



# BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE 146



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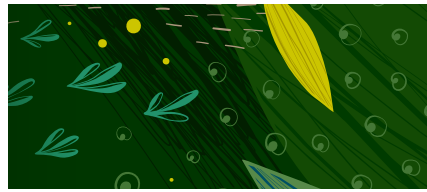
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# FRSLC Capital Improvements Project Completion

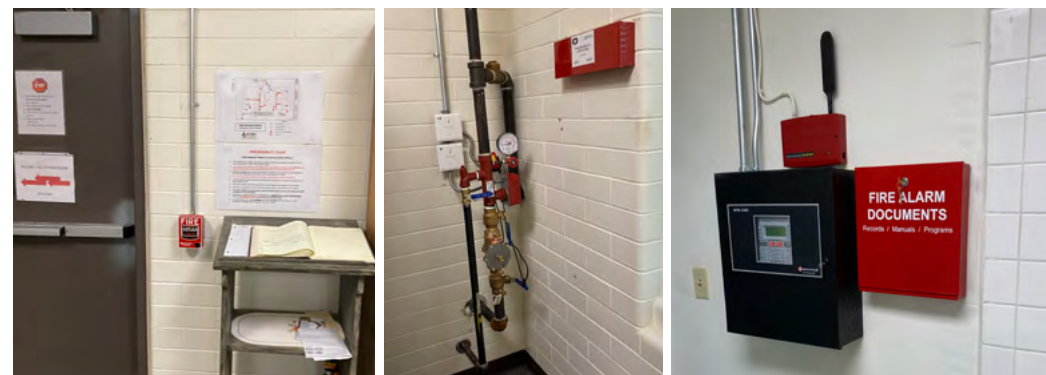
The Big Thicket Association (BTA) has operated its Thicket of Diversity (ToD) scientific and educational programs from the Field Research Station and Learning Center (FRSLC) in Saratoga, Texas for many years. In 2019, the State Fire Marshal conducted a fire safety inspection of the FRSLC. The findings called for significant upgrades to the building including NFPA-approved sprinkler and fire/smoke alarm systems. This required the board to discontinue overnight lodging in the dormitory rooms until NFPA code violations were corrected. Daytime use was allowed to continue. Additionally, attention to the building's air conditioning and heating units revealed that all three units are 20 years old. One of the units cannot be repaired, and all operate with refrigerant gases no longer allowed.

Executive Director Bruce Walker embarked on a campaign to raise over \$85,000 to pay for the required capital improvements. By the end of 2019, sufficient funds were raised to proceed with the NFPA-mandated improvements. BTA sends its warmest thanks to our donors, including EDAREN Foundation, Golden Triangle Master Naturalists, Big Thicket/ToD, and many individuals who contributed large and small amounts.

BTA contracted with a local engineering firm and various construction contractors to design, plan and execute the improvements project. BTA thanks Sigma Engineers, Coastal Sprinkler, Advance Systems Alarm Services, Jefferson Electric, Big Thicket Plumbing, West Hardin Water Supply, and Thermocon Service for their expertise and work on the project.

Construction began in March 2020 with the addition of a new high capacity water line to the building. Piping and sprinkler heads were added throughout the building followed by wired smoke and fire detectors and a state-of-the-art monitored fire alarm system. As of early May, all work was completed and various signage was added as required by the fire marshal's inspection. All work was done in compliance with State and Federal COVID-19 guidelines. Final inspections were completed in May so that lodging by students, scientists and others may resume once restrictions are lifted. Contracting and construction management were handled by BTA Vice President John Stafford, retired Professional Engineer. He reported having enjoyed being engaged in his former profession.

Big Thicket National Preserve Superintendent Wayne Prokopetz, Executive Director Bruce Walker and ToD Director Dr. Terri Looney expressed satisfaction for a job well done.





# WILDFIRE SAFETY

by: Song Bang, National Park Service VIP - Media Intern, Summer 2018

Wildland fires are a natural part of our world. At the National Park Service, we have a wildland fire management program that implements controlled, prescribed burns in the parks to manage the brush to reduce the impact should a wildland fire start.

## UNDERSTANDING WILDFIRES

Fire is comprised of three elements: fuel, heat, and oxygen. To extinguish a fire, we must eliminate one of these elements from the equation.



## CHECKING FOR FIRE SAFETY

Check the fire danger sign, weather forecast, and park website for fire restrictions or area closures.



- Wildfires are unlikely
- Some wildfires expected
- Wildfires are likely
- Wildfires very likely, outdoor burning not recommended
- Extreme risk of wildfires, outdoor burning restricted

## HUMANS ARE THE LEADING CAUSES OF WILDFIRES

Wildfires can be started by lava or lightning, but most are caused by humans.



## HOW YOU CAN PREVENT WILDFIRES

- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Don't discard matches, cigarettes, and smoking materials from moving vehicles or anywhere on park grounds.
- Avoid burning in windy conditions. Keep a shovel, water, and fire retardant nearby to keep fires in check.
- Call 911 if you see smoke, fire, or suspicious activities. Do not try to put out a fire by yourself.

### A MESSAGE FROM THE BTA PRESIDENT

Fellow Big Thicket Association members,

I hope everyone is staying safe and healthy during these unprecedented times.

Although we were unable to have the April 2020 board meeting, the Executive Board has met remotely once a month since the start of the pandemic to conduct business. The meeting minutes have been made available. The Executive Board will continue to meet monthly or as often as necessary to ensure continuity of business during these unusual times.

In better news, I am happy to report that much progress has been made on updating the FRS, thanks to John Stafford's continuing efforts. I will continue to pass along updates as they become available.

I hope to see everyone again once things return to normal. Stay safe.

Sincerely,  
Kathy Smartt, BTA President



# Lamar University Library's Special Collections On-line

by Penny Clark

If you are quarantining and still want to enjoy the Big Thicket, take a look at Lamar University's Mary and John Gray Library Special Collections on-line. These include some collections which have images of items from the archives and others are word documents that provide an inventory of the collection.

The Larry Jene Fisher Collection online provides only a small sample of thousands of images taken by Fisher of the Big Thicket. His photographs documented the rich biodiversity of the region with images of fauna and flora including an alligator, a bird the Florida Gallinule, and a luna moth. He also photographed hundreds of carnivorous plants including the bladderwort and the pitcher plant.

Fisher's photos document Big Thicket history such as a log cabin constructed during the days of slavery, M.T. Hickman's discharge from the Confederate Army in 1865, and a Hardin County Marks and Brands Register.

You can also get a taste of his fascination with Big Thicket folklife with photos of family groups, the Watkins Chapel in Kirbyville, and the hideout of notorious outlaw Thomas Jefferson "Red" Goleman. Fisher, who was active in the East Texas Big Thicket Association, documented other members of the group including its president R.E. Jackson

and Lance Rosier, popularly known as "Mr. Big Thicket."

Other collections you may view on your computer screen include the Pine Needle, a Hardin County newspaper, published between 1964 and 1968. A special part of the newspaper is the weekly column by Big Thicket environmentalist, Geraldine Watson, "Big Thicket Past Present and Future."

You may also view images of mushrooms photographed by famed mycologist, David Lewis.

There are also word documents providing inventories of Big Thicket collections, including Wanda Landrey's research materials from her six books with photographs and oral histories documenting Big Thicket life. Lance Rosier's collection provides documentation of his passion for the Big Thicket with original plant specimens, photographs, and postcards.

Here's the link to the collections. Happy viewing! <https://www.lamar.edu/library/services/university-archive/index.html>

If you would like further information about these or any other collections, please feel free to contact Penny Clark or Charlotte Holliman at (409) 880-7787 or (409) 880-8660 e-mail [penny.clark@lamar.edu](mailto:penny.clark@lamar.edu) or [charlotte.holliman@lamar.edu](mailto:charlotte.holliman@lamar.edu).



Captions: (digital image number lfj3.46.17) Fisher's photographs document much Big Thicket history including this log cabin

(digital image lfj3. Larry Jene Fisher enjoyed meeting the people of the Big Thicket and recording their stories which he planned to publish in a book.

## Big Thicket National Preserve's Response to COVID-19

By: Jason A. Ginder, Chief of Interpretation and Education, NPS

The spring of 2020 brought new challenges to southeast Texas and the world. As the coronavirus spread throughout our region, the National Park Service took important steps to keep our staff and visitors safe. On Friday, March 27, 2020, in response to the pandemic, the preserve stopped all services outside those that support visitor or resource protection.

Since that time most National Park Service (NPS) staff have been working from home. Many administrative tasks transitioned easily to teleworking, but front-line staff like the maintenance team and our visitor services staff found the transition a bit more difficult. Through this time, we've been updating planning documents, reviewing safety plans, completing important annual training courses, and creating substantial digital content for the park. Since mid-April significant planning has been underway to evaluate the safety of future operations and plan out what steps need to be taken to safely resume visitor services, including the acquisition of many new safety tools.

During the week of May 4th park staff shifted into Phase I of the effort to safely "return to normal." With specialized cleaning procedures and physical distancing fully embraced, some staff have returning to the office to complete on-site tasks, while many others continue to telework from home. Throughout the pandemic all park trails and most day use areas have remained open and accessible to visitors.

As of the week of May 11th, 2020, the following areas and activities are available at Big Thicket National Preserve:

- All 40+ miles of official hiking trails, including the popular Kirby Nature Trail, Sundew Trail, and Pitcher Plant Trail, are available for daytime use.
- Access to water-based recreation, such as fishing, canoeing, kayaking and motorboating, remains abundant along the Neches River, Village Creek, Turkey Creek, and numerous other small tributaries throughout the preserve.
- All boat launches are open, including the Confluence Boat Launch in Orange County and McQueens Landing Boat Launch in Jasper County.
- All picnic areas are accessible, including Edgewater Day Use Area in Jefferson County, the picnic shelter at the Sundew Trail in Tyler County, and many other informal picnic spots at trailheads throughout the park.

With public health in mind, the following services remain unavailable at this time:

- The Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center and Headquarters complex remain closed to the public.
- The issuance of all back-country camping, trapping, and special use permits remains suspended until further notice. Those with active permits may continue to operate through the duration of their permit period.
- All ranger-led programs, academic field trips, volunteer workdays, and special events remain cancelled until further notice.



"In these turbulent times, while practicing physical distancing, we hope that everyone can safely find relaxation and enjoyment in the many recreational activities the national preserve has to offer." stated Big Thicket National Preserve Superintendent Wayne Prokopetz. "In the coming weeks and months, we look forward to providing everyone with safe and meaningful ways to reconnect to their national parks."

The health and safety of our visitors, employees, volunteers, and partners continues to be paramount. We continue to work closely with the NPS Office of Public Health using CDC guidance to ensure public areas and staff workspaces are safe and clean for visitors, employees, partners, and volunteers.

Be sure to follow the preserve on Facebook @ BigThicketNPS or check our website at [www.nps.gov/bith](http://www.nps.gov/bith) for updates as we adapt to the every changing world.





## Day Trip to Watson Rare Native Plant Preserve

The Watson Rare Native Plant Preserve, about 45 miles north of Beaumont in Warren, Texas, was created by the late Geraldine Watson, one of the activists who worked to create the Big Thicket National Preserve. Having discovered a site near Lake Hyatt that held almost all of the plant communities for which the Big Thicket is famous, she purchased as much of it as she could and worked to restore it to its original condition so that it could be enjoyed by future generations. According to the Preserve's website, the site contains many rare and endangered species of native plants, including seven species of orchid, ten species of fern, four of the five types of carnivorous plants native to North America, as well as milkweeds, gentians, wild azaleas, blueberries, trilliums, and violets. The site is open to the public at no charge 365 days a year. Cindy and Dale Parish recently enjoyed an outing there, and sent these images.





THE FRIENDS OF KOUNTZE PUBLIC LIBRARY PRESENT

## Macrofungi Virtual Book Signing with David Lewis

The Friends of Kountze Public Library and partners are proud to feature Thicket of Diversity researcher David Lewis in this Macrofungi Virtual Book Signing. The event was originally scheduled for April 28 but unfortunately was impacted by stay at home orders. Organizers creatively tackled the challenge. Kountze High School students continued participation in an Art Contest. The Harrison Family Foundation donated prizes. Teacher Mary Catherine Johnston designed exhibits and hosted David Lewis in a zoom presentation.

David Lewis co-authored *Mushrooms of the Gulf Coast States* along with Alan and Arleen Bessette. David Lewis is the President of the Gulf States Mycological Society and the 2009 recipient of the North American Mycological Association's Contribution to Amateur Mycology Award. He received the 2010 Big Thicket Association's R.E. Jackson Conservation Award. The field guide is available through Amazon Smile. Designate the Friends of Kountze Public Library and the non-profit will receive a percentage of the sale.

Kountze High School Art Contest Winners are announced in the attached Slide Show. You may access the virtual book signing with the Lewis interview by clicking the link.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rtvTtWtOm2ajGIZlltkjvKD-eq5eS6rj/view?usp=sharing>

The event was hosted by the Friends of Kountze Public Library, Kountze High School, the Harrison Family Foundation, the International Association of Lions Clubs District 2-S1, and the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust.





## BTA gets a Spring Intern

David Hamilton joined BTA as our intern for the Spring semester. David is a senior at Lamar University studying Environmental Science with minors in Biology and Chemistry. He is a Beaumont Native and graduated from West Brook High School. An enthusiastic proponent of the outdoors, he has spent his last three summers working at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, where he would teach team building and outdoor skills to participants 13-17 years old. David hopes to continue working in outdoor education when he graduates in Fall 2020.

David is assisting Terrie Looney with the NRIB program in developing shore activities, teaching lessons and managing equipment.

David helped with the JASON Project this year. We had over 700 students visit our presentation in 5 days. Pictured here are Victoria Looney, Terrie Looney, Nancy Angell and David Hamilton.





# Birds of the Big Thicket: Red-bellied Woodpecker

A poem by Phoebe Dishman

For him, for all within earshot,  
the dawn comes up like thunder.  
On the gutter, a furious fusillade.  
I can only conclude his aim must be  
to impress a female.

Wooed, and won.  
They make a fine pair.  
Rock-solid, resolute.  
Together they bully our birdfeeder  
with rude shoving, and trills of maniacal  
laughter.  
Oh ye doves, of slender, pliable neck,  
you with your mincing ways,  
clear out, begone!  
We need those sunflower seeds!

For the woodpeckers have  
produced a child.  
He is cute,  
in a nondescript kind of way.  
As he flutters about, learning to fly,  
he looks surprised to be here,  
a little unsure what to do.  
He does, however, show promise  
of a sturdy neck.



Oil painting by P. Dishman, 1969





# Interpreting the National Preserve's Hog Management Strategy

By: Jason Ginder, Chief of Interpretation and Education, NPS

On your next hike in the national preserve you may notice several additions to the interpretive signage in the park. The Resource Management division and the Interpretation & Education team have recently added new interpretive panels to several trailhead kiosks highlighting the park's current strategies for addressing the feral hog populations in and around the park. These installations can be found at the Kirby Nature Trail, the Woodlands trailhead, at the start of the Big Sandy Trail, and at the beginning of the Pitcher Plant Trail.

Managing feral hogs in Southeast Texas has been a concern for many years. In the spring of 2019, several new strategies were implemented by managers at Big Thicket National Preserve, including the issuance of public hog trapping permits and a very successful program to loan hog trapping equipment to park neighbors.

Feral hogs are an invasive species descended from domesticated pigs brought to North America by European settlers. Their populations have increased in recent decades resulting in greater competition with native wildlife and increased

habitat damage caused by the uprooting of large areas of vegetation. Based on the park's 2013 Environmental Assessment, the NPS has chosen to use a dynamic multipronged management strategy (i.e. adaptive management) that minimizes impacts on native wildlife and the many park user groups recreating in the preserve. Frequent monitoring is used to assess the effectiveness of each strategy and to adjust the techniques used. Our goal with these new interpretive signs is to share that work with our visiting public.





## The Ivory Bill Gets a Makeover

Bruce Walker

The Ivory Bill has been idle since Saturday, March 14th, but it hasn't been neglected. In February, we scheduled a haul out to repaint the bottom anti-fouling paint, began sprucing up the outside panels, had Jorgensen Marine do preventive maintenance on the motors, and made ready for our annual U.S. Coast Guard Inspection. We were ready and excited to start a very busy spring season with a full schedule of Private Charters, School Field Labs, and Saturday Eco-history Tours. Our spring season ended March 13th, after our first and only school trip (Kountze Elementary, 90 students). Now we are looking forward to getting back on the Neches and in the Thicket. Hopefully, we'll resume Saturday tours on June 20th (with restrictions), but that date is uncertain. Ugh!

We hope everyone likes the look!



# What's been happening?



## Chain Saw Training

NPS photo: During the week of February 23, Big Thicket National Preserve hosted the NPS Chainsaw Safety, Maintenance, and Operations (CSMO) Program Instructor/Competency Evaluator Session II course. The course included eleven students representing six parks and 3 instructors from Yellowstone, the Southeast Arizona Group, and Big Thicket. All 11 students are now certified Instructor/Competency Evaluators at the Sawyer Level within the NPS Chainsaw Safety Program for Non-Wildland Fire Operations (NCSP). Engineer Equipment Operator Frank Sylestine (Course Instructor) and the entire Big Thicket National Preserve team are proud to have been involved in this important new agency-wide training effort. Sylestine was one of the first in the nation to be trained as an instructor for this new chainsaw course and has helped lay the groundwork for this agency-wide program.

By: Jason A. Ginder, Chief of Interpretation & Education, NPS



## Retirement of the Woodville Ranger Station

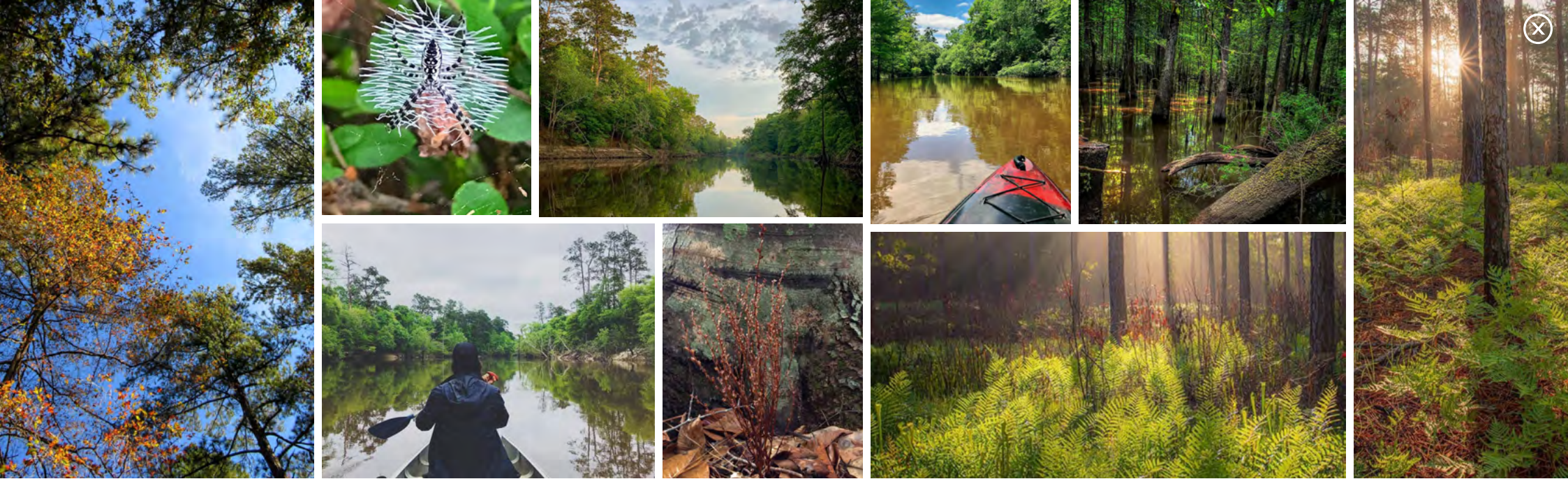
NPS photo: Since the early days of the national preserve the NPS has maintained a small office on Pine Street in Woodville, Texas. This building was once home to both the park's Fire Management team and a robust "North District" Law Enforcement operation. Both the 2008 opening of the new Fire Management Office on Highway 69, south of Woodville and significant staffing changes in the Visitor and Resource Protection division over recent years have left this facility underutilized. In 2019, park management decided to terminate the building lease agreement and begin repositioning the remaining law enforcement staff to other parts of the preserve. This building will be completely vacated by the summer of 2020.



## Trail Boxes

NPS photo: A while back we shared with you our new strategy for collecting visitor use numbers throughout the park and the plan to eliminate paper trail logs. In recent months, Cheyenne Millard, who is serving in a Student Conservation Association (SCA) Youth Corps position at the preserve, has rehabbed many of the trail boxes in the park. She's removed 4 unnecessary boxes and repaired and repainted the remaining 7 boxes. Thanks to Millard's hard work, these boxes will again serve an important purpose as remote distribution points for important basic park brochures. Visitor use records show that only about 25% of all park visitors come to the visitor center prior to exploring the park, so these remote brochure distribution points play an important role in keeping our visitors informed.

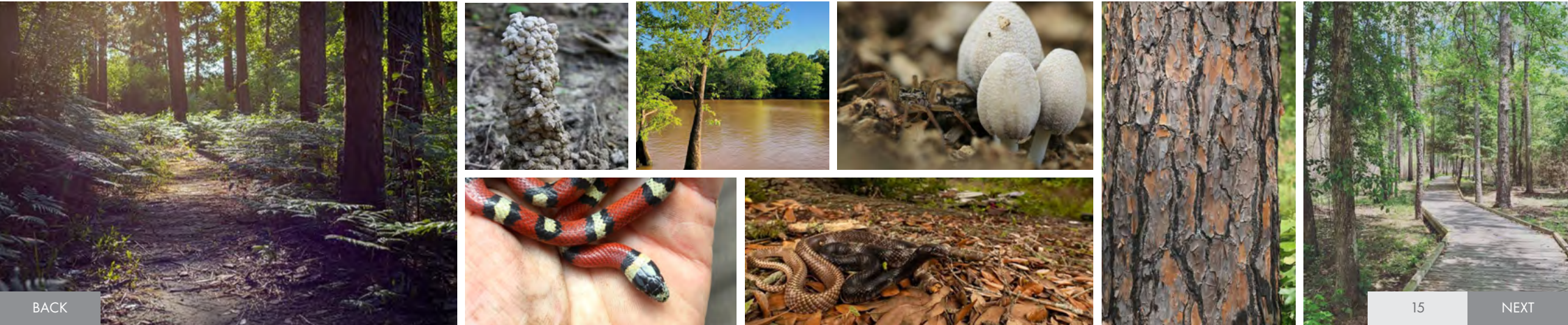




# BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

PARTNER IN PRESERVATION

#BIGTHICKET







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# BIG THICKET BULLETIN

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

### Web Sites

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Texas Black Bear Alliance  
[texasblackbear.weebly.com](http://texasblackbear.weebly.com)

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

