



BIG THICKET BULLETIN

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BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION AWARD WINNERS

STUART MARCUS AND RODNEY MONK

by Maxine Johnston

The Big Thicket Association board of directors met Saturday, July 13 in Beaumont. An active agenda included discussion of plans for the program for the annual membership meeting on October 12. This year's meeting holds special significance because 2019 is the forty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Big Thicket National Preserve, and the fifty-fifth anniversary of the Big Thicket Association.

Each year at the October meeting, the Association present awards. The R. E. Jackson Conservation Award is named for the Silsbee leader of the East Texas Big Thicket Association that worked to establish a 435,000-acre Big Thicket national park in the 1930s-1940s.

The Thomas Lubbert Superior Achievement Award recognizes the performance of Big Thicket National Preserve employees. Lubbert was the Preserve's first superintendent. His 12-year tenure generated not only visitor use programs, but also plans for development, resource management and environmental studies.

For 2019 the R. E. Jackson Conservation Award will recognize Stuart Marcus, Refuge Manager of the Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge.

The Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge is celebrating its 25th year, and Stuart Marcus has served as Manager since Day One. The Refuge now protects 30,000 acres of bottomland hardwoods, provides hiking trails and day-use areas for visitors, and hosts annual events that attract wide participation. Efforts also continue to inventory protected species. Beyond the Refuge, Marcus has completed 40 years in federal service.

The Thomas Lubbert Superior Achievement Award will honor Rodney Monk, Equipment Tech / Fire Crew Supervisor for Big Thicket National Preserve, a 17-year veteran employee.

Rodney Monk began work in 2002 at the National Preserve as Wildfire Operations Specialist. His work also involved longleaf pine restoration and fuels management programs. He has also upgraded the Preserve's radio system, which has improved park-wide communication and safety of Preserve employees and visitors.



Stuart Marcus



Rodney Monk

IN MEMORIAM

MIKKO COLABE III CLEM FAIN SYLESTINE, Principal Chief of the Alabama-Coushatta Indian Tribe, died May 21, 2019, at the age of 91, in Polk County, Texas. According to the tribe's Facebook page, "The traditional bell of the Tribe rang this morning, notifying the community of the passing of a tribal leader it has had for decades. The tolling of this bell sounded beyond the East Texas forest, across the prairies and mountains..." Chief Sylestine was a direct descendant of Chief Colabe, who served as the second chief to Principal Chief Antone in the early 1800's. Chief Sylestine earned a BA from Austin College in Sherman in 1952 and worked as a teacher and coach until his retirement in 1988. He was an elder in the Indian Village Presbyterian Church on the reservation. The tribe will observe a period of mourning through the end of 2019.

ROBERT GLENN "BOB" FINCH died May 31, 2019, at the age of 91, in Beaumont, Texas. Born in Bryan, Ohio, he graduated from the University of Cincinnati with a degree in chemical engineering. He worked for Mobil Oil in East Chicago, Indiana, was transferred to Beaumont in 1967, and retired in 1989. Bob served on the board of directors of the Big Thicket Association from 1975-1981, working on several committees, and as Recording Secretary from 1978-1981. Bob was active in the former Big Thicket Conservation Association, serving on several committees and as president from 1985-1989. His wife Phyllis was also active in these organizations. She preceded Bob in death. They are survived by their son William and Peggy Dudley, of Austin, and their daughter Patricia Glover and her husband Courtney, of Beaumont. Among Bob's endowment funds were two universities, including Lamar University.

MEET THE CAPTAIN: GERALD LANGHAM

by Bruce Walker, Executive Director

Gerald Langham has been a Captain of the Ivory Bill since 2015. He attended Sea School in Bayou La Batre, Alabama, in 2014 with intent to obtain his Captains License so he could drive the Ivory Bill.

An avid outdoorsman, you might find him planting trees, hiking, camping, telling campfire tales, paddling, or doing trail work. He is known for encouraging others to “get out to enjoy the rivers and forest,” especially the Neches River and the Big Thicket. Gerald says, “At one time or another, I have floated every mile of the Neches River from Highway 21 Bridge west of Alto all the way down to the end of the jetties at Sabine Pass! I love any float time on the Neches River!”

Gerald grew up in Beaumont and graduated from Lamar University with degrees in electrical engineering and mathematics. He married Sandra Kelley while both were Lamar students. They have one son and one daughter and three grandchildren. When Gerald is not with the grandkids, captaining the Ivory Bill, or volunteering, you can probably find him at an Astros game. He loves baseball.

After Navy boot camp and Electronics Tech School, Gerald came home to be a drilling reservist. He transferred to the Coast Guard Reserve in 1978, and became a boat driver on

a 41-foot search and rescue boat. He ran cases offshore from Mermentau Bay, LA, to Galveston Bay in Texas. He was promoted to commissioned officer in 1986 and retired from the Coast Guard in 1993. His working career mainly was as an instrumentation/automation engineer at DuPont’s Sabine River Works in Orange, Texas. Retiring from that in 2005, he then worked five years as a math tutor at Lamar State College Orange, and fully retired in 2011.

A certified canoe instructor, Gerald often leads trips on area waterways. He is active in the local Texas Master Naturalist Chapter and the Sierra Club, as well as a volunteer at Shangri La and Martin Dies State Park. Gerald has also assisted our Neches River program by volunteering as a deckhand and a river guide. He has a great presentation on the historic steamboats that plied the Neches. He loves Texas history and often speaks of his great-great grandfather, James Biddle Langham, who moved to Beaumont in 1846 and became one of the noted early pioneers in the city.

We are very lucky to have Gerald as an active member of the Big Thicket Association and as a very important participant in the Neches River Adventures program.



Photo by Bruce Walker, taken on the upper Neches in Davy Crockett National Forest

OPEN OUTDOORS FOR KIDS

by Jason A. Ginder, Chief of Interpretation and Education, NPS

Starting in 2016, the staff at Big Thicket National Preserve joined more than three dozen partner groups to facilitate educational and engaging field trip experiences for fourth grade students from across the Greater Houston Area. Led by NPS staff, this effort is funded through a \$150,000 grant from the National Park Foundation. Formally known as Every Kid in a Park (EKiP), and now branded as Open Outdoors for Kids (OOK), this program strives to eliminate the primary barriers to field trip participation, by covering all transportation costs, including bus fuel and driver's salary.

In June 2019 we completed the third year of this project. In that time 90 field trips were provided, with more than 8,037 students involved in hands-on educational experiences in parks and public lands. In many cases these schools would not have taken their students on these field trips without the support of this grant.

In addition to providing field trip experiences, the OOK program has employed five young adults early in their careers, providing them with an introduction to the National Park Service, valuable professional skills, and career development opportunities through internship experiences.

The National Park Foundation's Open Outdoors for Kids program creates pathways for kids to enjoy, understand and connect with nature in exciting ways by facilitating outdoor activity, experiential learning, and cultural heritage exercises. Nine cities and neighboring Units of the National Park System were chosen to participate in this program in 2016; since that time the program has grown to include more than a dozen cities and parks.



KOUNTZE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS VISIT BIG THICKET

by Mary C. Johnston, KHS

Kountze High School teens experienced the Big Thicket National Preserve as an outdoor learning lab through a partnership funded by Entergy Texas, the National Environmental Education Foundation, and the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust. Students were led on a guided field trip by park rangers and expert volunteers from the Sabine Chapter of Master Naturalists. Young adults learned tips on how to use field guides, identified tracks, and discussed biodiversity and the implications of climate change on wetlands. Jami Brown, an alligator researcher from the Thicket of Diversity, shared her experiences on the Neches River while collecting data for her Master's thesis. The event was organized by KHS teachers Leitha Gunter, Laurie Overstreet, and Mary C. Johnston, retired teacher Willie Watkins, and Shirley Weyler and Carrie Davis. Through the endeavor, approximately 70 students grew in appreciation of the Big Thicket through their visit to the Kirby Nature and Sundew Trails in the National Park Service's Big Thicket National Preserve.



Photos: Jami Brown

BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE HOSTS 2019 PRESERVE AMERICA YOUTH SUMMIT

by Morgan Brandenburg, Community Volunteer Ambassador, NPS

On June 19th, the Preserve America Youth Summit joined Big Thicket National Preserve to spend a day discussing preservation. The day began with a welcome and introduction from Chief of Interpretation, Jason Ginder. They then traveled to Sundew Trail to visit stations discussing management challenges like the rare ecology of the area with Ranger Mary Kay, the importance of fire ecology here with Ranger Alex, and the balance between accessibility and preservation with Ranger Max. Returning to the visitor center, students gave recommendations on improvements to the visitor center exhibits and film. Back into the heat they went to Kirby Nature Trailhead to perform a clean-up with Ranger Megan and to discuss the Staley Cabin with Rangers Bobby and Carol, where they brainstormed some potential ideas on how to utilize the historic building. To finish the day, speakers from partner groups visited to talk about how they support Big Thicket National Preserve. The day came together wonderfully with the hard work of many staff members and the great ideas from the Youth Summit groups.

After a weeklong experience, the Preserve America Youth Summit culminates with a Town Hall where students are able to give recommendations to leaders from the area on how to keep relevant in this changing world we inhabit. Preserve America Youth Summits provide on-site, interactive learning experiences for students and educators which engage them in the study of historic preservation, conservation, and heritage tourism with the goal of motivating them to become future stewards of historic communities, sites and land, shape policy at the local state and national level, and provide lasting impact on communities for generations to come.



Big Thicket National Preserve staff and Youth Summit members in front of Staley Cabin at Kirby Nature Trail. NPS Photo.



Park Ranger Alex Halbrook presenting fire ecology information to the PAYS participants along the Sundew Trail. NPS Photo

HARVEY UPDATE

by Jason A. Ginder, Chief of Interpretation and Education, NPS

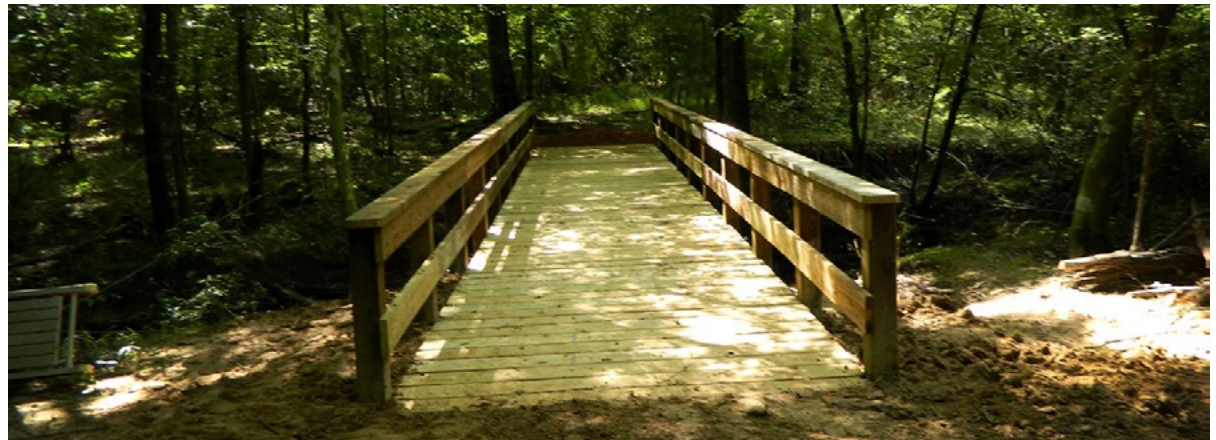
Just two years ago Tropical Storm Harvey changed our community. Many of the people who were touched by this storm's unprecedented rains and record flooding have just started putting those experiences in the past. Fortunately, damage to Big Thicket National Preserve facilities was minimal. The natural environment of Southeast Texas adapts well to these extreme weather events.

The primary damage to the National Preserve resulted from flooding along Turkey Creek and Village Creek. Many of the trail surfaces, boardwalks, and pedestrian bridges in the Turkey Creek Unit were damaged by this storm. Since then large sections on the Turkey Creek Trail have not been easily traversed. Many boardwalks and bridges needed to be reengineered and rebuilt.

In mid-2018, thanks to the hard work of many NPS staff, the Preserve received an infusion of special project funding in the amount of \$150,345, dedicated to repairing damage caused by Harvey. During the summers of 2018 and 2019, seasonal trail crews have worked to remove damaged infrastructure and rebuild boardwalks and bridges along these trails, to the Park's new engineering standards. At the end of this summer the majority of the trails in the Turkey Creek Unit will again be equipped with safe and sturdy bridges and boardwalks.

Structural foundation work will be required on the two large metal pedestrian bridges over Turkey Creek and Village Creek, in the southern part of the unit. In the coming months and years, work will be undertaken in consultation and partnership with the Federal Highways Administration and the U.S. Transportation Department to re-establish these important backcountry pedestrian bridges. Until that project is completed the large metal bridge over Turkey Creek, just south of the Sandhill Loop, will remain closed.

By September 30, 2019, work will also be completed on a washed-out section of the Woodlands Trail, repairing the trail surface and addressing drainage. As fall approaches and the weather cools, we encourage everyone to get out and rediscover the beauty and peace of the National Preserve.





MARK YOUR CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER 7, SATURDAY

Neches River Rally, Cooks Lake to Scatterman Paddling Trail. 8 a.m. – 2 p.m., LNVA Saltwater Barrier Boat Ramp – 6790 Bigner Road – Beaumont, TX 77708. For information call BTA office at 409-790-5399.

SEPTEMBER 14, SATURDAY

Full Moon Night Hike, 7:30 pm – 9:00 pm. 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.

OCTOBER 10, THURSDAY

Night Hike, 7 pm – 8:30 p.m. Engage your senses and learn about nocturnal wildlife. Locations vary and space is limited; call our visitor center at 409-951-6700 to register.

OCTOBER 12, SATURDAY

Big Thicket Day, celebrating 55 years of BTA and 45 years of Big Thicket Nat'l Preserve. Join us 9:30 – 11 a.m. at the Beaumont Country Club for BTA's annual meeting and program, featuring R.E. Jackson Conservation Award, Thomas Lubbert Superior Achievement Award, and speaker Rodney Franklin, Texas State Parks Division Director. Join us 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. at Colliers Ferry Park for music, entertainment, activities, exhibitors, food, and fun for all ages.

OCTOBER 26, SATURDAY

Fundamentals of Fungi, 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Explore the fascinating world of fungi along the Kirby Nature Trail. Meet at the Kirby trailhead on FM 420, 2.5 miles east of the visitor center, for the 1.7-mile walk. Please bring water, insect repellent, and good walking shoes. Please note there will be no collecting of any mushrooms. No reservation required.

NOVEMBER 13, WEDNESDAY

Night Hike, 7 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. Engage your senses and learn about nocturnal wildlife. Locations vary and space is limited; call our visitor center at 409-951-6700 to register.

NOVEMBER 16, SATURDAY

A Walk in the Woods, 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. The Kirby Nature Trail connects a series of diverse ecosystems, from forests to baygalls to cypress sloughs. Meet at the Kirby trailhead on FM 420, 2.5 miles east of the visitor center, for this 1.7-mile hike. Optional side hikes can bring the total walking distance to 2.5 or 4 miles. Please bring water, insect repellent, and good walking shoes. No reservation required.

NECHES RIVER ADVENTURES

Boat tours on the Ivory Bill in the Big Thicket. Register with the Big Thicket Association at (409) 651-5326 or nechesriveradventures.org/public-trips/register-for-public-trips.

Birds of the Big Thicket: Red-headed Woodpecker

by Phoebe H. Dishman

Some folks call me the Patriot Bird,
Or Flag Bird, if you'd rather.
No, not His Highness the Eagle—
I lack his size, his swagger.

Yet dashing red my neck and head
And cotton-white my belly,
Tuxedo black my wings, tail, back,
White-flashing secondaries.

Such a display does in fact
Look something like a flag—
Clean and bold upon the breeze
(though I wouldn't want to brag.)

Red-headed Woodpecker, that's my name—
Don't look for me much in town;
For several years my numbers there
Have dwindled steadily down.

Dead trees I need for nesting
No longer in their places
As people deport the deadwood
from their suburban spaces.

Yet still in preserves I continue,
No time for blame or napping!
I lead my lady to a snag,
Invite her to test it by tapping.

Upon her approval I excavate
A place for our family to grow—
Thank you Big Thicket for sheltering us
As on with our lives we go.

To life we pledge our allegiance,
Work hard for our daily bread,
And always give thanks for freedom,
while drumming our heads of red.



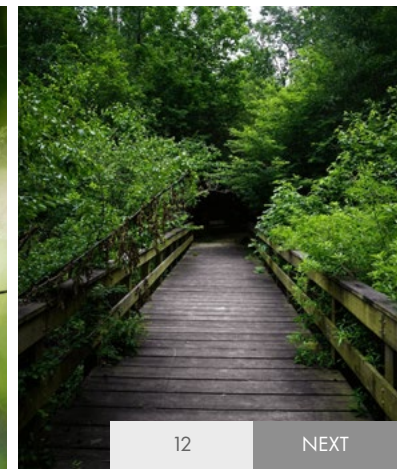
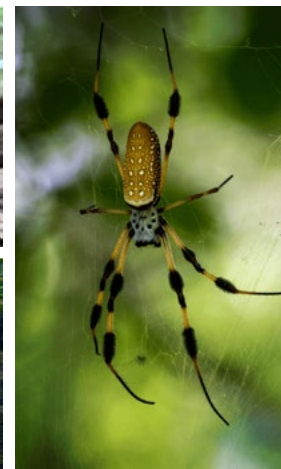
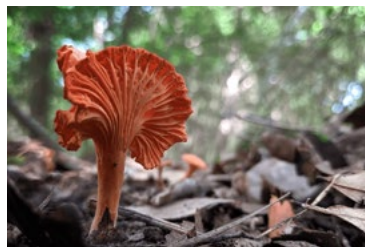
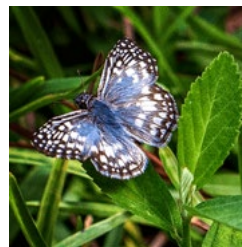
Photograph by Kathy Adams Clark



BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

PARTNER IN PRESERVATION

#BIGTHICKET





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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.bbct.org

Conservation Fund
www.conservationfund.org

Gulf States Mycological Society
www.gsmyc.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

Outdoor Nature Club, Houston
www.outdoornatureclub.org

Sierra Club Golden Triangle Group
www.texas.sierraclub.org/triangle

Texas Conservation Alliance
www.TCA.texas.org

Village Creek State Park
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.

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