

BIG THICKET DAY, October 12

Big Thicket Day 2013 began with a board and membership meeting with Jan Ruppel, President, presiding.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Ken Kramer, former Executive Director of the Lone Star Chapter, Sierra Club and current volunteer Water Resources Chair and Legislative Advisor, who addressed "Our State's Water Future – Progress and Challenges." Kramer noted that the Legislature made significant efforts this year to advance water conservation and to finance infrastructure, and he outlined challenges ahead.

Ann Roberts, Chair of the Awards Committee, presented the R.E. Jackson Conservation Award to Dr. James Westgate, Lamar University Professor of Earth and Space Sci-

ences. She provided a litany of his achievements, including his 18-year summer workshops for Environmental Science Teachers, his publications, research, awards, and other awards received and offices held.

Mona Halvorsen reported on the Thicket of Diversity, All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory. (See Diversity Dispatch).

Michael Hoke, Chair of the Neches River Adventures Committee, presented a PowerPoint that included plans for curricula-based student use.

Dr. James Westgate gave the election report for the Nominating Committee. All nominees were elected including Betty Grimes as Secretary plus two new directors — Leslie Dubey and Lolinda Gonzalez.



Dr. Ken Kramer was the keynote speaker for Big Thicket Day

After lunch, committees met to work on upcoming plans and projects.

Presidential Footnotes ... By Jan Ruppel

Because of the government shutdown we held BTA's 49th Big Thicket Day at First Baptist Church in Saratoga. Thank goodness for good neighbors. I want to thank all who came and learned of the financial and project growth the BTA has undergone this year.

Our focus next year will include celebrating the concurrent anniversaries of BTA's 50th & BTNP's 40th. We

have a number of activities developing to celebrate throughout the year. One will be the Neches River Rally...what is it? It's a fundraising event. This paddling event will take place September 6th and will coincide with the announcement of a new Texas Paddling Trail.

We are hoping you will step up to join us in celebrating the achievement of our mission and goals for

the preservation and protection of the Big Thicket region and continue to support the Thicket of Diversity, our partnership with the Big Thicket National Preserve. We want to be able to count on you to help make our future vibrant and our anniversary celebration one to remember.

Conservation Outlook

VILLAGE CREEK STATE PARK: PROJECT LONGLEAF

Beaumont Enterprise, Tim Monzingo,
September 25, 2013

Generations ago, thick forests of longleaf pines stretched from the eastern shores of Virginia down along the coast to Florida to East Texas. Over decades forests that covered more than 90 million acres have dwindled to a little more than 3 million acres, according to the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service ...

Foresters and caretakers of public lands want to re-establish the longleaf pine, considered among the most important species of trees in the South because the trees and forests they create are habitats to at least 29 threatened and endangered species, according to the USDA...

Village Creek State Park has embarked on an initiative to rebuild the area's longleaf forests and on Tuesday, contractors were burning mountains of brush ... Village Creek State Park decided a eucalyptus field planted some years ago by a timber company and purchased by the state would be a perfect environment to help re-establish longleaf pines.

More than 30 acres of brush pile burned Tuesday as part of roughly 180 acres planned for replanting, said Ryan Witt, the forest operations manager for Raven Environmental Services, Inc.

DAVIS HILL STATE PARK

The Lone Star Chapter Sierra Club made a special push during the last legislative session to try and open state parks that have never opened to the public. TPWD is now con-

sidering how Davis Hill could be opened on a limited basis.

Sierra Club worked with TPWD to set up service days to remove invasive species from the park. On the first workday September 28, volunteers cleared tallow trees along Davis Bayou. Another workday is scheduled for Saturday, October 26, to remove yaupon from the "pocket prairie" on the hill. The Houston group meets at the Subway in Cleveland at 8:00 AM. Others may gather at the intersection of SH 105 and FM 2518 at 8:30 AM.

While performing volunteer services, you can enjoy Davis Hill — a diverse and scenic park atop a salt dome where the highest elevation is 266 feet above sea level.



Volunteers at Davis Hill State Park are working to clear invasive species.

Diversity Dispatch

Mona Halvorsen gave an update at the annual meeting, on the Thicket of Diversity, All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory Project.

She distributed tables that recorded 2,790 species identified; 12 were new to science, and another 30 are pending that designation. Other data indicate that 267 species are new to the Preserve, and 133 species are new to the State.

Of 30 Taxa Working Inventory Groups (TWIGs), 15 have completed projects, including amphibians, Bryophytes (historic), Formicidae (ants), freshwater fishes, freshwater mussels, Lepidoptera and Noctuidae (butterflies and moths), lichens, Odonates (dragonflies and damselflies), photography, pseudo-scorpions, reptiles, Tardigrades (water bears), and Mordellidae (tumbling flower beetles). An additional 13

TWIGs are active, and 2 are being recruited.

Alex Dye, an intern with the Thicket of Diversity All-Taxa Biodiversity Inventory, presented a Science Café program on current mapping techniques used in documenting resources and research in the Big Thicket. The program was held at the Logon Café in Beaumont, at 6:00 PM on Thursday, September 19.

East Texas Miscellany

Grant of \$2.7 million for Kountze Hike/Bike Trail

Beaumont Enterprise, Sept. 4, 2013

The Texas Transportation Commission will grant \$2.7 million to fund a hike and bike trail in Hardin County. The trail, which will be just over six miles long, will run from the City of Kountze to the Big Thicket Visitor Center. Construction should be completed by fall 2014.

Shangri La Lecture Series

ORANGE, Texas, October 7, 2013 - Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center is excited to announce the program for its upcoming "Exploration and Discovery" Lecture Series. The series includes: **Monday, October 21, 2013 at 6:30 PM, *The China Connection... the Plants, People and Plans of an Emerging Horticultural Giant,***

presented by Dr. David Creech, Director Stephen F. Austin Mast Arboretum and Pineywoods Native Plant Center; **Monday, November 4, 2013 at 6:30 PM, *Charles Darwin and His Revolutionary Idea,*** presented by Bryan "Fox" Ellis, Fox Tales International; **Monday, November 18, 2013 at 6:30 PM *Exploring for Native Plants: Lessons from Nature for the Garden,*** presented by Rick J. Lewandowski, Director, Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center.

All lectures in the Exploration and Discovery Lecture Series will be held in the Discovery Theater on the grounds of Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center. Call 409.670.9113.

For reservations www.shangrilagardens.org.

About STARK Cultural Venues:

The Stark Museum of Art, Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, The W.H. Stark House and Frances Ann Lutcher Theater for the Performing Arts are venues of the STARK Cultural Venues of Orange, Texas that provide significant resources for the study and enjoyment of art, nature, history and culture.

Hardin County Historical Commission

The HCHC hosted a regional meeting of historical commissions. Oct. 19, 11:00 AM in the Legion Hall/County Seat Entertainment building next door to the Museum of Hardin County. The groups network on common goals of historic preservation. Each commission reported on their projects.

Preserve Overview by Ann Roberts

PRESERVE REOPENS TO VISITORS

Big Thicket National Preserve reopened to visitors October 17. Visitors can access public areas, roads, facilities, and other public services immediately. Big Thicket National Preserve has been closed since October 1 due to the lapse in Congressional appropriations.

“We are excited, happy to be back at work, and welcome visitors to Big Thicket National Preserve,” said Supt. Neighbor. “Autumn is a particularly special season to enjoy all that the Preserve has to offer.”

Hunting: The Preserve is again issuing hunting permits. Beech Creek Unit has 77 remaining, Big Sandy Creek Unit - 52, Lance Rosier Unit - 425, and Neches Bottom Unit - 86. All available permits for the Beaumont and Jack Gore Baygall Units have been issued.

NPCA SAVES F.L.R.E.A.

*reported by Suzanne Dixon,
Texas office, NPCA*

One provision that was added to this bill thanks to NPCA and its staff is an extension of the Federal Lands Recreation and Enhancement Act, through December 2015. The act provides an important source of revenue to all of our public lands, including more than \$200 million each year to national parks. NPCA's Government Affairs department led a funding coalition letter to House and Senate leaders requesting that the extension be included. The extension buys more time for a comprehensive reauthorization and ensures that NPS and other public

land agencies will retain annual fee authority after December 8 of this year. Fees are extremely important for the parks, which lost an estimated \$7.2 million in fee revenue during the shutdown.

Also, thanks go to Dennis Galvin, NPCA Board member, for testifying before Congress Wednesday at a marathon 5-hour hearing of the House Committees on Natural Resources and Oversight and Government Reform

PRESERVE WINS PHOTO CONTEST

News Release. Sept. 6, 2013

On September 4, 2013, Eastern National, a cooperating association that supports the national parks, announced that they selected a photo of Big Thicket National Pre-

serve in a photo contest to represent the Southwest Region of the National Park Service (NPS) in their 2014 collectible stamp set. These stamp sets, which include photos of ten regional winners and a national stamp, will be sold in NPS visitor centers nationwide in 2014.

An NPS employee, Michael Black, took the winning photo of 10-Mile Bayou, located in the Beaumont Unit of the preserve. It depicts Spanish moss-draped bald cypress trees lining the bayou and reflected in it, and captures the beauty, stillness, and mystery of the waterways that characterize this region.

This recognition of Big Thicket National Preserve is particularly appropriate at this time, as the pre-

...continued on page 5



Contest winner: Michael Black's photo of 10-Mile Bayou — the color photo appears in the Big Thicket Reporter color version on our website at www.bigthicket.org.

Preserve Overview

...continued from page 4

serve will celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2014. This is the first time that the preserve has been featured as a regional stamp in this program. In addition to national recognition, Big Thicket National Preserve will also receive \$500 from Eastern National to support its interpretive program.

Eastern National is a non-profit association that produces and sells educational material in bookstores in over 150 national parks. Since its incorporation in 1948, it has donated over \$100 million to the NPS to support park projects, particularly educational and interpretive programs.

OIL AND GAS

BTNP has pending two Environmental Assessments on Sept. 23, 2013: (1) Century Exploration LLC proposal to drill and produce the Phineas #3 and Wile E. Coyote Wells from a location outside the Beaumont Unit; (2) proposal to drill and produce the Fort Apache Energy, Inc. (FAE), Baptist Foundation #1 and Nordin #1 wells from surface locations outside the Turkey Creek Unit.

The 2006 oil/gas management plan assessed the total direct, indirect, connected, secondary, and cumulative impacts of multiple wells drilled inside and just outside the BTNP. Ideally, BTNP should acquire the mineral estate, but such a possibility is remote.

HUNT RETURNS TO U.S.

Charles Hunt has been appointed by NPS to lead the office that includes Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network and the Captain John Smith Chesapeake and Star-Spangled Banner national historic trails. The Bay watershed includes parts of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia. Hunt most recently served as Regional Director for the American Battle Monuments Commission. He managed 23 sites in France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Belgium.

Hunt was formerly Regional Issues Coordinator for the Big Thicket National Preserve. BTA recognized his achievements here with two awards -- The R.E. Jackson Award and a Distinguished Service Award.

Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust

BTNHT met Oct. 13, with Pres. Ellen Buchanan presiding. Buchanan reported on the meeting of the Land Trust Alliance. She also reviewed details of a proposed conservation easement in cooperation with The Conservation Fund. Several properties are pending transfer to the National Preserve. Various "housekeeping" details were covered including purchases, mailouts, etc.

B.T.A. News

A Big Thicket sized "Thanks" goes to TCEQ-SEP. BTA has received the third year grant of \$35,000 from the TCEQ-SEP thanks to the LSC Sierra Club. Funds provide support for the Thicket of Diversity specifically for Neches River research.

The **ExxonMobil Foundation Volunteer Involvement Program** awarded a matching grant to BTA for volunteer hours completed for Hardin County Cleanup day using Eastex canoes. Thanks to Exxon-Mobil as well as to Mary Kay Manning who submitted the request.

Big Thicket Association Membership

Mail checks (payable to BTA) to
P.O. Box 198, Saratoga, TX 77585-0198

BTA Dues

- \$ 15.00 Active
- \$ 25.00 Supporting
- \$ 10.00 Senior / Student
- \$ 25.00 Institution, Organization, Business
- \$500.00 Life Membership

Designated contributions:

- Land Fund
- Legacy Fund

THICKET OF DIVERSITY - ATBI

Checks payable to Big Thicket Association -ATBI

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|------------------------|--------------------------|
| \$ 25.00 Species level | \$ 500.00 Class level |
| \$ 50.00 Genus level | \$1,000.00 Phylum level |
| \$ 100.00 Family level | \$5,000.00 Kingdom level |
| \$ 250.00 Order level | |



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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

Gulf States Mycological Society
www.gsmyco.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

UPCOMING EVENTS

October 26

Davis Hill State Park work day with TP&W (see page 2)

October 26

Dinosaur Days at the Entergy Museum, 9:00-1:00; Neches River Adventures hosts three tours; sign up at booth on grounds at Entergy Museum

November 2 – Marysee Prairie Workday

November 2 thru November 23

Neches River Adventures boat tour every Saturday, 10:00-12:00. Reservations required: call 409-651-5326 for reservations.