

Big Thicket Reporter - #96 Nov-Dec 2008

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BIG THICKET DAY REPRISE

Big Thicket Day, the 44th annual general membership meeting convened Oct. 11, 9:00 AM in Saratoga, Field Research Station. The business meeting included the usual reports (minutes, treasurer, president, committees, etc.). Those attending adopted a work program for 2009.



Tellers reported the results of the election ballot. 2009-10 officers elected were Bruce Drury, President; Mary Catherine Johnston, Vice-Pres.; Fred Allen, Treasurer (filling vacancy 2009). Incumbent directors re-elected were Judy Aronow, Dr. Don Blanton, Rose Ann Jordan, Comm. Ken Pelt, Dr. Jeff Pittman, and Jan Ruppel. New directors include Bob Cassell, Lane Harrison, Dr. Carl Knight, and Dr. James Westgate.

The program featured an annual report by President Bruce Drury, followed by presentation of awards. The R. E. Jackson Conservation Award honored Wendy J. Ledbetter (Larsen Sanctuary, Nature Conservancy) and the Thomas Lubbert Superior Achievement Award honored Deanna Boensch (BTNP). Tom Lubbert, first BTNP superintendent, was present to present the Lubbert Award.



Program updates were provided by Supt. Todd Brindle for the Preserve and by Dr. Dale Kruse

for the Thicket of Diversity. Dr. J.F. de la Teja, State Historian, a keynoter for the Hardin County History Conference joined us and discussed preserving Texas History. Conservation updates were provided by Brent Kartye (Friends of the Neches) regarding the proposed Neches Scenic River and James Canup (Texas League of Conservation Voters) entitled. "Fish, Hunt, and Vote!"

BTA was pleased to welcome Dr. Carl Knight's Eastfield College group of 60+ students.

NECHES SCENIC RIVER

The Neches River has played an important role in the history of Texas. The canoes of several Indian nations -- Caddos, Cherokees, Alabama-Coushattas -- plied its waters. Early "Texian" settlers from the United States built log cabins along its banks. The timber barons of the 19th and early 20th centuries floated great rafts of logs down the river to sawmills in Beaumont. They built railroads into the towering forests of the Neches Valley and hauled the logs to long vanished sawmills. The river and bottomland forests were rich with fish, ducks, fruits, and nuts. Great predators like cougars and black bears were abundant. The bottomland forests and abundant wildlife sustained the population of hearty pioneers who built modern-day Texas.

Initiative Aimed at Increasing Tourism

The Neches today presents a quiet, natural oasis in a modern bustling world. Its long stretches of diverse forest and exceptional wildlife habitat are the refuge of hunters, fisherman, hikers, canoeists, and urbanites escaping from the noise and hustle of the city. Many people have begun to recognize the value of this beautiful and wild river for its economical potential and as a historical treasure. This appreciation for this special 400-mile corridor has led a number of people to propose that the river be designated a National Scenic River.

A Neches Scenic River would be good for economic development: Scenic Rivers are tourism destinations -- an economic engine for motels, B&B's, restaurants, outfitters, convenience stores, and other businesses that bring dollars to the local economy. "Designating the Neches a Scenic River would be a great thing for East Texas," Brent Kartye says, "but it's understandable that people, especially riverside landowners and folks in the timber industry, would worry about how it would affect them."

Kartye, a native East Texan, spent twelve years with Temple-Inland as lodge manager and wildlife specialist at Boggy Slough wildlife area near Lufkin. "I'm looking for opportunities to speak to civic organizations, nature groups, economic development groups, hunting and fishing clubs, and businesses -- any association that has concerns about designating the Neches a

Scenic River.”

The forests in the Neches River bottomlands stretch a contiguous 400 miles from its upper reaches near Tyler, past national forests and state parks between the Jacksonville-Palestine area and Lufkin-Diboll, then through the Big Thicket National Preserve to Beaumont-Port Arthur. The river bottoms abound with life – deer, squirrels, wood ducks, songbirds, wildflowers, fish, even “gators” -- providing fishing, hunting, hiking, canoeing, birdwatching, and other outdoor recreation for area citizens. The Neches Valley is the heart of the “Central Flyway.”

Dams proposed for the Neches together would flood 175,000 acres of those bottomland forests, leading the national groups American Rivers to name the Neches one of the “Ten Most Endangered Rivers” in 2007. Thousands of landowners would have their land condemned under eminent domain if the reservoir were built. Habitat for wildlife would be lost.

There has been on-again, off-again interest in damming and channelizing the Neches since the 1920s. In the 1980’s, then-Congressman Charlie Wilson had Congress deauthorize Rockland Dam, which would have inundated 125,000 acres in Angelina, Tyler, Polk, and Trinity Counties. The reservoir is periodically resurrected as a local/regional project and currently is listed as an alternative in the regions official water plan. Designating the Neches a National Scenic River would keep it in its free-flowing state, precluding the government from issuing permits for projects that would dam or channelize the river.

A proposal to raise the level of Dam B, which forms B.A. Steinhagen Reservoir in Tyler and Jasper counties, is under consideration. Raising this dam would flood Martin Dies, Jr. State Park, the Angelina-Neches/Dam B State Wildlife Management Area (known as “the Forks”), and valuable duck hunting areas.

Before the Neches can be named a National Scenic River, the National Park Service or U.S. Forest Service must conduct an extensive study. “Right now all we’re talking about is a *study* of the river,” says Kartye. “After the study, which would take two or three years, a bill would have to be passed in Congress to actually name the Neches a Scenic River. That bill can’t happen without the support of local congressmen and public officials, who won’t support it if it isn’t found to be good for East Texas.”

Big Thicket advocates should support a Scenic River not only for its economic and recreational value to the East Texas area, but also because it would protect the water sources and seasonal regimes that impact the Preserve's Neches River corridors.

PRESERVE EXPANSION

Volunteers Needed

Considering elections, economic downturns, and assorted problems, action on HR 5891 is unlikely in see any action this session. The bill would add "up to 100,000 acres" to the Preserve from "WILLING SELLERS." Cong. Kevin Brady will reintroduce the bill in the 111th Congress.

BTA must get organized because there's plenty of "legwork" we can do NOW and that must be sustained indefinitely. As the late Sen. Ralph Yarborough warned us back in 1966, it may take 6-8 years to "educate" the public and members of Congress. If we can convince local folks and conservationists to support this legislation, we could shortcut that time frame.

BTA has a powerpoint that can be used for discussions with county commissioners, city councils, chambers of commerce, conservation and civic groups. The presentation highlights benefits such as the expansion of stream corridors to protect bottomland hardwoods and to provide corridors for wildlife movement; recreational opportunities be such as a canopy walk, canoe and kayaking trails with GPS; campgrounds; an interpretive center on IH-10 to increase visibility; and increased economic benefits (increases already evident in the seven counties where BTNP units exist).

Ask YOUR organizations to schedule a program on this critically important opportunity to protect our natural heritage and to increase benefits to the area. BTA can supply speakers for programs, or recruit volunteers from our statewide membership to present programs. Call 936-274-1181 or 936-262-8522 for information or e-mail frs@bigthicketresearch.org.

DIVERSITY DISPATCH

The Thicket of Diversity Executive Council met Oct. 10 and filled vacancies. The new president is Dr. Dale Kruse (TAMU). TWIG grants were approved for Amphibians with Paul Crump and Rachel Rommel as leaders, and a second grant was approved for Dr. Larry Brown.

Kruse and BTA's Linda Brindle will serve on panels at the George Wright Society Conference in March.

The on-line database has encouraged the PI's and Researchers have been encouraged to enter their data in the online database. Progress has been made on data entry for over 7000 historic records, 1000 new records, three new to science records, and several new to park records in the database. **At** the recommendation of the Data Management and Science committees an SQL Server has been leased to provide more on-site management of the ATBI data, the ability to

create reports, and ensure data security.

NEW MUSROOM SPECIES DISCOVERED

Two new mushroom taxa are now officially recorded in the scientific literature from eastern Texas. *Megacollybia texensis* R.H. Petersen & D.P. Lewis, was collected in the Lance Rosier Unit of the Big Thicket National Preserve during an ATBI mushroom walk held on November 11, 2006. The new species was reported in the journal *Report of the Tottori Mycological Institute*, vol. 45, pages 1-57, July 2008, and titled "*Megacollybia* (Agaricales)". Ron Petersen, from the University of Tenn., and David Lewis, a Texas mycologist described the new species. In the article, the Texas material was compared to species from Russia, China, Japan, Europe, North, Central and South America. It is closely related to species from Guyana and Colombia. This is the first new species described from specimens collected during a Big Thicket National Preserve All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory event.

Another new species, *Russula texensis* Buyck, Adamcik, & Lewis, was collected from a residence in Bleakwood, located in Newton County, Texas. It was formally described in the *Journal Cryptograme Mycologica*, vol. 29, pages 121-128, 2008, and titled "*Russula* section *Xerampelinae* in Texas". *Russula texensis* was collected by Bart Buyck, a European Mycologist who specializes in the genus *Russula*, while on a collecting trip to East Texas in 2007. So far it is only known from one collection.

MUSHROOM FORAY - NOV. 15

A Mushroom Walk was held in the Big Thicket National Preserve, Lance Rosier Unit, on November 15, 2008 attracting 39 participants. The group met at 10:00 AM at the Big Thicket Field Research Station and conducted the foray into the Lance Rosier Unit of the BTNP to collect and record species. This activity is part of the BTNP All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory (ATBI). The collections will be displayed, identified, and dried for deposit in an herbarium. The mushroom walk was led by David Lewis, who is also the ATBI Taxonomic Working Group (TWIG) leader. Jay Justice, a well-known fungi identifier from Arkansas attended the session.

NPSOT MEETING IN JASPER

The Native Plant Society Symposium (NPSOT) moved from Beaumont to Jasper when problems developed because of Hurricane Ike. A hard-working, can-do crew of local and state folks worked overtime to make the move a remarkable success.

Pavilion-in-the-Pines was the site for most of the meetings -- a great place for the "Go Wild in

the Big Thicket" theme. The caterers were superb. Any problem was dealt with promptly by amazing folks like Peter and Cassandra Loos, Sharon Odegar, Pat Lewis, Gailon Hardin. Charles Allen resolved the AV/media troubles. A BTA team manned the registration desk and registered 134 participants.

Dr. Pete Gunter was keynoter for the event. Other speakers included, Julie Shackelford (TCF), Maxine Johnston (Introduction to Big Thicket), Dr. Dale Kruse and Linda Brindle (Thicket of Diversity), Dr. Alan Pepper (geoendemic plants), Greg Grant (Pineywoods Native Plant Center), Dr. Glenn Olsen (birds and plants they use), Lisa Jameson (invasive plants), Peter Loos (ornamental natives), Joe Liggio (orchids), David Lewis (mycology), Wendy Ledbetter (trailing phlox recovery), Deanna Boensch (fire and longleaf pines), and Dr. Charles Allen (baygall flora).

Guided field trips went to the Watson Preserve (Joe Liggio) Larsen Sanctuary (Bob Boensch), Sabine River NWR (Peter Loos), BTNP Pitcher Plant Trail (Sandi Elsik and Warren Preuss), Sundew Trail (Deanna Boensch), Mushroom Foray in Jack Gore Baygall (Dave Lewis), Doremus Wholesale Nursery (Ted Doremus), Marysee Prairie (Heinz Gaylord), Neches Cardinal Cruise (Richard Bothel), Davis Hill (Joe Liggio), CC Road Savannah in Louisiana (Rick Webb), Rush Creek Ravines (Jeff Pittman and Randall Terry, Cook's Lake Canoe trip (Lisa Jameson and Peter Loos), and Bryophytes in the Canyonlands (Dr. Dale Kruse).

HARDIN COUNTY SESQUICENTENNIAL CONFERENCE

History Come Alive

The Hardin County Sesquicentennial History Conference On Oct. 10th began with remarks from Judge Billy Caraway, Commissioner Ken Pelt, Sandra J. Pickett (Texas State Library & Archives Commission Chair), and J.A. McKim, III (Hardin County Historical Commission Chair).



Robert Schaadt, Director, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, gave an overview of Hardin County History, and Dr. J.F. de la Teja discussed "The Historical Imperative: Preserving Texas Past." Other speakers included Howard Peacock, Dr. Ralph Wooster, Jonathan Gerland, Judith Linsley, Dr. Paul Spellman and Maxine Johnston.

On Oct. 25, the Sesquicentennial HCHC troops and Hardin County Genealogical Society held a parade down US69 featuring county towns. "History Come Alive" followed with music, arts and crafts, and exhibits on the grounds of the Kirby Hill House grounds in Kountze.

PRESERVE OVERVIEW

by Ann Roberts

FALL ACTIVITIES

Big Thicket National Preserve Park Rangers presented free programs every weekend through the autumn months. Park rangers led trips on a 1.5 mile Kirby Nature Trail Hike to get a glimpse into the diversity of the Big Thicket; learn outdoor skills with Map and Compass and Kids Wilderness Survival; and explore plants that enjoy Insects for Lunch. For information on guided programs consult www.nps.gov/bith, or call 409-951-6701.

For Cardinal Cruises (Lamar University) group reservations and information call: 409-880-8907.

OF HURRICANES

BTNP closed down at warning of both Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, but it was Ike that brought major problems. An incident team from various NPS parks assembled and worked diligently to

clear trails and roads as well as to assist in damages to employee homes. As of Thursday, October 9, all units of Big Thicket National Preserve were open to the public. Caution was advised on hiking trails from hazards such as leaning and hanging trees as well as unstable footing. Visitors using the Village Creek Corridor Unit were also cautioned about submerged debris, and changing water levels.



Large Live Oak in the Lance Rosier Unit -- Survivor of Rita and Ike

CENTENNIAL CHALLENGE

The Preserve received a Centennial Challenge Award of \$65,000 matched by BTA for the Thicket of Diversity programs. Another request for FY 2009 is pending.