

Another Successful Science Conference

Research papers on the Big Thicket Region and the West Gulf Coastal Plain were presented at the Science Conference in Nacogdoches, April 8-9-10 with the theme “Changing Landscapes and Changing Climates.” Plenary speakers were Dr. Neal Wilkins (TAMU) and Dr. Camille Parmesan (UT-Austin).

There were 63 oral and 28 poster presentations divided into 12 mini-

sessions for oral presentations. The Conference attracted 166 registrants. BTA continues to serve as registrar and to manage funds for the sponsors.

Three field trips followed the conference: Sand Caves with Dr. Will Godwin; Tonkawa Sandhills with Jason Singhurst; and Birding in SFA’s Experimental Forest with Cliff Shackelford.

Underwriters and sponsors included U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Forest Service’s Southern Research Station, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Advanced Ecology, Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture at SFASU, Azimuth Forestry, Big Thicket Association, Big Thicket National Preserve (NPS), and Pineywoods East Texas Partners.

The Planning Committee included Dr. Dan Saenz (USFS-SRS), Chair, Jerry Cook (SHSU), Wendy Ledbetter (TNC), Jim Neal (USFWS), Craig Rudolph (USFS-SRS), Dr. Warren Conway (SFASU), Dr. Chris Comer (SFASU), Cliff Shackelford (TP&WD), Julie Shackelford (TCF), Suzanne Walker (Azimuth), Jason Singhurst (TP&WD), and Will Godwin (Jarvis). BTA was represented by Bruce Drury, Maxine Johnston, and Mona Halverson.

Ann Roberts, BTA’s Administrative Assistant worked tirelessly on registration before and after the Conference. Further, BTA owes a huge debt of gratitude to member-volunteers Charles and Wanda Smith of Colmesneil, who cheerfully and productively served at the registration desk throughout the Conference.



The Science Conference Planning Committee included (from left) Dr. Dan Saenz, USFS, Chair; Dr. Chris Comer, SFASU; and Dr. Warren Conway, SFASU.

Conservation Outlook

STOP (Stop Tar Sands Oil/Pipelines)

The proposed expansion of TransCanada Keystone XL Pipeline Project would cut another wide swath across the nation, including Texas. According to the EIS, the pipeline will impact 11,533 acres of grassland, 2,500+ acres of forest land, with a loss of 22,400 acres of wildlife habitat. The pipeline will cross 554 acres of wetlands and 91 streams (32 in Texas).

The United States State Department has released a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and the public comment period is now open, ending June 6th. To access the SEIS, the address

is <http://www.keystonepipeline-xl.state.gov/clientsite/keystonexl.nsf>

STOP RESPONSE

Despite STOP and 31 other local and national groups and countless other citizens calling for a comment period beyond 45-days, the State Department has said *they are not willing to extend the comment period*. Further, the State Department should hold hearings on the SEIS in Texas and other right-of-way states, as they did for the Draft EIS — not just in Washington. After the final EIS, a decision of whether or not Keystone XL is in the national interest must be made. There is a 90-day comment period then the Presidential Permit is granted or denied.

the surface by injecting steam to thin the crude, but this is an expensive process. The favored process is strip mining. They cut the trees, remove the overburden soil and haul the tar sand to a processing center where it is heated and diluted to remove much of the sand and clay. The product called DilBit (diluted bitumen) is then piped to refineries (some in southeast Texas) for conversion to gasoline and other refined products....

The pipeline ... is a standard 36 inch line that TransCanada says is as safe for the DilBit ... But this is not conventional crude oil! The Dilbit is heated to 140-160 degrees Fahrenheit to improve flow while conventional crude flows at below 100 degrees. The pressure is 1440 psi compared to 600 psi. The DilBit is also acidic and sulfurous and it carries its own sand abrasive. This highly unconventional and dangerous material has a spill record for the sections of pipeline all ready in operation many times that of conventional crude. ...Conventional crude floats on water, DilBit is heavier than water so it sinks to the bottom of the stream or aquifer.

The Keystone XL pipeline will cross the Ogallala and Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifers and many rivers and creeks, where a spill would result in long term pollution of these very important water resources. In southeast Texas the pipeline will cross the Neches and Trinity Rivers and will be

NOT JUST ANOTHER PIPELINE

Excerpts from an Op-Ed by Dr. Bruce Drury, BTA Conservation Committee Chair and Dr. Richard Harrel, President, Clean Air and Water, Inc.

... When TransCanada proposed a 36 inch pipeline to link central Alberta to Port Arthur, Texas the response was ho hum, another pipeline

Beneath the Alberta section of Canada's boreal forest is a huge deposit of very thick crude oil laced with sand and clay. Tar sand oil can be brought to



closely parallel to Pine Island Bayou for several miles. A break in the line would do great damage to farmland and parts of the Big Thicket.

Because the pipeline would cross the Canada-US border, the initial permit is the responsibility of the US Department of State. State seemed to be ready to approve the project until many environmental organizations began a campaign to stop it. As a result State has now issued a Supplemental Environmental Impact Study with a forty-five day comment period ending June 6, 2011.

Please join the effort to protect our environment from this dangerous project by going to stoptar-sands.org for information and Take Action by sending your concern to Secretary Clinton through nrdc.org/energy/dirtyfuels_tar.asp.

FUNDING TEXAS PARKS

The Texas Legislature's budget process will continue for several months. Both H1 and SB1 will go to their respective committees, and TPWD Executive Director Carter Smith will have the opportunity to communicate top priority budget issues to legislators. Amended versions of each bill will then go to a conference committee that will hammer out a final state budget for parks.

The FY 2012-2013 budget for TPWD proposed in HB 1 recommends a

25% reduction totaling \$162 million dollars over the biennium. SB1 proposes a 22.4% reduction totaling \$145 million. Besides elimination of capital equipment, grants and funding for new land acquisition, there would be a 15% across the board cut to division and agency administration budgets with deeper cuts in various divisions including Information Technology, Communications and State Parks. The eight regional support units will be reorganized into six.

Park transfers: As part of the state parks cut, the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) recommends transferring seven state parks to local communities. The proposed base budget assumes those transfers will all be willingly accepted by the communities in question. Should they decline to accept the transfer, other parks could be added, and it is possible that some of the facilities may be closed, despite caretaking costs that could have a severe impact resulting in additional park operational cuts.

EARTH DAY IN DALLAS

Earth Day Dallas, a nonprofit organization spearheaded by Trammell S. Crow, held its inaugural Earth Day Festival in downtown Dallas on April 22nd and 23rd. BTA was represented by life members Bruce and Kathryn Walker in the Texas Conservation Alliance booth. Bruce and Kathryn were also representing Citi-



Texas Conservation Alliance booth at Earth Day festival in Dallas. The booth also featured information about BTA.

zens Protecting the Neches River. They were joined in the TCA booth by representatives from Friends of the Brazos River, Protecting Texas Rivers, Historic Trees of Dallas, and other TCA member groups.

The weather was perfect, if windy, and on Friday thousands of students from local schools visited the almost 500 exhibitors who were present. Saturday brought out a different crowd, but all were able to visit the diverse exhibitors who included the EPA and the Urban Beekeepers, as well as almost every group imaginable with any link to spreading the gospel of environmentalism. Smart Cars and Go Green Couriers were there, as was Mary Kay cosmetics. We can hope now that Dallas folks know a little something more than they did about the Big Thicket and about the Neches River.

Preserve Overview

Ann Roberts | BTA Administrative Asst.

PERSONNEL

Ray Moore, Preserve Facility Manager, now serves as Acting Superintendent pending selection of a new Superintendent. Previous Acting Superintendent **Dave Roemer** attended a Texas Superintendent's meeting in Austin, and then went to Denver to represent BTNP at General Management Plan meetings.

Moving on: Law Enforcement Ranger **Liza Kent** accepted a job at Arches National Park and leaves May 8, 2011. **Iola Hallock** resigned to move to Austin to complete her Masters of Education.

STEP Student Maria Grant was graduated summa cum laude with a degree in nursing from Lamar University. She will be moving on at the end of May. **STEP Student Jessica Hall** will be studying in India for part of the summer but will return and continue to work at the Preserve until her graduation from Lamar in Environmental Science.

Maintenance and Fire seasonals are on board and Law Enforcement seasonals will be arriving soon.

Teacher Environmental Science Annual Workshop

Prof. James Westgate's annual Teacher Environmental Science workshop gets underway the week of June 13. For over 15 years, this program has offered public school teachers instruction and experience to use in their classrooms. The workshop always includes a foray

into Big Thicket National Preserve – sometimes on Village Creek and often near Cooks Lake by canoe. Water sampling and analysis is usually followed by reports from VCSP and BTA.

Yellowstone and Gallatin Firefighters Battle Wildfire

Four firefighters from Yellowstone National Park and the Gallatin National Forest recently came to the Preserve to help contain the more than 7,000-acre Pipeline wildfire burning on and near Big Thicket National Preserve. Bodie Tobin, Travis Clark and Grey Oyler (Yellowstone) and Todd Mott (Gallatin) augmented TFS and local volunteer fire departments.

NPF Grant

BTNP received a second year grant from the **National Park Foundation** to refine and disseminate the new EarthCache program. NPF is also funding an Intern from Westbrook High School, Dylan Hall, who will work with the Resource Education crew.

Teacher to Ranger to Teacher Program

Three new **Teacher to Ranger to Teachers** will join the TRT staff: Austin Keith from New Orleans, Carrie Birdsong from Bridgeport, and Carolyn Braun from Garland. Will Watkins from Kountze and Cindy Parish from Beaumont complete our TRT staff.

CONSERVATION FUND BRIEFING

Andy Jones and Julie Shackelford of The Conservation Fund met with BTNP and BTA representatives on March 8-9 at Preserve headquarters. Representing National Parks and Conservation Association were Suzanne Dixon, Texas Office, and Ron Simpson. Also present was Glenna Vigil, Chief of Land Acquisition, NPS Intermountain Region, Denver, CO.

An overview was presented of what has been accomplished, and the good news was reported that the last 200 acres have been acquired within authorized boundaries.

Among additional properties acquired by purchase and donations for the Preserve were Beaumont wetlands, 6300 acres; 3600 acres + 1640 acres from Hancock; Cooks Lake and land adjoining the LNVA Canal, 1104 acres. Village Creek State Park added 1090 acres, and the Forest Legacy program protected 12,000 acres east of the Turkey Creek Unit (administered by Texas Forest Service). Funds covering acquisitions came from the Land & Water Conservation Fund (13,891 acres) and donations (8,828 acres).

The participants discussed gaps in the boundary, strategic acquisitions for access and management, willing sellers, and priorities for purchase. On the 9th, a fleet of ATVs and a dune buggy explored potential land purchases adjoining the Rosier Unit.

Big Thicket and ALL of Texas has benefited enormously from the services of TCF. Our humble thanks to a great organization with a superb staff!

BTA / BTNHT / Thicket Of Diversity Activities

MEETINGS

The Executive Council, Thicket of Diversity, met Friday, April 15 at Preserve headquarters with Chair Wendy Ledbetter presiding. David Roemer, Chair of the Science Committee reported on data submission, and reported potential TWiGs for Lepidoptera with David Henderson as P.I.; land snails, Brian Coles; and grasshoppers and ants, JaVon Hill. The Science Committee meets again on June 11.

The BTA directors held their quarterly meeting Saturday, April 16 in Saratoga. President Mary Catherine Johnston presided over an agenda that included reports from officers and committees, from the Executive Director Teresa Tomkins-Walsh, and updates from BTNP's Acting Director, David Roemer.

The **Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust** board convened at 2:00 PM with President Ellen Buchanan presiding. The agenda included reports on properties acquired and potential additions.

FIELD TRIPS

Woodpecker Hill: On April 2 Ragan Bounds of Hancock Forest Management led a field trip to Woodpecker Hill, a longleaf pine protected area with numerous healthy trees in all stages from grass to candle to mature. The Trailing Phlox were in bloom, thanks to Hancock's partnership for the Restoration Project with BTNP and The Nature Conservancy.



In early April, Ragan Bounds (left), Hancock Forest Management, led a field trip to Woodpecker Hill.

The group also made a brief visit to The Nature Conservancy's Timberlake Preserve.

Rosier Unit – Black Creek: On March 29 BTA members Brandt Mannchen and Tom Maddux accompanied your editor in an attempt to reach Black Creek from an old tram road. This area was where Bud and Ben Hooks launched a lot of bear hunts. It is also the site of Archer Fullingim's "Holy Ghost Thicket" where he celebrated "white oaks and toadstools" and "talked in tongue." Rita and Ike damaged the area beyond our expectations. Felled trees criss-crossed and shrubs invaded the "road." At noon, we gave up.

Rosier Unit Driving Tour: On March 15 several Saratoga folk, recruited by Lora Ellis, participated

in a proposed "Driving Tour." Stops were made along Cotten Road, at the Oilfield Cemetery, the Rosier homesite with its magnificent live oak planted in 1861, the palmetto-hardwood flats at the Bridge to Nowhere, and the pine savannah area on Little Rock Road.

Village Creek State Park: Doris Mager, a representative from Save Our American Raptors (SOAR), took guests on a night hike at Village Creek State Park in Lumberton Saturday, February 19 at 7:00 PM. Mager has rehabilitated over 80 eagles and has returned 15 to the wild. Known as "The Eagle Lady", she has devoted a large part of her life to rescuing, rehabilitating, training, and researching, American raptors.

East Texas Miscellany

WILDFIRES

...in Village Creek State Park

On April 1, a natural gas drilling rig fire started in the southeast corner of Village Creek State Park located in a remote area about 2.5 miles from the park headquarters. Oil field fire-fighting experts from Boots and Coots worked to put out the blaze.

The burning rig created a small wildfire that was extinguished Friday. The wildfire burned about 50 acres of mostly brush and some recently planted longleaf pine seedlings that had been planted in an effort to restore the area following extensive tree loss from Hurricane Rita in 2005.

... in Hardin and Tyler Counties

Wildfires have burned about 7,500 acres of Hardin County and Tyler County forestland – started accidentally at an oil drilling site on April 16. The fire began on the west side of Gore Store Road in

the vicinity of McNeely Road and Hoffman Loop Road and near Fire Tower Road.

Severe drought conditions and low 2011 rainfall level (10 inches below normal) plus high winds exacerbated the spread of the fire.

According to the *Beaumont Enterprise*, the fires were 90 percent contained as of April 23. Firebreaks have been constructed around the blaze. Volunteer firefighters and contractors worked with the Texas Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to get the fire under control. Pine Ridge, Kountze, Wildwood, Sour Lake, Silsbee, Warren, Ivanhoe, Dam-B, Woodville, Spurger, Fred and Lumberton fire departments contributed their services to the effort.

GUNTER AT LAMAR

Lamar University's lecture series on the "Future of Texas," (Texas Leadership in the Humanities)

presented Pete Gunter on March 3, who talked about the "Frontier Mentality and the New World of Texans: Time for a New Ethic?" The lecture was held on campus in the Science Auditorium at 4:00 PM and later reprised at the Mamie McFaddin Ward Visitor's Center at 7:00 PM.

Gunter, a University of North Texas Regent's Professor of Philosophy, who is well known for his books and articles both on philosophy and Big Thicket, was a strong and effective leader in the effort to establish the Big Thicket National Preserve. He served as President of the BTA from 1971-73, and then became Chair of the Big Thicket Coordinating Committee, an umbrella group of conservation organizations.

EAST TEXAS BLACK BEAR MEETING

On March 24, the Black Bear Task Force met at the Ellen Trout Zoo in Lufkin. Nathan Garner and Ricky Maxey of TP&W provided updates. Reports were given on conservation priorities and hardwood habitat restoration. In the afternoon the Habitat and Education Committees met, chaired by Aron Flanders and Chris Comer.

LANGHAM WINS AWARD

Gerald Langham (GT Sierra) was selected as winner of the 2010 Virginia Murray Brewer Outings Award that was presented April 9th at the Lone Star Chapter's Annual Awards Banquet in Austin.

Gerald has organized numerous group outings through the years, including MLK weekend floats on



Wildfires burned 7,500 acres in Hardin and Tyler Counties in April.

area rivers. In April, he organized the Trail-Between-the-Lakes Hike to celebrate Earth Day-- an ambitious three-day, twenty-eight mile hike in the Sabine National Forest.

TRINITY RIVER NWR

Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge held a ground breaking ceremony for a new administrative headquarters on Friday, March 18, 2011 at 10:00 am. The site is located directly across from the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center on FM 1011 in Liberty. Refuge staff along with the prime contractor and public officials manned the shovels.

The Refuge staff and the Friends of TRNWR, observed their annual Earth Day event on April 23 at Champion Lake. The fun-filled afternoon included walking the levee trail, canoeing, kayaking, viewing birds and butterflies, dip netting and fishing lessons for kids.

TEA, ANYONE?

On April 30 from 1-3:30 PM, at the Kirby-Hill House Museum located in Kountze, Lamar Institute of Technology students offered "high tea" — presenting the history and customs of serving tea. Participants enjoyed fabulous food, impeccable service and live actors.

WE REMEMBER ...

Cynthia Troxell, 1954-2010: Cindy Troxell died at her home in Boulder of cancer October 31, 2010. She was Daniel Murphy's wife and the mother of Miles Murphy and Gavin



Manning the shovels for ground breaking for new TRNWR headquarters are staff and contractors.

Murphy. Cindy is also survived by her parents Robert and Martha Troxell of Port Arthur, Texas, a sister Donna Oberle of Beaumont and brother Steve of Katy.

Cindy attended the honors program at the University of Texas and graduated from Louisiana State University with a degree in botany. She received a master's degree in environmental biology and a PhD in molecular biology, both from the University of Colorado. She did research on motor proteins at National Jewish Hospital, the University of California, Davis, and the University of Colorado in Boulder.

BTA is honored and enriched to have enjoyed her friendship and support. Her friends gave numerous memorials for Cindy

Richard N. Evans, 1924-2011:

Richard Evans died Feb. 22. In addition to being a practicing trial attorney, he was a West Texas rancher, a licensed pilot, a scoutmaster, a former chair of the Golden Triangle Sierra group as well as the Sierra Lone Star Chapter. Survivors include his wife Eloise, daughter Kathryn, son Richard, Jr., brothers Charles and Robert Evans, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. A memorial service was held at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church.

Both Richard and his wife Eloise were life members of BTA, and Evans acquired properties for the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust. His friends will long remember his delightful humor and strong commitment to conservation.



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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.TCA texas.org

Village Creek State Park

www.tpwd.state.tx.us.park

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UPCOMING EVENTS

May 7

Orchid walk on the Sundew Trail, led by Joe Liggio.

May 13,14,15

Golden Triangle Sierra weekend at South Toledo Bend State Park, Toledo Bend Lake on the Louisiana side. Camping, hiking, birding, and bicycling. Paddling on Toro Bayou. Gerald Langham and Bruce Walker.

FMI: 782-7732.

June 25

Join the "The Longest Day Hike" on Saturday to hike the entire Turkey Creek Trail in the Big Thicket, all 15 miles of it, with GT Sierrans & BTA members.

Contact: Kathryn Walker—409-782-3485, or
ktwalker@gt.rr.com

July 9

BTA Quarterly Board Meeting,
Field Research Station, Saratoga

July 21

2-5 PM, Ice Cream Social, BTA Benefit, Kirby-Hill House Museum, 210 West Main Street, Kountze