



BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE 162

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2024

APRIL
MAY
JUNE

3

2024 Neches River Rally
Rescheduled: September 7, 2024 »



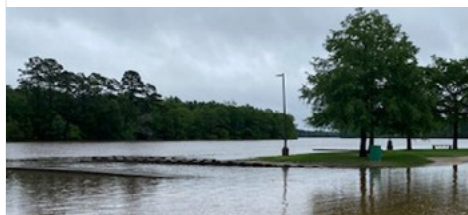
4

Happy 60th Anniversary! »



5

2024 Spring Flooding »



6

Big Thicket National Preserve »



8

Looking Back: "Big Thicket Lake" idea
didn't float for long »



10

BTA Membership Committee Hosts 2nd Big
Thicket Bus Tour »



12

April on the Neches »



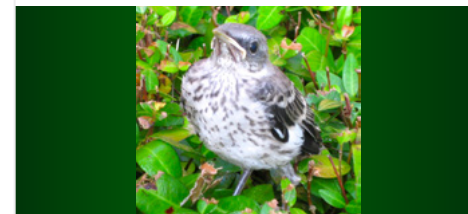
13

Butterflies and Pollinating Plants Subject of
Science Café »



14

Northern Mockingbird – Peace Talks »



15

Dr. Pete Gunter Memorial »



16

Order today! BTA 60th Anniversary Shirts »



17

Save the Date »



2024 Neches River Rally

Rescheduled to September 7, 2024

This year's route will take paddlers through the Big Thicket National Preserve via the 4-mile Cooks Lake to Scatterman Paddling Trail. This is a rain or shine event.

Paddlers will experience the open waters of the Neches River and the bald cypress/water tupelo swamp. Wading birds, songbirds and turtles are common wildlife observed in these backwaters.

Canoes and kayaks (no paddleboards) will launch and return to the LNVA Saltwater Barrier location in Beaumont. Bring your personal boat or reserve a boat with Big Thicket Outfitters (409) 786-1884.

Each adult registered participant will receive a complimentary Big Thicket Association 2024 membership.

Registrants also receive a free hamburger, chips and drink for lunch, and goodie bag.

The Big Thicket Association thanks our generous sponsors and donors of goods and service for supporting this event!

[Click here to make your reservation!](#)

In addition to enjoying this Texas Paddling Trail, there will be live entertainment and free rides aboard the Ivory Bill. This is a family friendly event. No public consumption of alcohol is permitted.

Registration forms must be completed and signed by all participants and/or legal guardians at the time of registration.



NECHES
RIVER RALLY
2024

EST

2014

BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION



BTA Milestone! Happy 60th Anniversary! Part II

CAPTAIN BRUCE WALKER, BTA PRESIDENT

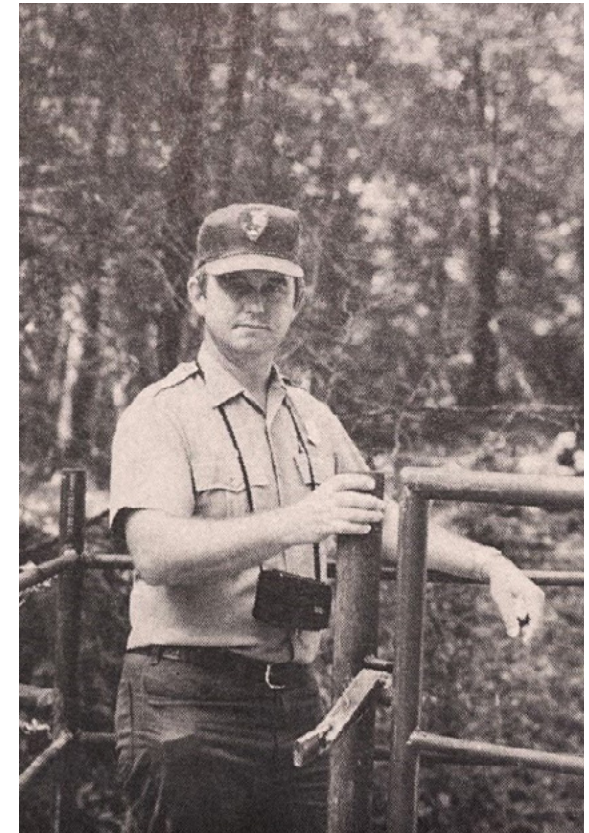
Becoming a National Preserve isn't easy. The many years and expertise that our BTA Founders and Past Preserve Superintendents contributed to Preserve's creation is sometimes lost over the decades. When Present Gerald Ford signed the Big Thicket National Preserve legislation on October 11th, 1974, his signature only created a "paper park." The first land purchases didn't take place until 14 months later. The large lumber companies faithfully observed a moratorium on cutting in the Preserve. Many small timber companies continued logging. The results were dramatic, affecting close to 4,000 acres. Not until the Emergency Land Purchases Bills were passed in 1976 by Congressman Charles Wilson and Senator Lloyd Bentsen was the harvesting halted.

Even after these bills, land purchases began to occur only in increments for eighteen years, from 1976 to 1992. The sheer difficulty of purchasing the separate tracts of land fell on William Jewell of the U.S. Corps of Engineers. Jewell was quoted by a Texas Lawyer reporter that he was "beset in a nightmare of convoluted title searches and time-consuming detective work to track down heirs of long departed oil field speculators." Widely credited with the skillful handling of these difficult cases and keeping the funding moving, Jewell was given an award by BTA in 1994.

Whereas other parks were created for their scenery, the Big Thicket was set aside to preserve its bio-diversity. Its biological integrity had to be protected. Challenges of allowing hunting and oil exploration in the Preserve's isolated units and stream corridors created a complex situation. Among these problems was establishing boundaries. When the Preserve was created, boundaries were depicted only in general terms. Thicket environmentalist, map maker, and BTA member Billy Hallmon took it upon himself to drive from Dallas on weekends to walk and map the Units step by step, mile by mile, with little more than a topo-graphical map, an ankle-attached yardage gauge, and a hand-held map roller. Because the NPS was short on staff and money, Park Superintendent Tom Lubbert was able to accept Hallmon's maps, which with some corrections are those of the present Preserve.

The creation story of the Preserve is a fascinating story. I hope to share more in future Big Thicket Bulletins, during our 60th Anniversary year.

References: *Saving the Big Thicket* by James J. Cozine, Jr. and Pete A.Y. Gunter, Past President of the Big Thicket Association.



The Preserve's first Superintendent, Thomas E. Lubbert. (Source: Saving The Big Thicket/Big Thicket Association Files. Courtesy of Maxine Johnston.)

2024 Spring Flooding delivered big disappointments to BTA's Spring Neches River Adventures Programs aboard the *Ivory Bill*, and the Neches River Rally

Captain Bruce Walker, BTA President

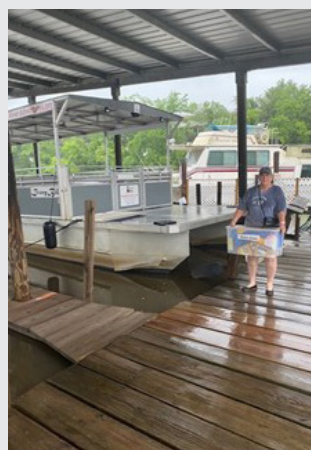


Neches River Adventures: The April and May flooding on the Neches River this Spring caused many cancellations that impacted our Environmental Education Classes, Saturday Public Eco-History Tours, and Private Charters. Boat docks at Colliers Ferry Park, the Saltwater Barrier boat dock, and the Beaumont Marina were all impacted by the flooding. All Neches River Adventures program have now resumed.

Neches River Rally: The rally that was scheduled for May 4th was also cancelled due to the flooding. The Rally Committee has rescheduled the Rally date for September 7th. Paddlers will still have a chance to paddle this year and celebrate our 11th Annual Neches River Rally.



Colliers Ferry Park: Boat Dock, Boat Ramp, Parking Lot, and Green Space for Land Activities were all flooded.



Preparing the Ivory Bill's boat stall and storage unite at the Marina for flood waters.



As the floor water level rises, the boat floats high in the stall and the storage units are taking on water. All school supplies, boat equipment, and PFD's have been moved to safety.

Photos by Bruce Walker and Kay Ali

Big Thicket National Preserve

Megan Urban, Chief of Interpretation and Education



At the annual Junior Ranger Day, over 150 adults and kids enjoyed learning about the different types of rangers who work at the Big Thicket. This year, the resource management crew built an archeological dig for kids to learn about the vast human history of Big Thicket.

The first ever Science Symposium took place on May 18th, where scientists who have led research at Big Thicket presented their findings to the public. There were 40-50 people in each session to learn about archeology, the inventory and monitoring network, hydrology, and bats at the preserve.



Big Thicket National Preserve

Megan Urban, Chief of Interpretation and Education



Summer programming will include multiple types of paddle programs, including sunset paddles, fishing and paddling, and day trips on the local waterways. Interested visitors should keep an eye on the website for dates. Registration for the paddle trips opens 2 weeks before the event.



Come stargazing with us this summer at Tyrrell Park in Beaumont. Rangers will share the awesomeness of the night sky and the moon with visitors at two events. Check the website for the dates; registration is **not needed**.

LOOKING BACK:

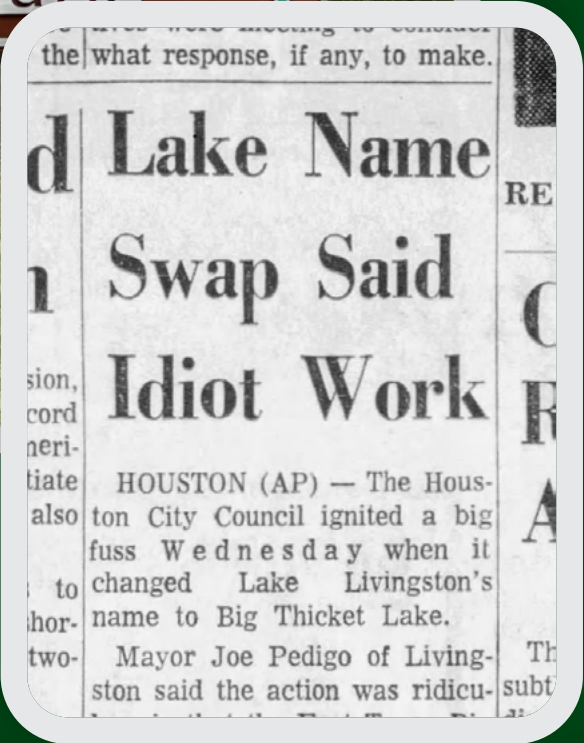
“Big Thicket Lake” idea didn’t float for long

Dennis Durkee, BTA Board

It made headlines all over Texas on March 18, 1971: “Lake Livingston from now on will be known as Big Thicket Lake.” That was the first sentence of an Associated Press news report out of Houston.

The story went on: “Councilman Lee McLemore won approval from the Houston City Council yesterday to change the name. McLemore, who has advocated a change of names for years, said he was asking for a more regional name rather than one singling out the town of Livingston. He said there are 27 other towns either inundated or practically on the shores of the reservoir. The town of Livingston is 7.5 miles from the huge dam that impounds the water of the Trinity River to form the lake.”

There was just one problem. The city of Houston didn’t own the lake. It is operated by the Trinity River Authority. McLemore, however, believed his city had the right to change the name because Houston had footed the bill for the lake, though the river authority held the construction contract. The original 1964 agreement between the authority and the city reserved 70 percent of the water for Houston. That agreement is still in place today.



*Lake Livingston State Park has 635 acres and opened in 1977.
A headline in the Austin American-Statesman on March 19, 1971.*



Lake Livingston has 83,000 surface acres in Polk, San Jacinto, Trinity, and Walker counties.

There was also a second problem. Livingston Mayor Joe Pedigo told reporters that Houston’s action “was ridiculous in that the East Texas Big Thicket area does not extend to the lake.”

The name change sparked a big fuss around Texas. A headline in the Austin American-Statesman, for example, said bluntly: “Lake name swap said idiot work.”

McLemore was unfazed, saying he only intended to honor all East Texas citizens whose lands were inundated by the lake. “They can call it what they want, but the official name will be Big Thicket Lake,” McLemore told reporters.

But within a month, the river authority directors voted to reaffirm that the name was not changing. The name “Big Thicket Lake” was sunk.

Within a few years, local efforts by the Big Thicket Association and others finally led to the creation of the Big Thicket National Preserve. That preserved tens of thousands of acres of unique land across Southeast Texas. And it also preserved the name “Big Thicket” in a way much better than a reservoir.

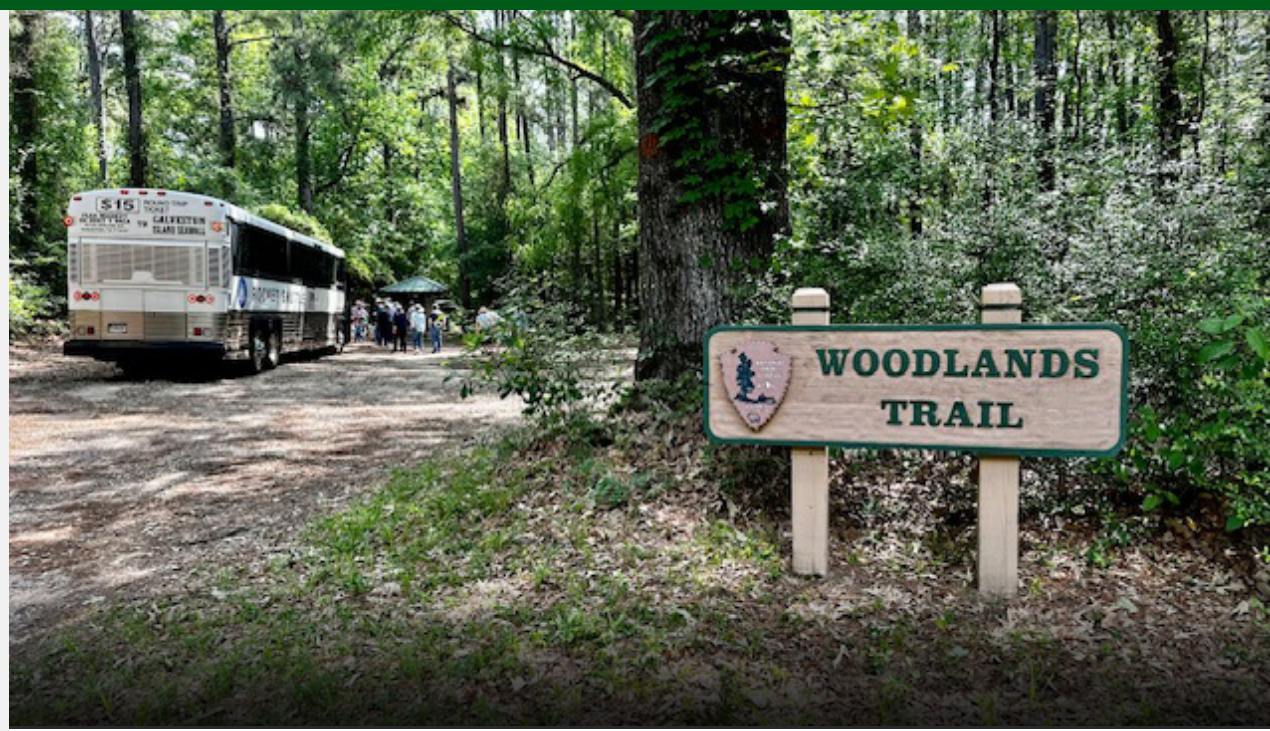
BTA Membership Committee Hosts 2nd Big Thicket Bus Tour

Diane Thompson, BTA Executive Director

BTA's Membership Committee plans events to promote membership in Big Thicket Association and educate others about the Big Thicket National Preserve. Some of those events have been a bus tour into the Big Thicket, and Science Cafés at the Logon Café.

On April 27, 2024, BTA hosted its second bus tour, covering the west side of the Preserve (BITH). Travelers enjoyed a beautiful spring day in the Big Thicket where flowers were blooming, birds singing, and plants a lush green.

First stop was the Visitor Center at the Big Thicket National Preserve. Megan Urban, Chief of Interpretation and Education, gave a talk, and passengers watched a movie about the Big Thicket and how it came into existence. Did you realize the reason the Big Thicket is such a biodiverse area is ICE?? If you want to know how ICE played an important role in the flora of the Big Thicket you will need to go to the Visitor Center on Highway 420 in Kountze and watch the movie!



Second stop was the Big Sandy Trail. Guests didn't hike at this location but observed prescribed burn areas from last year and this year. Some passengers weren't familiar with prescribed burns and what they do for the pines and the forest, but it was obvious when comparing the two areas that it cleared out the junk undergrowth, and native plants are flourishing now instead.

Third stop was the Woodlands Trail. Hikers enjoyed the beautiful lake on this trail and found some Texas-sized mosquitos!

Fourth stop was the Beaver Slide Trail. There were many bodies of water on this trail including Sandy Creek, and hikers observed a beaver dam.

Fifth stop was the Bird Watchers Trail. At this stop the bus was unable to travel down the road and had to move onto the next stop.

Sixth stop was the Big Thicket National Preserve Field Research Station in Saratoga. BITH owns the research station and BTA manages the reservations for researchers and conservation groups who come to BITH to do research and work. Guests were able to learn about the important work researchers conduct, and tour the facility.

Everyone had a fabulous day!

The Membership Committee is planning a 3rd Bus Tour for November 2024, so stay tuned!



April on the Neches

Phoebe H. Dishman, BTA Board, Bulletin editor

Wednesday, April 3, I joined three BTA folks aboard BTA's boat *Ivory Bill* to host the producer and crew of the Canadian TV show "Fishing for Treasure." These men had traveled 1500 miles to investigate a World War I ship whose half-forgotten remains drew worldwide attention last year when revealed by the low waters of the Neches. Here's my report.

A lovely April afternoon
Aboard the *Ivory Bill*
Beloved River, sun and breeze
My weary heart did fill
Husband at the helm
Friends close by my side
Canadian documentary crew
Up front enjoyed the ride
Man of the hour River Bill
And with him Lori his wife
Susan K of the Ice House
And her husbandly partner in life
Kim of the Beaumont Enterprise
Recorded our pleasant cruise
I'm eager to see what she chooses
To make it into the news
News of a cruise over wreckage
Ships gone down over time
While we, alive and thriving
And I, reporting in rhyme!

The show will air first in Canada. They're hoping for international release next January. In her Enterprise article, Kim Brent quoted producer and director Scott Leary: "The true treasures we're finding are the stories that have been lost." Here's to telling our stories.



"Fishing for Treasure" aboard the *Ivory Bill* - Diane Thompson

Butterflies and Pollinating Plants Subject of Science Café

Mary Catherine Johnston, BTA director,
Thicket of Diversity chair

Butterfly naturalist Nancy Denmark shared the Joys of Butterfly Gardening on April 1st at the Logon Café to a packed audience. She warned to beware of colored composts. Go with leaf litter mulches instead, as it is a natural source of nutrients. Create puddling spots, muddy areas for butterflies. For butterfly food, place overripe fruit with a dab of beer or wine to encourage fermentation. Google Texas Parks and Wildlife’s PDF document to find the 36 milkweeds native for the state. Propagate and plant these varieties. Do not plant tropical milkweed, *Asclepias curassavica*, a species often sold by nurseries. It is a non-native and does not go dormant. It becomes a distractor for migrating butterflies who will prefer to stop and reproduce rather than complete their journey.

With beautiful photographs, Denmark described various butterflies and their favorite host plants. For more tips, join her Facebook page, Joys of Butterfly Gardening SE Texas. Members can receive milkweed seeds and tried and true planting instructions to create a healthy butterfly garden.



Nancy Denmark – M.C. Johnston



Nancy Denmark – M.C. Johnston



left to right: BTA Executive Director Diane Thompson, Nancy Denmark, BTA Thicket of Diversity chair Mary Catherine Johnston, BTA Executive Board members Katy Hambricht, Bruce Walker, Phoebe Dishman – Aimee Lieby

Northern Mockingbird – Peace Talks

Phoebe H. Dishman, BTA director, Bulletin editor

*Excerpt from Evangeline and the Mysterious Strangers
Dallas: Tuckapaw Media, 2015*

They sprouted miniature feathers. Next thing we knew they were out of the nest, huddled under nearby bushes. The relatively peaceful nest time was over. But it would be some time before the babies could fly. During this period of on-the-ground exposure, the parents allowed themselves no rest. Each time we stepped outside or even dared to show ourselves at the window, they “chacked” at us. One afternoon I was sitting quietly on the patio, when father mocker flew down and perched on the chair opposite me. Glaring at me with accusatory eye, he began scolding.

My defense was three-fold:

1. Tasha was indeed a very wicked kitty. But she’s been dead fifteen years.
2. Her replacement, Sandy, has no claws. And no ambition.
3. As for me, I wish your children only the best.

After thinking it over, he decided to drop the case against me.



Baby Mockingbird – Phoebe Dishman



Dr. Pete Gunter Memorial

Maxine Johnston



Former BTA President Dr. Pete Gunter died in March. He was retired as Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Texas. He had been in hospital for some length of time. He mentioned in his last letter the completion of a novel and offered to send me a copy.

Pete was President of BTA from July 1971 - June 1973. He traveled to Batson for Big Thicket meetings in Saratoga – always staying in the home of Alice Cashen.

Pete told us he would not look like a professor while working for the Big Thicket. He planned to travel Texas with his guitar singing his "Last Big Thicket Blues." He carried with him membership envelopes, and he increased membership from 244 to 678! Indeed, Ann Roberts said that we knew where Pete was traveling by where the envelopes came from.

In his travels, Pete dropped in at newspapers, TV stations and media, saying, "I'm Pete Gunter, President of the Big Thicket Association. Would you like to interview me?" The answers were often affirmative. He also managed to do an interview on national television.

To quote Brandt Mannchen's tribute: "Pete often made plans with other Big Thicket stalwarts, like Geraldine Watson, Maxine Johnston, Lorraine Bonney, to spread the 'holy ghost' in the Big Thicket, rouse the troops for action, and battle for the good of Nature. Pete had that little bit of 'rabble-rouser' in him which electrified and motivated his audience." In his book *Saving the Big Thicket*, James Cozine quoted a timber company official as saying, "Gunter whip-sawed us to death."

When his term as BTA President expired, Pete moved on to become Chair of the Big Thicket Coordinating Committee that represented over 40 groups – local and national. Again, he maintained his record of superior performance, including a brief service in Washington as an aide to Rep. Bob Eckardt, author of one legislative bill. He also testified at several legislative hearings.

His books and articles contributed greatly to the *Big Thicket* preservation movement. These include *The Big Thicket: a Challenge for Conservation*, *Texas Land Ethics*; *The*

Big Ticket: An Ecological Evaluation; and to quote from a web article, "a variety of other pieces including fiction, philosophical monographs, and book reviews."

Pete finished high school in Houston, then graduated from the University of Texas in 1958. His academic work was outstanding. He taught at Auburn University 1963-65 and University of Tennessee from 1965-69, followed by the establishment of a Philosophy Department at the University of North Texas.

The *Denton Record Chronicle* article reported: "Pete's scholarly work encompassed the full range of both philosophy and environmental science, from physics and biology, to ethics and education, and creativity itself often involving music. His work on Henri Bergson made him possibly the world's living expert on that great philosopher."

A small private graveside service was held in Denton on April 5, 2024, at Roselawn Cemetery, and then a Celebration of Pete's life, with reminiscences and music, was held May 25 at UNT's Environmental Building.

https://dentonrc.com/obituaries/pete-a-y-gunter/article_8b7f5266-e7cc-59cf-b998-cb4795f0c1c0.html

ORDER TODAY!

BTA 60th Anniversary Shirts

Order today! We have a limited number of BTA 60th Anniversary T-shirts. The price is \$20 plus tax & a shipping/handling fee. Adult sizes from X-Small to 2X-Large. Avoid shipping cost by picking up your order, by appointment, at our office in Beaumont. You can place an order via QR code or by clicking this link:

<https://form.jotform.com/240544364212145>



Order your BTA 60th Anniversary T-shirt today!



SAVE THE DATES

Neches River Adventures

Tour the Neches River's backwater channels into the Big Thicket National Preserve and to the Port of Beaumont aboard the *Ivory Bill* excursion boat. Private Charters continue year-round. Book any day of the week, any time of the day. <https://www.nechesriveradventures.org/charters/>

Public Eco-History tours are available most Saturdays through October 26th. <https://www.nechesriveradventures.org/public-tours/>

Free Environmental Education Field Labs are available for the Fall Semester. <https://www.nechesriveradventures.org/education/>

Explore the Big Thicket

For activities in the Preserve please see www.nps.gov/bith

11th Annual Neches River Rally

Rescheduled to September 7.

Fall Bus Tour

Being planned by BTA Membership committee.

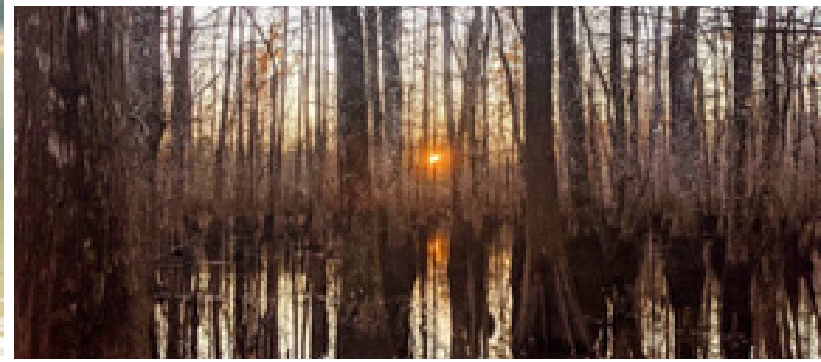
50th Anniversary Celebration of the Big Thicket National Preserve

Saturday, October 12th: 10:00 am – 4:00 pm
Big Thicket Visitors Center

This is a FREE event that is open to the public and will offer an opportunity for families to visit the preserve and celebrate the creation of Big Thicket National Preserve. There will be activities for the entire family including kids' activities, booths by area conservation organizations, lunch provided by the Big Thicket Association, and more. <https://www.nps.gov/bith/planyourvisit/50th-anniversary.htm>

Big Thicket Association 60th Annual Membership Meeting & Gathering

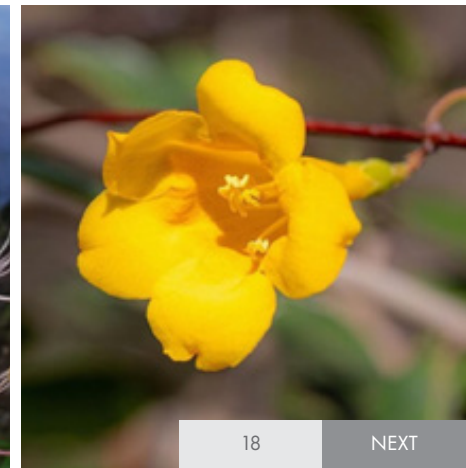
The Big Thicket Association, as a Friend's Group of the Preserve, will join the Preserve's 50th Anniversary Celebration. BTA members and guests are invited to visit our booth, meet our current board members and officers, as well as our newly elected 2025 board members. This will be a great opportunity to hear about BTA's current programs and projects.



BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

PARTNER IN PRESERVATION

#BIGTHICKET





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BIG THICKET BULLETIN

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Big Thicket Association
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- Web Sites**
- Big Thicket Association
www.bigthicket.org
 - Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust
www.bigthickettrust.org
 - Big Thicket National Preserve
www.nps.gov/bith
 - Conservation Fund
www.conservationfund.org
 - Gulf States Mycological Society
www.gsmco.org
 - National Audubon Society
www.goldentriangleaudubon.org
www.houstonaudubon.org
 - National Parks Conservation Association
www.npca.org
 - Native Plant Society of Texas
www.npsot.org
 - Nature Conservancy
www.nature.org/texas
 - Neches River Flood Planning Group
www.nechesfloodplanning.org
 - Outdoor Nature Club, Houston
www.outdoornatureclub.org
 - Sierra Club Golden Triangle Group
www.sierraclub.org/texas/golden-triangle
 - Texas Black Bear Alliance
texasblackbear.weebly.com
 - Texas Conservation Alliance
www.TCAtexas.org
 - Texas Master Naturalist Association, Sabine Neches Chapter
www.txmn.org/sabine
 - Village Creek State Park
tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/village-creek

Big Thicket Association Mission

The purposes for which the Big Thicket Association is organized are

- » To work for the preservation of the flora, fauna and historical culture of the Big Thicket area
- » To promote the conservation of natural resources and natural history of the Big Thicket area, and education for same
- » To maintain and perpetuate, so far as possible, the many species of trees, plants and animals found in the Big Thicket area, and to do whatever else may be done to preserve for posterity the abundance of flora and fauna and natural beauty with which this area has been endowed
- » To promote and to fund research contributing to knowledge of the Big Thicket area
- » To publish or support publication of cultural and scientific Big Thicket literature
- » To promote the welfare of the Big Thicket National Preserve

For more information about the Big Thicket Association and upcoming events, please click here to visit us online.

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