpretation, presented one of the workshops. The Naturalists also visited the Larsen Sanctuary (TNC) as part of its classroom field experience.

David Baker, retired BTNP Interpreter Extraordinaire, presented a program on "Skulls and Skulls," on January 23 at Village Creek State Park. Dave has also scheduled a series of Birding Classes for "Wild-birds Unlimited" and has already hosted an Owl Prowl for VCSP.

NEW TO SCIENCE DISCOVERY!

Dr. Michael Barger announced publication on two brand new species of aquatic ectothermic vertebrates: **Barger, MA.** 2010. A new species of *Lissorchis* (*Trematoda: Lissorchiidae*) from creek chubsuckers (*Erimyzon oblongus*) in the Big Thicket National Preserve, Texas, U.S.A. *Comparative Parasitology* 77:1-5.

Barger, MA. 2010. A new species of *Caecincola* (*Trematoda: Cryptogonimidae*) from spotted bass (*Microp-terus punctulatus*) in the Big Thicket National Preserve, Texas, U.S.A. *Comparative Parasitology* 77:6-8.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

The ToD Executive Council met Jan. 8th and approved a budget to submit to the BTA board. The budget included an increase in hours for the database manager, Mona Halverson, from 20 hours to 30 hours per week. Travel funds were recommended for the Discover Life in America Conference.

Vice President Gillian Bowser resigned from her office on the Council. Her enthusiasm set this project on the path toward success,

and she will be missed. Wendy Ledbetter (Southeast Project Director, Big Thicket/Sandylands Sanctuary, Nature Conservancy) was elected by the Council as the new vice-president.

Dave Roemer reported that a NPS group met at the Discover Life in America meeting to work on a "white paper" that would suggest common definitions and policies for ATBI, with emphasis on the utilization of ATBI data for resource management. The group is also working on a NPS plan to make

more use of taxonomists. Roemer also noted that he is working with the Desert Southwest CESU on a funding proposal to assist the application of ATBI data to resource management.

Carl Knight discussed his proposal for a Regional Science Center to be associated with, and located in, the Big Thicket area.

The next quarterly Thicket of Diversity Executive Council meeting is scheduled for **March 25, 2010.**

BIODIVERSITY

FIELD TRIPS and SEMINARS

(mark your calendar and check the website for further details and updates)

- ✦ **April (exact date TBD): *Slime Molds*** workshop and fieldtrip will be conducted by TWiG co-leader, Katie Winsett. Details on this event will be sent later, as they are finalized.
- ✦ **April 24, 25, 26:** Learn about *lichens* in the Big Thicket! Dr. Robert Egan will present a seminar and workshop on lichens and will lead a field trip for a select group of lichen enthusiasts. Details to follow.
- ✦ **May 22: *Frog Calls...*** Paul Crump and Rachel Rommel, from Houston Zoo, will present a seminar on frog calls followed with a workshop and a possible field trip.
- ✦ ***The Neches River Canoe Trip***, led by Dr. Chad Hargrave, has been rescheduled because of concerns about the current river flow conditions. At this time, we have **rescheduled** the canoe trip in March or April.



WANT MORE INFORMATION AND UPDATES?

Visit our website

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

Check out our Facebook page

<http://tiny.cc/TODFacebook>



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WEB SITES

Big Thicket Association
www.bigthicket.org

Big Thicket National Preserve
www.nps.gov/bith

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

National Parks Conserv. Assoc.
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.texas.sierraclub.org/triangle

Texas Conservation Alliance
www.TCA.texas.org

Village Creek State Park
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park

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The Condundrum of NPS Budgets!

by Suzanne Dixon (NPCA)

ONPS in FY2011 is proposed at approx. \$2.3 billion, a net increase of \$35.3 million over FY2010 levels. This top line number however includes \$32.1 million in "absorbed costs" for parks, meaning that parks will not receive compensation for fixed cost increases in FY2011. In addition, the top line number includes a "fixed cost adjustment" of \$46 million to increase the Departmental Working Capital Fund. It seems that parks will be "charged" in order to create or enhance this fund. Offsetting the dip in park resources are targeted increases, as follows:

- \$31.5m base increases for 127 parks (Big Thicket, specifically mentioned);
- \$7.2m to strengthen the agency's capacity to recruit, train and retain staff;
- \$1.3m to expand integrated ocean and coastal stewardship at 74 parks;
- \$210k to support the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom;
- \$1.0m to expand the educational component of NPS.gov;
- \$1.8m increase for US Park Police;
- \$700k for enhanced workplace risk recognition & management training;
- \$2.0m to expand the land use planning program in support of the growing capacity in LWCF funding (see page 3 for more on LWCF funding).

The take-away here is that, although there are some good and useful programmatic increases, parks across the System will be returning to the darker days of robbing Peter to pay PG&E. If this is left to stand, the operations shortfall will surely swell again, and the backlog of needed repairs to the thousands of buildings, structures and systems will accelerate.