



# BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE 138



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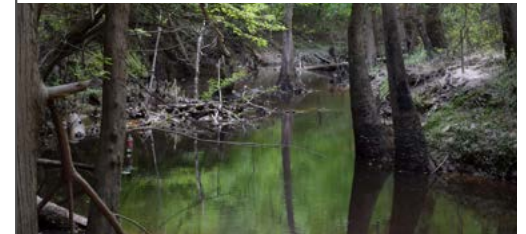
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*NPS Ranger leading an instructive hike.*



## **BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE ANNOUNCES A SUMMER OF RANGER-LED PROGRAMS**

The staff of Big Thicket National Preserve invites you to explore the thicket by taking advantage the many ranger-led programs being offered this winter season.

From canoe trips on Village Creek to full moon hikes and special summertime youth programs, park rangers will offer a variety of free programs. Some programs require participants to pre-register. Be sure to consult the 2018 Spring and Summer – Rangerled Program Schedule for details. Additional information on all our public programs is also available on our website at <http://bigthicket.org/>

See the Events Calendar in this issue of the Big Thicket Bulletin.



*Nate Zantzing, AmeriCorps Community  
Volunteer Ambassador*

## **BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE WELCOMES COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER AMBASSADOR**

The Big Thicket National Preserve welcomes Nate Zantzing of suburban Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to the team. He is one of 52 recent college graduates working in a national park this year to “Get Things Done” as an AmeriCorps Community Volunteer Ambassador.

“Nate continues the long legacy of young people devoted to conservation stewardship,” said Big Thicket National Preserve Superintendent Wayne Prokopetz. “His enthusiasm will be a great asset as he creates volunteer opportunities in the preserve over the next year.”

Zantzing will spend a year working with park partners and neighboring local communities to organize volunteer events and activities across all seven Southeast Texas counties where the preserve is located.

“I am from Paoli, Penn., which is a western suburb of Philadelphia,” Zantzing said. “I enjoy the natural beauty of the South...and, as an environmentalist, BITH is truly a dream location, given the plethora of species and habitat found here.”

In his brief residence at BITH, Zantzing has “visited almost every unit thus far, but the Lance

Rosier Unit really connects me to the wild lands of the area. The slope forest of the Canyonlands Unit stands out to me as a reminder of home.”

As a Community Volunteer Ambassador, Zantzing plans to maintain ties with the National Park Service while “remaining active in environmental issues.”

The Community Volunteer Ambassadors Program is a partnership between the National Park Service, Northwest Youth Corps, and Conservation Legacy. The program provides work and training opportunities to young adults ages 21 to 30 in national parks throughout the country.

Each Community Volunteer Ambassador will work in collaboration with local communities to mobilize volunteer groups and individuals to share in the protection of our nation’s natural and cultural resources.

“I’m very excited to learn about Southeast Texas and to work with the community to build stewardship of the preserve,” stated, Zantzing. “I’m drawn to the dynamic environment and diversity of species found throughout this region of Texas.”



*Ivory bill captains Deputy Ken Hobbs and Deputy Mark Bryant*

# Meet The IVORY BILL CAPTAINS

*by Bruce Walker*

Deputies Mark Bryant and Ken Hobbs from the Sheriff Department's Marine Division were at the helm during the very busy spring school season. Bruce Walker and Terrie Looney met with representatives of Sheriff's Office earlier this year and recruited the two deputies. The Jefferson County Sheriff's Marine Division is funded by a grant from the Sabine Neches Navigation District. No tax dollars are used to support this partnership.

Deputy Ken Hobbs is a native of Beaumont with 42 years in law enforcement. In 2006, he retired from the Beaumont Police Department and joined the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office. For the past ten years, he has been assigned to Marine Unit and patrolling the waterways in Jefferson County. Ken has a long history with our floating classroom.

Deputy Mark Bryant has been with the Jefferson County Sheriff Department since 1993. He has been with the Marine Unit for the past ten years as a supervisor for one of three shifts. His Marine Unit is responsible for all waters in Jefferson County including nine miles offshore.

Together the deputies will be a great resource for the BTA's Neches River Adventures program and the Ivory Bill. The Big Thicket Association is very proud of our partnership with the Sheriff's Office, and we look forward to their participation in our environmental education labs and for their protection on and off the Neches.

The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office has partnered with the Big Thicket Association's Neches River Adventures program.

The Neches River Ivory Bill is always looking for USCG Maritime Captains to pilot the Ivory Bill and provide a safe experience for eco-history tour passengers and students participating in BTA's environmental education program.



## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

### June 28, 2018

Full Moon Night Hike at 8:30 pm, Hike the nighttime world of the Big Thicket under a full moon. Locations vary and space is limited, call our visitor center at 409-951-6700 to register.

### July 5, 2018

Canoe Trip, 10 am, with park rangers on the waters of the preserve, casual and novice paddlers: canoes, PFDs, and paddles will be provided. Space is limited, call our visitor center at 409-951-6700 to register.

### July 6, July 13, July 20, & July 27, 2018

Junior Ranger Days, 9 am to Noon: Programs about plants, animals, and wilderness survival for kids ages 8-12. No reservations required. Call the visitor center at 409-951-6700 for details.

### July 19, 2018

Canoe Trip, 10 am, with park rangers on the waters of the preserve, casual and novice paddlers: canoes, PFDs, and paddles will be provided. Space is limited, call our visitor center at 409-951-6700 to register.

### July 27, 2018

Full Moon Night Hike at 8:15 pm, Hike the nighttime world of the Big Thicket under a full moon. Locations vary and space is limited, so call our visitor center at 409-951-6700 to register.

### August 2, 2018

Canoe Trip, 10 am, with park rangers on the waters of the preserve, casual and novice paddlers: canoes, PFDs, and paddles will be provided. Space is limited, call our visitor center at 409-951-6700 to register.



## KOUNTZE STUDENT SCIENTIST NEWS

The Brown Foundation will fund a newsletter to be prepared by Kountze High School student Jacob “Tiger” Hopkins, Contributing Writer in Chief. He is summarizing research conducted by the Big Thicket Association’s Thicket of Diversity. It will be available in print and online in June. This information is offered by Mary Catherine Johnston.



Mary Bernard (left) with Maxine Johnston on a walk through the recent longleaf pine burn near the Visitor Center of the Big Thicket National Preserve.



Maxine Johnston (left) with Ellen Buchanan on the hunt-camp trail south of Silsbee.



Blooming Prickly Pear Cactus along the hunt-camp trail.

## HITTING THE HIKING TRAIL *With Maxine Johnston*

Before the heat set in, Ellen Buchanan and Mary Bernard hit the trail with Maxine Johnston to learn something about the Big Thicket.

It was a chance to get first-hand information about the Preserve from someone who was there before its enabling legislation passed.

At 88-years old, Maxine's gait is slower, steadied by a pair of walking sticks. In exchange, she gifts her fellow-hikers with stories of the early days of the Preserve.

Many of the Preserve's founding fathers have passed-on, and yet she continues to hit the trail.

"Sorry to be saying this because it sounds so self-promoting, but I probably have seen more of the Big Thicket...than any person alive," Maxine said.

She talks about getting 84,000 acres through the government bureaucracy to establish the Preserve in 1975, saying: "it took ten years for the first bill, and six years for the addition act" that passed in 1993.

The political ramrod of the issue was Texas 2nd Congressional District Rep. Charlie Wilson, a flamboyant and effective promoter

who worked to designate the Preserve as a freshman representative.

"I ran into him at the capitol, and he said: 'Maxine let's go sit on the steps and talk to me about DC. He was brand new, and you could just feel he was so amazed and so proud, that he had become a congressman.'"

He asked her to take a helicopter ride over Village Creek to assess the acreage of private land along the drainage. It was a rough ride; she said: "I was so sick, and I vomited in my purse," rather than mess up the machinery.

One thing is for sure; if you're expecting to talk about the fairies along any Big Thicket pathway, you won't get it from Maxine.

As a hiker, Maxine recounts the words of a friend: "Maxine, don't invite me to anything because the answer is always - I can come," she said.

Want to walk in the Big Thicket? "If you have excursions, and if it is flat territory that I can navigate with my two sticks, I can come."

*Let's Go Hiking!*



# THICKET OF DIVERSITY NEWS

*By Mary Catherine Johnston*



The Thicket of Diversity promotes the Big Thicket with the 2018 educational outreach and citizen science activities of the Big Thicket Association facilitated through a grant provided by The Brown Foundation, Inc.

The Thicket of Diversity organizes activities throughout the school year at Kountze High School, including field trips into the Big Thicket bringing students and researchers together.

Pictured here are 79 Kountze Intermediate School students in the Big Thicket National Preserve with the National Park Service 'Every Kid in a Park Program.'

Other academic activities under the grant included planting native trees and landscaping on the school campus, sponsoring a science fair, and donating artwork to the Society of Wetland Scientists. Student Lailah Wilburn created a slide show to interpret the Dr. Beth Middleton's program on American Bald Cypress and the Effects of Climate Change.

These projects through the Big Thicket Association are possible through a network of partners: Kountze ISD, the Big Thicket National Preserve, Eastfield College, Sabine Chapter of Master Naturalists, the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, Gulf States Mycological Society, US Geological Survey Wetland, and Aquatic Research Center, and the Brown Foundation Inc.

Other contributors and volunteers are: the Nancy Angell and Glenn Dutton of the Sabine Chapter of Master Naturalists; Ellen Buchanan, Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust President; Katie Ballard, science teacher; Josie Gunter, University of North Texas student, and Stacie Arsement, KHS Counselor, are appreciated. Helpers: BTA Director Willie Watkins, Mona Halvorsen, Dr. Carl Knight of Eastfield College, David Lewis of the Gulf States Mycological Society and wife; Patricia, Alison Tarter, and KHS science teachers Laurie Overstreet and Leitha Gunter.



# Lamar History & FOLKLORE NEWS

## *Larry Jene Fisher Collection: History and Folklife of the Big Thicket*

*By Penny Clark, Assistant Professor/University Archivist at Lamar University*



*Chimney daubing.*

Although Lamar University's Special Collections boasts of many treasures, one of its most important is the Larry Jene Fisher Collection.

It contains a wealth of images of the Big Thicket spanning decades and including plant and animal life, and most importantly the daily life of the people including oil and lumber production, church services, funerals, family gatherings, syrup making, and chimney daubings.

Mary Laswell in her book, *I'll Take Texas*, dubbed Fisher "the Renaissance Man of Southeast Texas," an apt moniker for a man who in his early years was a silent movie theatre organist, who traveled the country, wowing audiences wherever he went.

He finally came to Beaumont to play the Jefferson Theatre's fabulous Morton Wonder Organ. The talented Fisher was also a pilot, who while traveling from Beaumont to Dallas, noticed the destruction of the Big Thicket.

Fisher's fascination with the region led him to relocate to Saratoga where he lived in the famed Vines Hotel, operated by Mattie Jordan Evans. Fisher quickly realized that much of the unique qualities of the Big Thicket were being destroyed by the lumber companies and "progress."

He recognized that the close-knit residents of the area had maintained centuries old folkways, but sadly these were being lost. Fisher, armed with his trusty camera, documented many different kinds of events in the area.



*A sawmill in the Big Thicket.*



*Horses goind cane to make syrup.*



*Scientists in the Big Thicket.*

Fisher also played a key role in the early day preservation group, the East Texas Big Thicket Association. The group sought to gain support for a Big Thicket national park by publishing a book, which included Fisher's photographs, which highlighted the biodiversity of the area.

Although Fisher died in 1956 at the age of 53, he left an amazing legacy in his photographs. He left the area in the late 1940s to pursue a career as a filmmaker, leaving his negatives, photos, and scrapbooks in Saratoga.

The photos remained with Lance Rosier. After Rosier's death, the family donated them to Lamar's library where they are preserved and made accessible to researchers.

Highlights of the collection are online at:

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/LJFC/>

# Mill Creek Trail

By Mary Bernard and Ellen Buchanan



## Where the Tupelo trees sing

Sometimes a simple hike becomes an unexpected gift, or as John Muir said: "In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks."

The gift was a chance discovery of the Mill Creek Trail in the Big Thicket National Preserve. The trail is a hidden sanctuary beneath a canopy of cypress and tupelo trees just a few miles west of downtown Silsbee.

It is a part of the Preserve rich with cypress-tupelo trees in all stages of growth; indispensable for the conservation of the Big Thicket.

The day we walked the trail was windy, and the tree-tops swayed above us, showering pink and white tupelo blossoms onto the trail. Cast among the pine straw at our feet were tupelo seeds yellow profusion.

Halfway down the trail, we heard an unfamiliar sound and paused to identify the melodic song. It wasn't long before we realized the sound came from tupelo limbs rocking against one another in the wind.

"The tupelo trees are singing," Ellen Buchanan said.

Mill Creek is not an established trail; it came to us because of the comments by a local official who said the Preserve's natural wetlands contributed downstream flooding at Village Creek.

This belief is mistaken.

We found no impediments on the main channel like log jams or natural dams before the confluence to substantiate the claim. It is a clear water passage unobstructed to the flow of water.

Mill Creek's wetland is not a stillwater swamp, but rather a "complete ecosystem," as Buchanan says: an "ecological corner of the thicket that remains unaffected by modern disturbance."

The trail starts and drops significantly from the Hwy 327 overpass and follows to Village Creek, roughly 1.5 miles long. Stream banks at the top of the trail are high, and drop-off significantly as the creek enters the confluence floodplain. Sloughs do occur in the bends of the creek where wetlands occur, but none appear boggy.



# THE NATURE CONSERVANCY NEWS



*Longleaf Ridge pitcher plants. Photo credit David Bezanson.*

## **Forest Legacy Working Forest Conservation Easement-Longleaf Ridge**

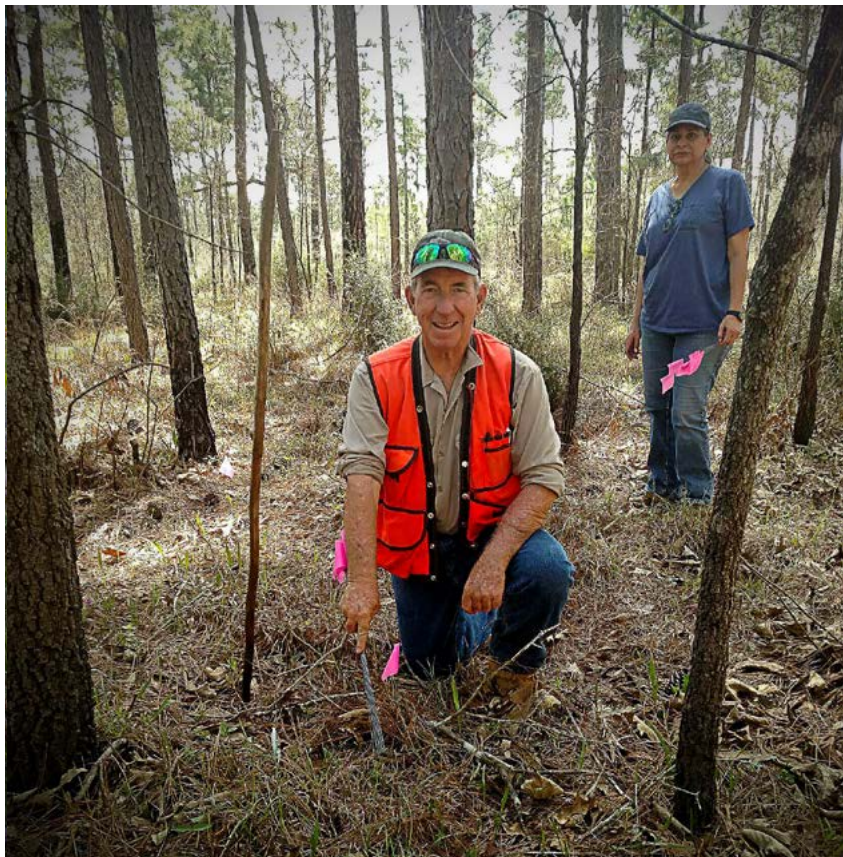
The Nature Conservancy has completed a conservation easement on 5,438 acres Longleaf Ridge in Jasper County. This iconic site includes waterfalls, hillside pitcher plant bogs, 15 miles of live water, and 2,000 acres of longleaf pine forest. Longleaf Ridge has long been identified as a regional conservation location of high biological diversity and significance for southeast Texas.

The Nature Conservancy worked with Campbell-Global, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, and the National Wild Turkey Federation to secure this acreage to be managed as a working forest conservation easement. The Texas A&M Forest Service will hold the conservation easement and conduct annual monitoring of forest management, science, and stewardship activities. The Nature Conservancy was instrumental in raising \$2.7 million for the easement from the federal Forest Legacy Program. Funds from the Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Acres for America Program of the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation were also secured for this transaction.

## **Texas Trailing Phlox Surveys**

Members of the East Texas Rare Plant Working Group conducted surveys for the endangered Texas Trailing Phlox. Despite flooding in the uplands of the preserve by Hurricane Harvey, the plant populations appear to have weathered this major natural event. Population information will be shared with Texas Parks & Wildlife Department for the state's Natural Heritage Database. The Nature Conservancy is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other conservation partners to revise the Recovery Plan for this species. The Sandyland Preserve harbors the largest protected population numbers for the species. Surveys were also conducted on Big Thicket National Preserve and private timberlands.

# THE NATURE CONSERVANCY NEWS



*Trailing Phlox survey.*

## **Frosted Elfin Butterfly Search**

Volunteers conducted surveys for possible sightings of the rare Frosted Elfin Butterfly on the Sandyland Preserve and other conservation lands. This species is associated with the legume of wild/ false indigo (Baptisia). BTA Board member Randy Beehn and his wife Cristi were among several volunteers across the country participating in these surveys.

## **Women In Philanthropy Lamar University**

Wendy Ledbetter, Forest Program Manager, joined with Ellen Buchanan, of the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, to serve as keynote speakers at the Women In Philanthropy luncheon hosted by Nancy Evans of Lamar University. Wendy and Ellen provided an overview of natural resources and historical events in Southeast Texas with an update on hurricane recovery. One hundred people attended the event.

## **Hurricane Harvey Recovery**

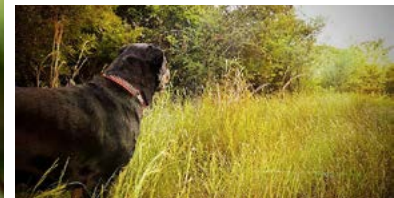
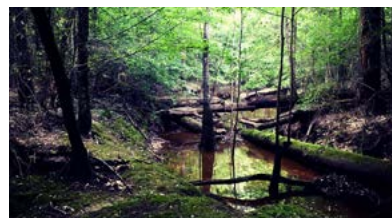
Recovery from Hurricane Harvey continues. Damaged preserve buildings have been removed and road repairs completed. The Nature Conservancy is working with a regional engineering firm to assess the use of the preserve for future infrastructure and construction of a new office and maintenance complex.



# BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

*Partner in Preservation*

**#BIGTHICKET**





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# BIG THICKET BULLETIN

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## WEB SITES

Big Thicket Association  
[www.bigthicket.org](http://www.bigthicket.org)

Big Thicket National Preserve  
[www.nps.gov/bthn](http://www.nps.gov/bthn)

East Texas Black Bear Task Force  
[www.etsbb.org](http://www.etsbb.org)

Conservation Fund  
[www.conservationfund.org](http://www.conservationfund.org)

Gulf States Mycological Society  
[www.gsmso.org](http://www.gsmso.org)

National Audubon Society  
[www.goldentriangleaudubon.org](http://www.goldentriangleaudubon.org)  
[www.houstonaudubon.org](http://www.houstonaudubon.org)

National Parks Conservation Association  
[www.npsca.org](http://www.npsca.org)

Native Plant Society of Texas  
[www.npsot.org](http://www.npsot.org)

Nature Conservancy  
[www.nature.org/txusa](http://www.nature.org/txusa)

Outdoor Nature Club, Houston  
[www.outdoornatureclub.org](http://www.outdoornatureclub.org)

Sierra Club Golden Triangle Group  
[www.sierraclub.org/goldentriangle](http://www.sierraclub.org/goldentriangle)

Texas Conservation Alliance  
[www.texascons.org](http://www.texascons.org)

Village Creek State Park  
[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park)

## 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.

## FOLLOW US

