

## GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN MEETINGS, NOV. 15-18

Once again public meetings were held to discuss alternatives for an updated General Management Plan. Meetings were held at Silsbee, Houston, Woodville and Beaumont, Nov. 15-18. Supt. Todd Brindle presented a short overview of the planning process and the alternatives. Erin Flanagan, Denver Service Center, planning team leader, offered comments.

The alternatives were categorized as 1) Continue current management, 2) Enhance partnerships and collaboration, 3) Leadership in biodiversity and sustainability, and 4) Increase relevancy of the Preserve. If one goes no further, No. 3 would be the choice – after all, that’s why the Preserve was created. Indeed, one might question the word “relevancy”? To whom?

In practice, BTA will submit a statement that borrows elements mostly from Nos. 2 and 3 while voicing strong concerns about new roads, multiple-use trails, hiking



*An open house was held in Woodville November 15-18 to present BTNP’s General Management Plan.*

trails on pipelines, mixed-use waterways, ORVs and houseboats. And would you believe a “hunter accessible trail” in the Rosier Unit? Not the driving tour that would benefit the handicapped, elderly, and summer visitors?

Another issue is campgrounds. The conservationists who worked to establish this Preserve had to compromise acreage drastically and felt

strongly that any development and tourist amenities should be OUTSIDE the park.

The NPS is unlikely to address the critical need for expansion to protect a vulnerable Preserve and to add areas with outstanding resources, but conservationists can and should. BTA needs to contact our Congresspersons and ask them to introduce legislation.

**Footnote:** Cong. Kevin Brady strongly recommends a “canopy trail.” One’s first reaction might be 1) too costly and 2) possible damage to sensitive areas. But on the flip side, such a “Treetops Trail” would attract many visitors with consequent economic advantages to the Big Thicket region. Moreover, such a trail was first proposed by two Big Thicket icons, Dr. Paul Harcombe and former Ranger David Baker.

If you did not receive a copy of the GMP newsletter, log on to <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bithgmp>. As BTA members and friends, you should weigh in on these and other issues. The deadline is December 30., 2010.

You can also weigh in with the editors to support or to oppose 1) expansion, 2) canopy trail, 3) campgrounds – and other issues you think important. We will collect and summarize the data for the Board of Directors. —M.J.

# Conservation Outlook

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## CONSERVATION FUND

On Big Thicket Day, Julie Shackelford, Director of Programs, East Texas Office of TCF, reported on land purchases for the Big Thicket Region. Acquisitions have included 33,719 acres since 2004. Of that funding 13,891 acres came from Land and Water Conservation Funds, which accounts for all but 200 acres within the current boundary.

Other purchases that were direct donations by TCF to the National Preserve include over 6600 acres added to the Beaumont Unit; 900 acres to Weiss Bluff on the Lower Neches Corridor; 1,104 acres at Cook's Lake on Pine Island Bayou along LNVA canal. Additional lands were added to Village Creek State Park and the Trinity River NWR. TCF also worked with the Texas Forest Service for the Forest Legacy Program to acquire conservation easements on over 11,000 acres adjacent to the Turkey Creek Unit.

## OTHER NEWS

### Trinity River NWR National Public Lands Day Cleanup

The Refuge along with the Friends of Trinity River Refuge hosted a trash cleanup day at the Hwy 105 Trinity River bridge on September 25th. Nearly 55 volunteers assisted in picking up litter and filling an entire 7' x 18' trailer, with an estimated total of 2,000 pounds. Aluminum cans were separated for recycling. Special thanks go to Ms. Penny Taylor of Liberty High School who brought 38 Environmental Sci-

ence students to the event, many with colorful tee shirts promoting the cleanup. Other volunteers included 10 Cub Scouts from Dayton Pack 8 and 4 Refuge Volunteers.

### Larsen Sanctuary

Cody Conway, ornithologist, led a bird walk in the Sanctuary Oct. 30 on the Upland Trail. Conway is also a wildlife photographer and a Texas Master Naturalist.

### Audubon Group Meeting

Resource Management Chief David Roemer presented a program to the Golden Triangle Audubon Society on August 19. He reported on: 1) prior bird inventories at BITH, 2) bird monitoring proposals recommended by the NPS Gulf Coast Inventory and Monitoring Network, and 3) the possibility of a volunteer-driven ATBI bird TWiG.

Some general comments were that volunteer birders in our area are already fully-extended on citizen science bird counts (Christmas Bird Counts, Breeding Bird Counts) and aren't strongly motivated to undertake new, extensive, quantitative approaches to counting birds in the Big Thicket.

Roemer is pursuing funding instead from the NPS Gulf Coast Inventory and Monitoring Network to hire a contractor for monitoring birds, and to establish an e-bird kiosk in the Visitor Center to help promote birds and citizen science.

### TCEQ Meeting Sunset

Clean Air and Water Inc. joined the GT Sierra group to sponsor a public meeting on the sunset review process for Texas Commission on

Environmental Quality. Panelists included Rep. Allan Ritter, Chairman, Texas House Committee on Natural Resources; Dr. Richard Harrel, President CA&W; Donna Phillips, TCEQ Coastal and East Texas Area Director; and Lize Burr, Alliance for a Clean Texas. John B. Stevens, Judge, Criminal District Court, moderated the discussions. Dr. Harrel strongly recommended better funding for local offices to make review of permits more effective.

### Golden Triangle Sierra Celebrates Anniversary

At its December 7 meeting, GT Sierra will observe its 40th anniversary. An "e-vite" has been sent to members. The event takes place at the McFaddin Ward House and will include dinner, a speaker, Sierra Club bingo, door prizes.

The first meeting was held Dec. 1, 1970 with Dr. Brad Hogue as Acting Chairman; the group appointed a nominating committee. On Dec. 12th they held their first outing on Village Creek with 10 canoes and 23 participants. Through the years leadership of Ex-Com chairs included, Richard Evans, Charles Crabbe, Carol Barbay, Ron Reiche, Erin Williams, Elton Gish, John Cooper, Jeff Haven, Harrison Jordan, Linda Gober, Judy Aronow, Linda Lang, Dan Dinkler, Bruce Sieve, and Bruce Walker.

The group has supported many conservation causes and issues through the years, but BTA is especially grateful for its early and continuing interest in the Big Thicket region's preservation.

# Planting Longleaf Pines (LLP)

In the past LLP trees grew in extensive areas of the southeastern United States and as far west as East Texas. Now LLP trees grow in 2% of their historic range. Only about 45,000 acres of LLP remain in Texas. As LLP habitat has declined, species that are dependent on this important ecosystem have also declined--including the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Louisiana Pine Snake, and Bachman's Sparrow.

**Houston Sierra** has scheduled a service project to plant longleaf pine seedlings on January 15, 2011. According to Brandt Mannchen, LSC, Big Thicket Committee Chair, the group will plant seedlings in the Lance Rosier Unit. Participants will meet at 10 AM at the Big Thicket Field Research Station in Saratoga and then proceed to the northeast corner of the LRU in wetland pine savannah habitat. The NPS will provide tools (dibble bars), planting bags, and gloves.

On Sunday the group will enjoy a winter hike with no insects!!! Participants may come for one day or spend the entire weekend. Bring a daypack, plenty of water, lunch, hat, field guides, binoculars, and comfortable hiking shoes and warm clothes. If you stay overnight bring what you need for the evening and a sleeping bag. Call Brandt Mannchen at 713-664-5962 or email him at brandtshnfbt@juno.com and reserve a space (leave your name, phone number, and email).

**National Parks Conservation Association**, Texas Regional Office, Director Suzanne Dixon reports another longleaf pine volunteer project on January 17, 2011, Martin Luther King Day. NPCA purchased 3,000 long leaf pine seedlings and will be partnering with the River Oaks Garden Club, Houston Garden Club and the Magnolia Garden Club. Volunteers expected include 15 between the Clubs and 5 from BTA.



Longleaf Pine forest depicting trees in "candlestick" stage. [photo by Calvin Blakley]

## Diversity Dispatch

**Science Cafes:** On Sept. 20 Tom Bell, Sierra Club, presented a Neches River Powerpoint® program at Suga's Restaurant in Beaumont. Bell reviewed "The Science and Significance of the Neches River" and answered questions.

On Oct. 28 Lee Stuemke, Graduate Research Assistant at Stephen F. Austin State University, held a Science Café on "Bats of Southeast Texas" at the Logon Café in Beaumont. She covered 11 species of bats living in or near Big Thicket, where they live, what they eat, and the role they play in pest control.

On Nov. 15 Katherine Winsett, professor at Univ. of Arkansas, presented a Science Café on "Myxomycetes at Big Thicket." The venue again was Logon Café.

**New TWiGs:** The Executive Council met Oct. 28 and approved two new Taxa Working Groups – Odonate (dragonflies and damselflies), led by Dr. Autumn Smith and Noctuid Moths led by Dr. Mike Pogue.

The Council also approved grant requests for existing TWiGs including Myxomycetes, Dr. Steven Stevenson and Dr. Kate Winsett; Vascular Plants, Dr. Larry Brown; and Pyrenomycetour Fungi, Dr. Larisa Vasilyeva.

**Hancock Forest Management's** new Forest Area Manager Christy Nichol and Forester Ragan Bounds visited the Field Research Station to present Hancock's annual contribution of \$1,000 to the ToD. Bounds will lead a field trip to Woodpecker Hill in April.



# Big Thicket Association News

## BIG THICKET DAY

On October 9 approximately 80-90 people assembled for Big Thicket Day, the annual membership business meeting and program, this year held at the National Preserve Visitor Center.

**Membership Meeting:** Members confirmed the election of officers and directors for two-year terms beginning January 1: Mary Catherine Johnston, President; Jan Ruppel, Vice-President. President Drury becomes a member of the Executive Board as Past-President. Incumbent directors re-elected are: Judy Aronow, Ellen Buchanan, Lane Harrison, Rose Ann Jordan, Dr. Carl Knight, the Hon. Ken Pelt, and Dr. James Westgate. BTA welcomes Dale Parrish as a new board member.

Other incumbents whose terms expire in 2011 are Fred Allen, Treasurer; Elaine Allums, Secretary; Gilbert Adams, Judy Allen, Michael Black, James Caccioppo, Marion Holt, Maxine Johnston, Wendy Ledbetter, Joe Liggio, Rosalie Rogers and Kathryn Walker.

**Program:** Reports and updates included Julie Shackelford on Conservation Fund land acquisition (see Conservation Outlook), Supt. Todd Brindle on the General Management Plan, and ToD Council President Wendy Ledbetter on the Thicket of Diversity (ATBI). Bob Boensch, Program Manager at Larsen Sanctuary, presented a brief report on a recent Mussel Foray. The R.E. Jackson Conservation award was presented to David Lewis for his outstanding work in mycology.

After lunch, field trips were held to Weiss Bluff (newly-acquired by TCF), Village Creek Canoe trip, and a Driving Tour of the Lance Rosier Unit.

## OTHER BTA NEWS

### Linda Brindle Leaves BTA

Linda Brindle is moving on effective Nov. 30. She will resume her NPS career at Rocky Mountain National Park. In his message to the Board of Directors, President Drury stated, "Linda has done a super job for us and will be thoroughly missed."

Linda sends this message to BTA members: "It has been such a pleasure working with all the folks that

help make the Big Thicket Association a strong voice in protecting the Big Thicket region and overall conservation of the area. The accomplishments we have made together over the past four years during my tenure have been significant. I look forward to hearing about the continued progress of the Thicket of Diversity (ATBI) project, and given the diversity of the Big Thicket I am confident that new species to science will continue to be discovered. I remain committed to the conservation of the Big Thicket. Thank you for the opportunity to work for such a wonderful organization!"

### New Executive Director for BTA

The Big Thicket Association is proud to announce that Dr. Teresa Tomkins-Walsh has verbally committed to become the executive director of the association, replacing Linda Brindle who has taken a job with Rocky Mountain national park in Colorado.

A search committee composed of Bruce Drury, Wendy Ledbetter and Maxine Johnston examined the credentials of eight candidates, interviewed six, and recommend Dr. Tomkins-Walsh (Terry) for the job. Terry brings to BTA a very diverse set of experiences. She has served as a contract archivist for the Houston Endowment and is currently director of the Houston History Archives in the University of Houston Center for Public History. She has also worked with the Citizens' Environmental Coalition, the Bayou Preservation Association and The Park People.

### Lorraine Bonney's *Backroads to Big Thicket Country*

Bonney's book has been approved for publication by the editorial board of the University of North Texas Press and is on their Fall 2011 list. The title will be No. 6 in the "Temple Big Thicket Series." A masterpiece of local history and conservation, the magnum opus has been in preparation since the 1970s before Orrin Bonney died and has undergone several updates and revisions. The author has generously conferred all rights to BTA.

### Board Retreat

A motivational retreat has been planned by incoming officers to energize the BTA to continue preservation and promotion efforts and to set goals for the new year. The Retreat, facilitated by Executive Director Marcia Stevens of the SE Texas Nonprofit Development Center,

700 N Street, Beaumont, will be held Jan. 8th from 9:15 to 3:15, with the board meeting held from 9:30-10:30. Retreat sponsors are BTA life member Bill Clark of Bill Clark Pest Control and Brookshire Brothers. RSVPs are required; please contact Cathy Johnston (409)782-0642.

### Field Trips

On Oct. 16, **Joe Liggio** (author/board member) led a field trip to Davis Hill State Park. Despite ravages of Hurricane Ike, the Park offers magnificent diversity and scenery – from hilltop “pocket prairies” to deep, fern-draped ravines. The shadow witch orchid was in bloom as an added bonus.

On Nov. 13, **Tom Maddux** (retired teacher/life member) led a field trip on the Woodlands Trail in Big Sandy Creek Unit (off limits to hunters). The hike started in drizzling rain but skies finally turned sunny. We gawked at huge trees and felled trees and recent thickets of river cane as a result of Hurricane Ike. Occasional views of Big Sandy Creek rewarded the trekkers.

### In memoriam

**Cynthia Louise Troxell**, d. Oct. 31, 2010: A Port Arthur native, Cindy received her MA in environmental biology from LSU and PhD in molecular biology from the University of Colorado. She supported Big Thicket preservation and did field research at Rocky Mountain National Park. Memorials may be made to the Big Thicket Association. More details are in the guest book at [www.cristmortuary.com](http://www.cristmortuary.com).



*Joyce Almaguer-Reisdorf and twins (Carmen and David) during field trip at Big Sandy Creek Unit's Woodlands Trail.*

### Editor's Comment (don't blame BTA!):

Recently visitors will notice that underbrush has been cleared from areas surrounding the BTNP Visitor Center and Headquarters – result? A view of cars whizzing north on US 69 and increased traffic noise. Purportedly, the purpose was a fire break to protect the VC – an unlikely event with concrete drive and sidewalks and small existing clearings. Earlier some native waxmyrtle was cut because it was choking pine trees? Replaced by grass? –M.J.

**OF INCOME  
TAX DEDUCTIONS**

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**THINK  
PYRAMIDS!!**

It's that time of year to contribute to worthy causes!

Last year, BTA and its partners began a campaign to purchase a 296-acre tract in Newton County that has several populations of the threatened and rare pyramid magnolias. BTA made its Land Fund available (circa \$30,000). Several partners and individuals have “Saved-an-Acre” by giving \$1,000, and 3-4 individuals have given generously. The fund now stands

at approximately \$65,000. Additional funds will be forthcoming from fund-raising activities of the Eastfield College Science Club.

***Help us protect these trees!***

Other opportunities exist:  
Legacy Fund for BTA's future!  
Thicket of Diversity (ATBI)!  
Operating Fund!  
Publications!

# Preserve Overview

Ann Roberts | BTA Administrative Asst.

## Village Creek Cleanup

On September 25, 2010, Big Thicket National Preserve sponsored a trash clean-up along Village Creek from Hwy 327 to Baby Galvez. This was one of hundreds of volunteer events taking place on public lands across the country as part of National Public Lands Day. Eight volunteers, plus Preserve staff, floated the creek and filled several 30-gallon trash bags, plus many smaller trash bags. IESI in Kountze donated trash bags, bottled drinks, and paper towels for the clean-up.

## Fire Management Program

**Fulton Jeansonne** reports: The Preserve has been in a moderate drought for the last few months, increasing critical fire danger across the area. Most counties in the area are currently under burn ban. Although recent rainfall mitigated the fire danger somewhat, we have had two wildfires on the Preserve recently. On 10/9/10 the McGallion

Road fire in the Jack Gore Baygall Unit burned 2 ½ acres – unknown cause. On 10/18/10 the Archer fire in the Jack Gore Baygall Unit burned 2 acres – caused by lightning.

Prescribed fire treatments are on hold at this time with the critical fuel conditions. The next burn scheduled is in Lance Rosier when conditions become more favorable. A Beech Creek Unit project consists of two fuel breaks in the unit to protect visitors, the community of Odomville, and the resources of Big Thicket from the effects of a catastrophic wildfire. One fuel break is directly behind Odomville and the other is along the center road dissecting the unit from north to south. Another recent project involved protection of the Visitor Center from the threat of wildfire. We removed brush and hurricane debris from around the Visitor Center by hand.

Three local volunteer fire depart-

ments — Saratoga, Wildwood, and Warren — were approved for grants totaling \$13,500 from the DOI Rural Fire Assistance Program to purchase equipment for assistance with fire response in the Big Thicket National Preserve.

## Oil Spill

**Eric Worsham** (Liaison of the Gulf Coast Exotic Plant Management Team) reports: I served as a Resource Advisor attached to the Florida Division Incident Command Team in Homestead, Florida. In late May to early June, tar balls had been reported from the Dry Tortugas and oil plumes were traveling towards the Florida Keys via the Gulf Loop Current.

We formed a three person team composed of National Park Service personnel from the Big Thicket National Preserve and Arizona and Alaska National Parks to develop Oil Spill Response Plans for the five south Florida National Parks that could possibly be affected by oil traveling on the Gulf Loop Current.

We worked with park service crews to collect background soil samples from tidal areas within these parks. The time spent in the pristine backwaters of the parks collecting soil samples and documenting sensitive resources helped us to appreciate the sensitivity of the threatened resources we were charged with protecting. Fortunately the oil degraded and dissipated faster than expected and the impacts to the south Florida parks was confined to a total of less than ten gallons of tar balls in scattered locations.



*Volunteers participated in Public Lands Day to help clean up Village Creek.*

# East Texas Miscellany

## Charlie Wilson's Friends

David Adickes, sculptor, reports that the Charlie Wilson statue is at the foundry to begin the bronzing process. Peyton Walters (former county judge and Wilson aide) says that Charlie will be "standing tall" at the dedication ceremony in Lufkin, Jan. 12, 2011, 1:00 PM at the Charles Wilson Veterans Outpatient Clinic in Lufkin.

## Hardin County Historical Commission

The commission held its annual awards luncheon on October 13 at the Senior Citizens building in Kountze. The speaker was Dr. Thad Sitton who shared some highlights of his new book, *Gray Ghost and Red Rangers; American Hilltop Fox Chasing*. Awards were presented to Gilbert Adams, Judge Billy Caraway, and to Cong. Kevin Brady, accepted by his aide Justin Veillon.

## Tyler County Historical Commission

Tyler County Historical Commission wants to restore the old courthouse built in 1891. Refurbished in the 1930s, the red brick was covered with stucco and the gabled roof and clock tower were removed. Seventy-plus years later another restoration is needed, and the Commission is applying for Texas State Historical Commission grants as well as gifts from corporate and individual donors.

## Heritage Village

The annual Harvest Festival was held October 15-16 with the usual assortment of spinners, weavers,

potters, jewelry makers, and wood crafters. A "Sheriff's Posse" directed traffic, and there was a photo contest. Ann Roberts worked the Big Thicket booth with VIPs Gordon and Darlene Robinson. The "School Kids Friday" attracted almost 600 students. The annual Christmas Twilight Tour is next on the agenda for December 4, 5:00-7:00 PM.

## Kountze Big Thicket Trade Days

The first Kountze Trade Days was a huge success. Held October 22-23 on US 69 North adjoining the Super 8 Motel. The event attracted 250 vendors including 16 food vendors. Activities for children included moon walks, a train ride, face painting, and airbrush tattoos. There are no parking or admission fees and the site is handicapped accessible.

## East Texas Historical Association

met Sept. 16-18 at Stephen F. Austin State University. There were numerous interesting sessions on publishing books and articles, the Neches River, folk songs, political history – a wide range of topics competing for attention.

During one session, alarms sounded, and the building had to be evacuated in the middle of a presentation by Monte Monroe (whose dissertation was on Sen. Ralph Yarborough). We gathered on the sidewalk and Monroe continued his presentation!

Another benefit one enjoys at ETHA meetings is not only meeting people whose names you are familiar with, but also to rub elbows with folks like Ab and Hazel Abernethy, Richard Donovan, Jo Ann Stiles, Robert Schaadt, et al.



Monte Monroe presented a program on Texas politics at the October East Texas Historical Association meeting at SFASU in Nacogdoches.



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**WEB SITES**

**Big Thicket Association**  
www.bigthicket.org

**Big Thicket National Preserve**  
www.nps.gov/bith

**East Texas Black Bear Task Force**  
www.bbcc.org

**Conservation Fund**  
www.conservationfund.org

**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.TCAtexas.org

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

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**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**2010**

**December 7**  
GT Sierra 40th Anniversary Dinner

**2011**

**January 8**  
BTA Board Retreat

**January 10**  
Dedication Charlie Wilson Statue,  
Lufkin

**January 15-16**  
Houston Sierra group, plant  
longleaf pine seedlings in Lance  
Rosier Unit Saturday; meet at Field  
Research Station, Saratoga, 10:00  
AM; overnight bring sleeping bags

**January 15-17**  
GT Sierra, MLK Weekend, Canoe/  
Kayak Toro Bayou on the Sabine  
River. Contact Gerald Langham or  
Bruce Walker @ 409-782-3486

**January 17**  
NPCA volunteer project to plant  
longleaf pine seedlings

**March 5**  
Field Trip to Outdoor Nature Club's  
Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary,  
San Jacinto County

**April 2**  
Woodpecker Hill Trek to visit trailing  
phlox project

**April 8-10**  
West Gulf Coastal Plain and Big  
Thicket Science Conference at  
Stephen F. Austin State University