

# Big Thicket Reporter - #95

## Sept-Oct 2008

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### **BIG THICKET DAY OCT. 11**

The 44th annual meeting of the BTA convenes Saturday, Oct. 11. The General Membership and Quarterly Board of Directors meeting begins at 9:00. Keynoter will be Cong. Kevin Brady with remarks on his HR 5891: "Connect, Preserve, Revitalize." HR 5891 would allow adding to the BTNP 100,000 acres FROM WILLING SELLERS only.

The program begins at 9:30 when BTA Pres. Bruce Drury presents the BTA Annual Report, followed by updates from BTNP Supt. Todd Brindle and Dr. Dale Kruse, president Executive Council, Thicket of Diversity (ATBI).

Hardin County's Sesquicentennial will be covered by Director Robert Schaadt, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center. Dr. J.F. DeLa Teja, Texas State Historian, will also speak.

"Ecotourism and Development" will be discussed by Shaun Davis, Director, Southeast Texas Planning Commission. Conservation leaders Brent Kartye, Director, Neches Scenic River, and

James Canup, Executive Director, Texas League of Conservation Voters, will also speak.

Lunch is at 12:00 noon. Books will be on sale from 1:00-3:00, and several authors will be present to autograph their works including, Pete Gunter, Howard Peacock, Wanda Landrey, and Geraldine Watson.

## **HARDIN COUNTY HISTORY CONFERENCE**

The Sesquicentennial History Conference will be held at the Hardin County Courthouse, Friday, Oct. 10 at 9:00 AM, under the aegis of the Hardin County Historical Commission, and also sponsored by the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center. the BTA.

9:30-Noon

Welcome, Judge Billy Caraway

Historical Overview, Robert L. Schaadt

"What the Big Thicket Means to Me," Howard Peacock

"Big Thicket Preservation Efforts," Maxine Johnston

12:00-1:30 - Lunch at the Senior Citizens Building (speaker pending)

1:30-3:30 PM

Sawmills and Temple Lumber Company, Jonathan Gerland, Director, History Center

Hooks and Saratoga Oil, Judy Linsley, Mamie McFadden Ward House

Oilfields of Hardin County, Dr. Paul Spellman

3:30 PM Keynote Speaker: Dr. T. F. de la Tejas, Texas State Historian

## **JACKSON AND LUBBERT WARDS**

Plaques honoring two outstanding conservationists will be presented at the Big Thicket Day meeting, October 11.

## **R.E. JACKSON AWARD**

Wendy J. Ledbetter will receive the R. E. Jackson Conservation Award. The award is conferred periodically to recognize out-standing achievements and contributions to conservation. Wendy is Southeast Texas Project Director for The Nature Conservancy. She began work at the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary in 1997. Wendy received a B.S. in Wildlife Biology at Colorado

State University. She and her daughter Teal live in Silsbee.

Her work at Larsen Sanctuary has been productive and invaluable to the protection and administration of a remarkably diverse and scenic resource. That involved oversight of everything from prescribed burns to interpretation. Beyond those responsibilities, she has exhibited extraordinary organizational skills chairing the Planning Committee for Big Thicket Science Conferences in 2003 and 2007. In 2008 she organized and presided at the Big Thicket Workshop for Leadership Southeast Texas. Other conservation activity includes participation in the East Texas Black Bear Task Force, Environmental Learning Center at Lamar, the Trailing Phlox Recovery Program, and the Native Plant Society. As a community leader, she also serves as president of the Southeast Texas Arts Council. She was added to the Beaumont Convention and Visitors Bureau's Hall of Fame in 2008.

### **THOMAS LUBBERT AWARD**

Deanna Boensch, Fire Ecologist, will receive the Thomas Lubbert Superior Achievement Award. Each year this award recognizes a Big Thicket National Preserve employee with at least three years service whose performance is outstanding, and whose contributions to the Preserve are significant.

In February 2003, she accepted a permanent job with Big Thicket National Preserve as the lead fire effects monitor, working with a crew of seasonal employees. In 2006, she was promoted to fire ecologist. She works collaboratively with other federal agencies, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions on projects such as Texas Trailing Phlox reintroduction, Longleaf Pine restoration, the Thicket of Diversity ATBI, the Big Thicket Science Conference, as well as prescribed burns and wildland fire suppression.

Deanna received a B.S. in Biology, College of William and Mary in 2000. She worked for Shenandoah National Park as a SCA volunteer and later as fire effects monitor. She continues to pursue a M.S. in fire ecology with Stephen F. Austin State University. She lives in Silsbee, TX with her husband, Bob, who is a preserve manager for The Nature Conservancy.

### **NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY SYMPOSIA - OCT. 16-19**

Plans for the NPSOT meeting at Holiday Inn Plaza, Beaumont, Oct. 16-19 are complete thanks

to Peter Loos, Conference Chair and his committee. Dr. Pete Gunter will be the keynoter, speaking on Friday, Oct. 17.

Other conference speakers include Wendy Ledbetter, Deanna Boensch, Bob Boensch, Lisa Jameson, Dave Lewis, Joe Liggio, Glenn Olsen, Charles Allen, Julie Shackelford, and Ellen Cover. The field trip schedule includes Rush Creek, Kirby and Sundew Trails, Canyonlands, Persimmon Gully, Larsen Sandylands, Anahuac Marsh, Davis Hill SP, Watson Pinelands Preserve, Doremus Nursery, Marysee Prairie, Shangri La, and canoe trips.

BTA volunteers will cover the Registration Desk. Check [www.npsot.org](http://www.npsot.org) for registration forms and details of the meeting.

### **B.T.A. LEGACY FUND**

BTA had been most fortunate to receive supporting grants from foundations that contribute generously to our program commitments. The Brown Foundation, the Meadows Foundation, Stark Foundation, T.L.L. Temple Foundation, Temple-Inland Foundation, Magnolia Charitable Trust, Entergy, Magnolia Garden Club, Crawford Family Trust, et al. Some of the larger projects include renovation of the former museum as a BTNP Field Research Station, the Thicket of Diversity ATBI, and purchase of land adjoining the Visitor Center.

Because of this largesse, we now have an Executive Director Linda Brindle, an Administrative Assistant Ann Roberts, and a Database Manager Mona Halvorsen who are immersed in organization and paper work supporting the ToD, managing the Field Research Station and performing organizational chores like bookkeeping, membership lists, etc.

Foundations ask how we plan to continue these projects. The BTA Board of Directors authorized establishment of a Legacy Fund Endowment and directed that all future life memberships be placed in this Endowment and plans are in progress for fund-raising. Contributions are needed.

### **CONSERVATION OUTLOOK**

### **HURRICANE RITA DEBRIS REMOVAL**

Editorial by Maxine Johnston

NPS Intermountain Region released Aug. 28 the decision on the Environmental Assessment proposal to remove hurricane debris from Little Pine Island Bayou Corridor of the Big Thicket National Preserve -- a FONSI (Finding of No Significant Impact).

The news release says "the NPS has decided to conduct a ***one-time removal*** of large woody debris related to Hurricane Rita and foreign debris within the Corridor Unit... NPS experts did locate a few areas where ... large trees spanning the channel could possibly create such [flooding] conditions in the future." They say smaller woody accumulations will not be removed because "studies show that flood levels are not significantly raised by such debris, and wood is an important feature of the aquatic ecosystem .. therefore, removal ... is not consistent with the Preserve's enabling legislation." Officials say that removal will be by helicopter with ground crews assisting and taking care of human debris.

Friends, that is weird! Effectively, NPS says that Man knows more than Nature about managing streams, and that people who buy houses (on berms) and realtors who build on floodplains have to be bailed out -- instead of enforcing regulations for building on floodplains. BTA has been opposing meddling with streams since 1966 when a Pine Island Bayou channelizing project was stopped. Periodically other efforts to impact PIB and LPIB have been avoided through wide support of local citizens and timber companies.

For the first time, Preserve and Hardin County officials have decided to tolerate and to participate in interference with natural processes. Indeed, Hardin County for months before the FONSI have been ditching and removing debris from other streams that empty into Preserve streams. Recently, a mistake at the Village Creek bridge on US 96 resulted in removal of debris on five acres of the Village Creek Corridor.

A precedent has been set that opens doors.

### **RAW SEWAGE DUMP PLANNED**

Joanna Ruiz and others are getting out the word about the proposed Sewage Dump in Tyler County on CR 4780. Steve Fontenot, Sr. applied to Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for a permit to dump every year over 900,000 gallons of sewage from household septic tanks on 17 of his 48 acres. According to Ruiz, the sewage will be spread on the ground and sprayed with disinfectant. Local residents are concerned about contamination of surface water, wells, and springs. They point out that spring fed branches flow from Fontenot's property into branches that flow into Black Creek, Hickory Creek, and Turkey Creek Unit of the Preserve and eventually through Village Creek into the Neches River. Air pollution may be a problem. Other

concerns include lowering property values

Fontenot says that sewage is pretreated with lime and that no toxic chemicals are used, that the site is buffered by woods, and that he has dug monitoring wells to determine runoff. He claims that the project is in complete compliance with TCEQ regulations.

This probably needs further investigation and discussion, but the neighbors are right! Not in our backyard!