

Trinity River N.W.R. Dedicates Headquarters

Refuge Manager Stuart Marcus reports: The dedication event on January 4th at the Trinity River Refuge for the new headquarters and shop facilities was fantastic. Over 130 folks attended including Friends of Trinity River Refuge, Liberty High School Choir, VFW Honor Guard, elected officials or their representatives, volunteers, interested folks, and two local Chambers of Commerce.

The Friends group handled food and refreshments with additional help of volunteers from Texas Chenier Plain Refuges. A “double” ribbon cutting ceremony was held with the Liberty/Dayton and Dayton Chambers of Commerce handling the setup.



The wide grin behind the bow is Refuge Manager Stuart Marcus

Temples Win Leopold Award in 2011

(Several folks complained that we failed to report this award. Oops! They were right!)

Arthur “Buddy” Temple and his wife Ellen received the 2011 Leopold Conservation Award for Texas for their transformation of an over-grazed, over-hunted South Texas ranch into a haven for wildlife and valuable research venue. The Leopold Conservation Award honors the legacy of Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), considered the father of wildlife ecology.

The Award was conferred in May 2011 by Sand County Foundation and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department as part of its Lone Star Land Steward Awards program. Carter Smith, TPWD executive director observed that, “They deserve the highest praise and recognition for their leadership and inexorable commitment to a private lands conservation ethic.”

Originally known as El Rancho La Gloria, the ranch was founded by Edward Nixon Gray and his wife Rosa Garza-Garcia Gray in 1868. It played an important role in the development of Duval County. The ranch is located 11 miles north of Freer in Duval County; the 11,300-acre ranch has been owned by the Temples for 19 years.

Conservation Outlook

Dark Side

KEYSTONE HAVOC

The delay on the Keystone XL Pipeline was most welcome but still headed toward a collision (or collusion?) course. Misinformation and propaganda and questions proliferate. If it's such a great idea, why don't the Canadians build a refinery? One person said it's too cold there. Really?

How many total acres does a 1700- mile pipeline require? Are landowners happy about having a wide gash through their land? The EIS says the pipeline will impact 11,533 acres of grassland, more than 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). Meanwhile:

- ◆ Job creation 20,000? Even the State Department says 6,000 jobs and a Cornell study predicts fewer – and most are TEMPORARY JOBS.
- ◆ Addresses oil and gas shortages? Really? Some sources say that a high percentage of the oil is already contracted to the foreign markets.
- ◆ No environmental hazards? There is a record of existing spills and pollution.

Liberty Vindicator just published a short report with an Austin dateline: "Only a few hundred whooping cranes remain living worldwide, and a new report says the species could be decimated by the proposed Keystone pipeline ... The report lists 10 species most imperiled in the United States by oil, gas, and coal extraction, three of which can be found in Texas..." [See story: www.newsservice.org/index.php].

PELLET POWER?

The *Beaumont Enterprise* reports that the "Pine Curtain" will become a "Wood Basket" with German Pellets' new biomass plant in Woodville (\$100 million plant) expected to produce 500,000 metric tons of pellets a year with production beginning in 2012. The pellets are said to be the size of a dowel used in furniture making. The pellets are "headed to the furnaces of electric power-generating plants in Europe." The Port of Beaumont will handle shipping of the black pellets.

Tyler County Commissioners "approved a 10-year tax abatement ... first year abatement of 90 percent ... down to 10 percent in the final year." The County Judge predicts 250-300 new jobs.

The wood supply, of course, comes from the forest industry as well as those new eucalyptus farms. Eucalyptus is listed by USDA as a noxious and invasive weed. A competitor for Chinese tallow?

STATE PARKS IN TROUBLE

Texas State Parks suffered record drought and heat, devastating wildfires, and a drop in visitation that led to a critical situation for state parks. Carter Smith, Executive Director, reports a need to cover a \$4.6 million shortfall and help keep these state parks open.

You can help by: 1) making a tax-deductible **donation online or by mail**; 2) **write in a donation** of \$5 or more to state parks on your vehicle registration form when you register your motor vehicle by mail, at your local county tax office, or online in counties which offer online payment; 3) **visit a state park** with your family or friends because visitor fees pay for about half of all state park operating costs.

Bright Side

DIBBLING WITH N.P.C.A.

For the second year, National Parks Conservation Association and BTNP organized a Longleaf Pine Restoration Project on MLK Day, January 16, in the Turkey Creek Unit of the Big Thicket National Preserve. Suzanne Dixon and Erika Pelletier from the Texas Office coordinated the event. Volunteers came from Magnolia Garden Club, River Oaks Garden Club, and the BTA. They planted 5,344 seedlings. NPCA has supported BTNP from the early 1970s to date –



"Dibblers" with NPCA-BTNP restoration project. [photo by Deanna Boensch]

Conservation Outlook

👍 **Bright Side** (continued)

legislation, appropriations, reports like “State of the Parks, ”etc. They even loaned us their Texas mailing list several years ago, and we gained some strong, effective members.

Currently, NPCA is working with partners to prepare for the 100th anniversary of NPS in 2016 focusing on “A Call to Action,” the 5-year strategy released in August 2011 by NPS. (If you care about all of our national parks, you should be a member (www.npca.org)).

ST. MICHAEL’S VOLUNTEERS

Between January 8-14, the MOVE students from St. Michael’s College (Vermont) planted a total of 7,682 seedlings in Hickory Creek Savannah Unit and Turkey Creek Unit. The group included Jenna Brukhardt, Piper Krabberhoft, Laura Buckman, Janel Roberge, Patrick Mager, Colin Marshall, Taqueu Tuthill, Mary Waters, Amy Blackey. MOVE stands for Mobilization of Volunteer Efforts, and their slogan is “Think Globally; Act Locally.” St. Mike students have been volunteering for Big Thicket projects for over 10 years, and this year’s group was another blue ribbon team.

HOUSTON SIERRA FORESTRY

A group of 11 Houston Sierrans hiked Beech Creek Unit and made a brief foray into Turkey Creek Unit on Saturday, January 28, and visited the Rosier Unit on Sunday, January 29, staying in Batson overnight. The group was led by Brandt Mannchen. The Houston Sierrans visit Big Thicket venues at least once – sometimes twice – each year.



St. Michael’s College Volunteers [photo by Deanna Boensch]

VILLAGE CREEK STATE PARK HIKE

Village Creek State Park began 2012 “on the right foot, the left, and the right again.” Texas State Parks joined America’s State Parks in launching “First Day Hikes,” an initiative to get families outdoors. VCSP Superintendent Jerry Rashall led the hike on Sunday, January 1st, at 2:00 pm. There was a good turnout for the hike that started at the trailhead in the main parking lot.

LOWER TRINITY VALLEY BIRD CLUB

The LTV Bird Club met December 10, 2011, in Liberty with Gary Holmes presiding. Maxine Johnston presented a Powerpoint™ program on “Biodiversity” – wearing a Trinity River NWR T-shirt and sporting a Bill Brett horsehair braided hatband. There were old friends and BTA members to visit with including Stuart Marcus, Denise Barkis, Lewis Casey, and Ellen Pickett. The club generously presented a gift of \$200 to BTA.

OUTDOOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT in Southeast Texas was the theme of a meeting January 31 with The Conservation Fund, the Beaumont Convention and Visitors Bureau and invited Trailblazer guests. Dialogue included promotion of trail development in a project similar to one conducted by the City of Lufkin.



Houston Sierra Forestry Group on Beech Woods Trail

Fire Management Plan

Fire Management Plan scoping for an Environmental Assessment is in progress. An internal scoping by NPS specialists identified elements to be considered, including 1) Full suppression of wildfires; 2) Ecological restoration of altered lands; 3) Prescribed burning and mechanical use as tools of ecological restoration and hazardous fuel reduction; 4) Limited herbicide application to assist ecological restoration; 5) Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation of wildfire areas; 6) Consider biomass utilization only as an aid to ecological or hazardous fuel reduction. For more information, check <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bith/>. **Submit comments by Feb. 14.**

Chief Ranger Position Filled

The Chief Ranger vacancy has been filled by **Merrick Moody** who grew up in Mississippi. His most recent assignment was Independence NHP in Philadelphia. He earned a Masters Degree in US History from the University of Southern Mississippi. His wife Stephanie and his daughter Emily are happy to be in Big Thicket. He reports that his personal boat is in good working order for the Neches River!

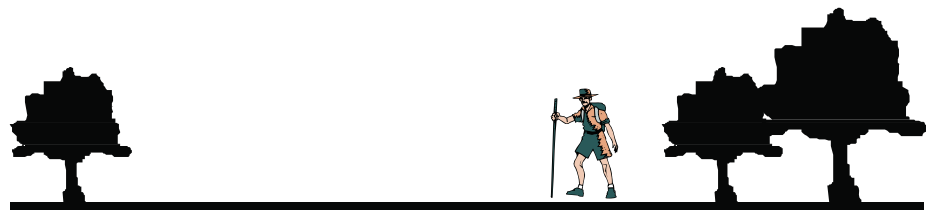
Retirements

Lamar Funderburk, "Elder-Statesman" and "Chef Extraordinaire" of the Maintenance Task Force, just retired leaving behind a huge gap and a legacy of service. Lamar won the BTA's Lubbert Superior Achievement Award in 2009. The staff honored him on January 20 with a dinner at Catfish Cabin in Lumberton.

Lee LeJeune, Administrative Officer, departed official service Dec. 31, 2011 with over 36 years of federal service,

27 with the National Park Service, nine of them at Big Thicket. Previous assignments include Devils Tower National Monument, Natchez NHP, White Sands NM, Dinosaur NM, and Amistad NRA. Her retirement party was held February 2 at Mama Jack's in Kountze surrounded by family and friends.

Resource Management Intern **Jessica Ward** has researched and designed several wayside panels about Climate Change, its ramifications and management strategies. Two new wayside exhibits were installed at the Salt Water Barrier in cooperation with LNVA. Others will be installed on existing kiosks in the preserve.



Hikes and programs scheduled

Saturday, January 28: "The Big Thicket by Moonlight," 6:00 pm

The Big Thicket can seem like a very different world after sunset. Engage your senses and learn about nocturnal wildlife on this 1-mile night hike. Meet at the Sundew Trailhead with water, good walking shoes, and a flashlight or headlamp with a red lens. The trailhead is located on CR 1910, 0.5 mile south of FM 2827, about 7 miles north of the Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center.

Wednesday, February 8: Kids' Library Program, 10:30 am

Kids! Join a park ranger at this special library program about the Big Thicket. Meet at the Elmo Willard Library, 3590 East Lucas St., Beaumont.

Saturday, February 18: "Birds of Prey," 2 pm

Learn about and even meet some raptors at this afternoon program. Wildlife rehabilitator Doris Mager, also known as "The Eagle Lady", will introduce several birds of prey under her care and discuss their conservation. Past bird guests have included a crested caracara and great horned owl. Meet at the Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center.

Friday, February 24: "Black Bears in the Big Thicket," 6 pm

Are there really black bears in the Big Thicket? Find out at this program, where park ranger Mary Kay Manning will discuss black bear sightings and ecology in east Texas. Meet at the Logon Café, 3805 Calder, in Beaumont.

Wednesday, March 14: Kids' Library Program, 10:30 am

Kids! Join a park ranger at this special library program about the Big Thicket. Meet at the Elmo Willard Library, 3590 East Lucas St., Beaumont.

The Board of Directors met January 14 in Saratoga. Breakout sessions were held for committee meetings. The board reviewed the usual reports and adopted a budget for 2012. New directors include Charles Smith and Michael Hoke. Ann Roberts and Pete Gunter returned to the board.

Committees

The directors selected a Nominating Committee for 2012 including Ann Roberts, Rosalie Rogers and Judy Aronow. The Personnel Committee is reviewing applicants for the Executive Director position. A selection is expected soon.

Jefferson County Tourism Committee Award

The Committee awarded \$1000 to BTA through grant funds provided by County Hotel Occupancy tax. The BTA will design a reproducible auto guide. Kountze High School digital media students will assist with the project.



Pat Lewis oversees BTA's trade booth at Kountze Trade Days

Kountze Trade Days: David and Pat Lewis organized a booth for BTA at Kountze Trade Days on the 4th Saturday of November. Despite hours of hauling assorted sales items and gathering tents, tables, etc., the weather turned ferocious with wind and rain while Dave and Pat spent over an hour holding the tent down. The sales were disappointing. The "best sellers" were used paperbacks!

Honors for Directors

Some of our directors have earned achievement awards. **Dr. James Westgate**, Lamar University Professor of Earth & Space Sciences, received the prestigious Minnie Stevens Piper Professor Award. Dr. Westgate's JASON project and Teaching Environmental Science program involves students in "learning through doing." **Elaine Allums** was recognized by the Southeast Texas Regional Planning Commission with the Frances K. Monk Regional Leadership Award. Allums, Mayor Pro-Tem in Kountze, actively and effectively supports regionalism.

No. 6 in the "Temple Big Thicket Series" is Lorraine Bonney's *The Big Thicket Guidebook* – still a local best-seller at \$29.95. Members can obtain copies from BTA at a 20% discount (\$23.68) plus tax (\$1.50) and postage (\$3.00). Order from BTA, P.O.Box 198, Saratoga TX 77585.

MEMORIALS

BTA was lucky to have friends like John Parker and Buddy Hollis! Our loss is great, but our lives have been enriched by knowing them.

John Calvin Parker, 1939-2012

John Parker, the first superintendent of Village Creek State Park, died January 18. A graveside mass service was held January 22 at Pine Ridge Baptist Church Cemetery. He is survived by his wife Leta Parker and two sons and three daughters plus several grandchildren and many friends.

John led the development of VCSP from the early 1980's until his retirement in 2001. He was a former editor of *Mobile Marine Publications*, Mobil

Oil Corporation, and he was a navy veteran.

John was also a historian. Once upon a time your editor attended a meeting in Lumberton and borrowed a line from "Steel Magnolias": "If you don't know anything good to say about anyone, come sit by me." John smiled and said, "Do you know who said that? It was Alice Roosevelt Longworth!"

Leon Bailey "Buddy" Hollis, Jr., 1941-2012

Buddy Hollis, former BTA board member and Big Thicket guide, died January 19 in Newton, and memorial services were held January 23. He is sur-

vived by several cousins and, again, many friends.

Buddy was especially dedicated to Village Creek State Park and was one of their most constant volunteers. He brought along "Ginger" who was equipped with a volunteer dog vest.

BTA called on him for guide services and bird programs over the years. We especially remember his field trips with an early St. Michael's College group (Vermont), when a bright young speech student followed him around making notes on his pronouncements (such as, "if you want to run with the big dogs, you have to get off the porch").



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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.TCAatexas.org

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

Thicket of Diversity

The **Executive Council** of the Thicket of Diversity met Jan. 12 at BTNP headquarters. Brian Lockwood, Science Committee Chair, presided in the absence of President Wendy Ledbetter. Mona Halvorsen was named interim Executive Director until the position is filled. Ann Roberts retired Dec. 31 as Administrative Asst. after five years of service. The Funding Committee reported on grant requests pending.

Big Thicket Images: On Friday, January 13, photographer Michael Black presented a "Science Café" at the Logon Café in Beaumont, giving everyone a glimpse into the sometimes strange and hidden beauty of the Big Thicket. Black's images portray the adventures and discoveries of research teams working on the All-Taxa Biodiversity Inventory as they scour the Big Thicket to find every species living in this area. While working with the scientists, Mr. Black has had the privilege of being first to photograph several species new to science.

Dr. Larry Brown: The "Plantman" (Mr. Taxonomy) was asked about a report from Joe Liggio that Menard Creek Corridor Unit is turning out to be one of our most diverse units. Brown provided a list of 52 plants that are found only in the Menard Creek Unit or in that Unit and one other Unit. Brown has published lists of Big Thicket flora in prestigious scientific journals, and arguably is our most productive researcher.

Brown served as Biology professor at Houston Community College since 1976, as well as Research Associate in Plant Taxonomy at Spring Branch Science Center Herbarium in Houston. Among earlier assignments are USDA (Plant Taxonomist at the Forest Service Herbarium in Washington), Tarleton State College and Rice University. He "retired" July 31, 2006.