



# BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE 156



**BIG THICKET**  
ASSOCIATION

PARTNER IN PRESERVATION

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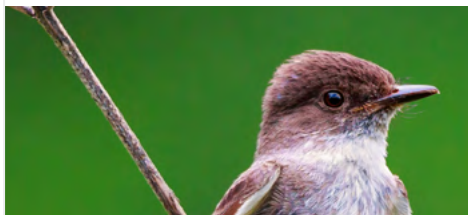
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NOVEMBER  
DECEMBER

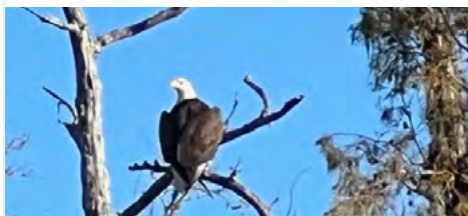
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## A Message from the President

John Stafford, BTA director and board president

Greetings Friends and Members of BTA!

This past quarter has been very busy with our two biggest events. Thanks again to Neches River Rally and Big Thicket Day committees whose hard work made both events highly successful.

Rally Day was beautifully sunny and pleasant. All paddlers had great times on the Cooks Lake to Scatterman Paddling Trail with assistance from numerous volunteers, Big Thicket National Preserve staff, Westbrook NROTC group and of course, our fabulous outfitter, Gerald Cerda of Big Thicket Outfitters. Our hamburger lunch was very delicious as prepared by Richard K's team from Cooks 2 Dozen-Plus.

BTA held its annual General Membership meeting as part of Big Thicket Day on October 8 and presented our awards again this year:

- The "Maxine Johnston Distinguished Service Award" to Ms. Wanda Landrey, historian and author;
- The "R. E. Jackson Conservation Award" to Mr. Gesse Bullock and the Alabama-Coushatta Wildlife Fire Management Team; and
- The "Thomas E. Lubbert Achievement Award" to Mr. Andrew Bennett, Biologist, Big Thicket National Preserve.

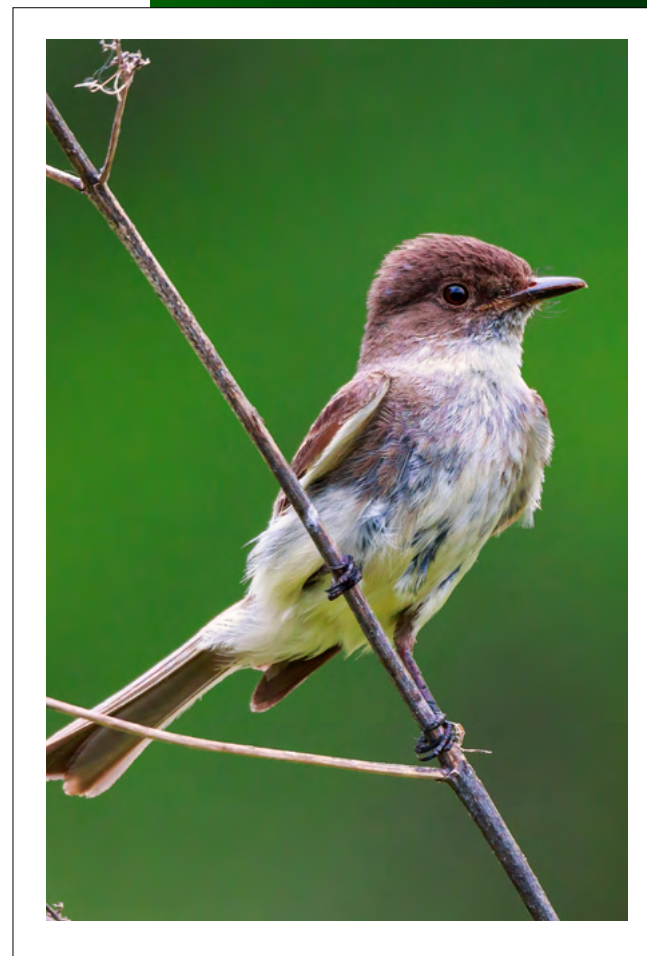
This year our keynote speaker was Dr. Scott Solomon of Rice University. Dr. Solomon is one of our researchers involved with our Thicket of Diversity program at our Field Research Station and Learning Center in Saratoga, TX. Dr. Solomon's topic was "Why Insects Matter: Appreciating Bugs in the Big Thicket and Beyond" - a most interesting and entertaining presentation. Thank you!

This year's public portion of Big Thicket Day was by far the most successful ever with 400+ people attending and more exhibitors than ever. Live music provided by the very talented Casey Chesnutt was enjoyed by everyone. Free IVORY BILL excursions were again very popular as evidenced by long lines this year. Complimentary kayak/canoe experiences courtesy of Big Thicket Outfitters was a very 'cool' addition for the young and adventurous.

Our free Environmental Education programs continue to be in great demand with hundreds of students and many new schools (public, charter and home) represented due to efforts of Dir. Jennie Knapp and her volunteers. (More volunteers are needed as these programs increase - see our website.)

Our Neches River Adventures under leadership of Capt. Bruce Walker has been very busy with school groups, public tours and private charters. Public tours are just completed and will resume in March. School groups and charters continue year round, and are enjoyed by all as they visit the Big Thicket National Preserve and enjoy beautiful scenery.

Keep watch for the Preserve's Winter Restoration days coming in December, January and February.



# A Message from the Executive Director

**Diane Thompson, BTA Executive Director**

Since joining the staff of BTA in July I have had the pleasure of learning many things about our programs and projects. I can say this .... we have a lot going on!

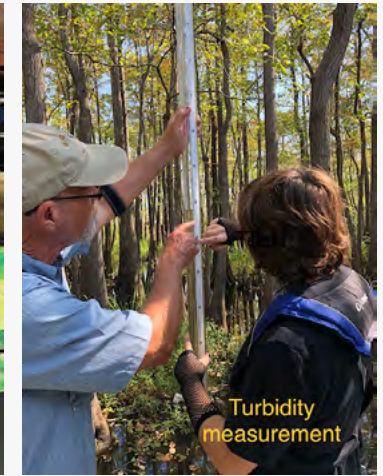
One program is Neches River Adventures. On a recent Saturday I was fortunate enough to find myself on the water as a docent for a public tour. We went to the Port of Beaumont and were lucky enough to see some military ships and military equipment being moved to one of the ships. That day we also saw osprey, turtles, belted kingfishers, heron, egret, and many other birds. Eventually, we went into Ten Mile Bayou, one of my favorite places. It is lush, peaceful, and beautiful as the Ivory Bill travels up Ten Mile Bayou. You totally forget you are near a large city and interstate highway as you enter the Big Thicket National Preserve. The passengers learned a lot and were appreciative to have discovered this gem right in their own backyard!



*Bald eagle, Fall 2022, environmental education cruise on the Ivory Bill – Jennie Knapp*



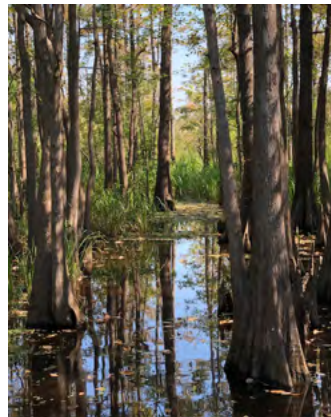
*Benthic testing, environmental education cruise on the Ivory Bill – Diane Thompson*



*Turbidity measurement, environmental education cruise on the Ivory Bill – Diane Thompson*



*Private charter on the Ivory Bill – deckhand Sharon Jackson*

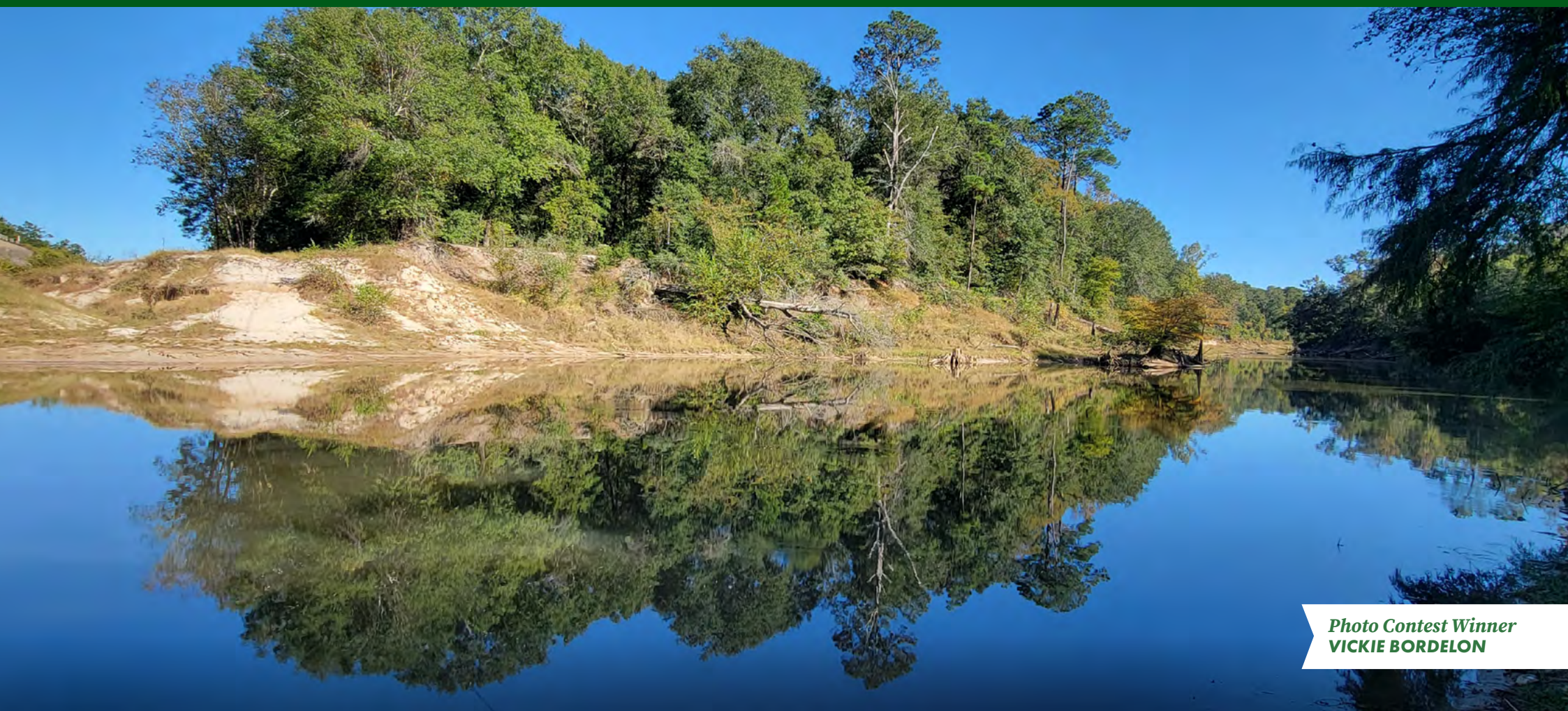


*Ten Mile Bayou, from the Ivory Bill – Diane Thompson*

I was able to join Jennie Knapp, Director of Environmental Education, for an Environmental Education class. She was a pro with the students and did a fantastic job leading them to make their own discoveries during class. The students checked water temperature, did benthic and turbidity testing, and looked for various plankton using magnifiers and microscopes. There was ongoing discussion about what these tests indicate regarding water quality and observation of the plants and wildlife during class. Many of these students had never been on a boat before and some were even apprehensive but were confident before the trip was over. As a former educator it was exciting to watch the students' engagement and enthusiasm during class.

For private charters each group chooses if they would like the Eco-History tour given by the docent or their own agenda. One group had a beautiful wedding reception on the Ivory Bill. Often, it's a party atmosphere and groups bring a picnic dinner and beverages. Some groups decorate the boat with lights, tablecloths, and even lanterns. Everyone loves being out on the water, getting away from the noise to enjoy some beauty and peace, and traveling into the Big Thicket. They are always amazed to learn it's so close to home.

This is just one of Big Thicket Association's programs. I challenge you to make a difference today and become involved in one of our programs.



*Photo Contest Winner*  
**VICKIE BORDELON**

### PHOTO CONTEST: Fall Theme: Waterways of the Big Thicket

Big Thicket Association is pleased to announce the winner of our first quarterly photo contest "Scenes from the Big Thicket, Waterways." Vickie Bordelon submitted her winning photo of Village Creek. She will receive four free passes for a cruise on the Ivory Bill. BTA members be on the lookout in the new year for our next photo contest!

## Pine Planting Events

Megan Urban, Chief of Interpretation and Education,  
Big Thicket National Preserve

For over 10 years, Big Thicket has been welcoming volunteers on Martin Luther King Jr Day of Service to plant longleaf pine trees in the Turkey Creek and Big Sandy Creek Units. With the goal of restoring the longleaf pine savanna ecosystem, partnerships with Big Thicket Association and other partner groups flourished during these events. Volunteers and Park Service staff have planted 100,000 trees since then, with many of them during the National Park Service Centennial year and we aren't stopping there!

Starting last year, Big Thicket staff increased the number of planting events to three, one in December, January and February, which gave volunteers more opportunities to engage in stewardship at Big Thicket. Throughout the past year, the management team at Big Thicket has discussed how to approach restoration of the long leaf pine ecosystem with a shift to holistic view, which includes planting of understory grasses and pollinator plants in areas where long leaf pines are already established. Because of a donation of a large greenhouse by Randy Beehn, resource management staff were able to grow 30,000 plugs of native grasses over the summer, with the intention of planting them during the wintertime. For the December planting event, volunteers will finally get those grasses into the ground in an area that already has long leaf pines growing from a previous year. Then at Martin Luther King Jr Day of Service and Presidents Day planting events, volunteers will plant both long leaf and grasses in an area that has been recently cleared.

The staff at Big Thicket look forward to another successful season of volunteer events and hope to see everyone at our winter planting days!



Ranger planting longleaf pine tree – NPS

# Big Thicket Day on the Neches 2022

Katy Hambright, BTA director, Big Thicket Day Co-chairman

Big Thicket Day October 8 at Collier's Ferry Park was a rousing success. Board members began arriving at 6:30 a.m. to set up the site, aided by sunrise sparkling on the Neches. Cooks 2 Dozen, led by Joe Cascio, soon had their pits fired and began preparations for the delicious lunch of hotdogs, links and hamburgers.

This year's Big Thicket Association (BTA) program was enhanced by the presentation of three awards: the Maxine Johnston Distinguished Service Award, to Wanda Landrey, historian and author; the R. E. Jackson Conservation Award, to Gesse Bullock and the Alabama-Coushatta Wildland Fire Management Team; and the Thomas E. Lubbert Achievement Award, to Andrew Bennett, Biologist, Big Thicket National Preserve, accepted on his behalf by Wayne Prokopetz, Park Superintendent.

Noted biologist and professor Dr. Scott E. Solomon, our keynote speaker, entertained us with a talk on "Why Insects Matter: Appreciating Bugs in the Big Thicket and Beyond."

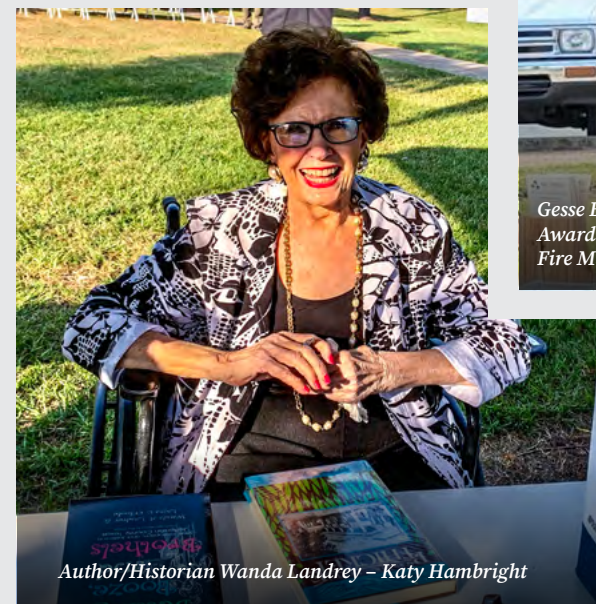
Following our program, 400-plus guests enjoyed the meal prepared by Cooks 2 Dozen while listening to tunes by Casey Chesnutt under the park's pavilion. While strolling around the park grounds, visitors petted and groomed Stable Spirit's horses, chatted with Big Thicket authors David Lewis, Wanda Landrey, Ernest Brown and Maxine Johnston, and learned about our region from the Thicket of Diversity, Village Creek State Park, Sabine-Neches Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist Association, Native Plant Society of Texas, Lamar University



Big Thicket Day exhibitors' midway - Katy Hambright



Gesse Bullock receives R.E. Jackson Conservation Award (on behalf of Alabama-Coushatta Wildland Fire Management Team) - Bruce Walker



Author/Historian Wanda Landrey - Katy Hambright



*Tim Wynkoop and Micah Leigh welcome guests aboard the Ivory Bill  
- Katy Hambricht*



*John Stafford, Bruce Walker, Diane Thompson - Ben Jones*

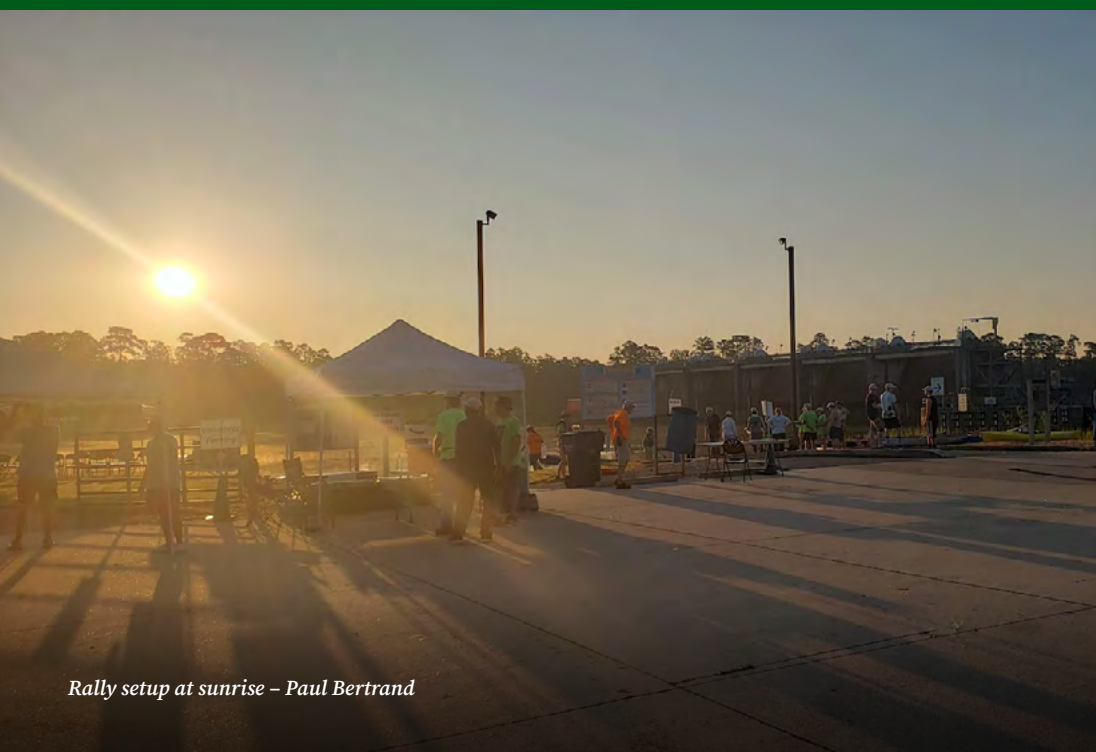
Special Collections, B.S.A. Troop 1971 and Friends of the RAW Outdoors of Greater SETX, Big Thicket National Heritage Trust, Big Thicket National Preserve and Western National Parks System, Big Thicket Biosphere and Big Thicket Association. Big Thicket Outfitters' Gerald Cerda and his team offered hands-on demonstrations of canoes and kayaks. Our own Ivory Bill offered free, docent-led cruises on the Neches throughout the day.

The day closed with dinner at Ann Ethridge's Ethridge Farm in Kountze, under a starry night, for BTA board members and guests.

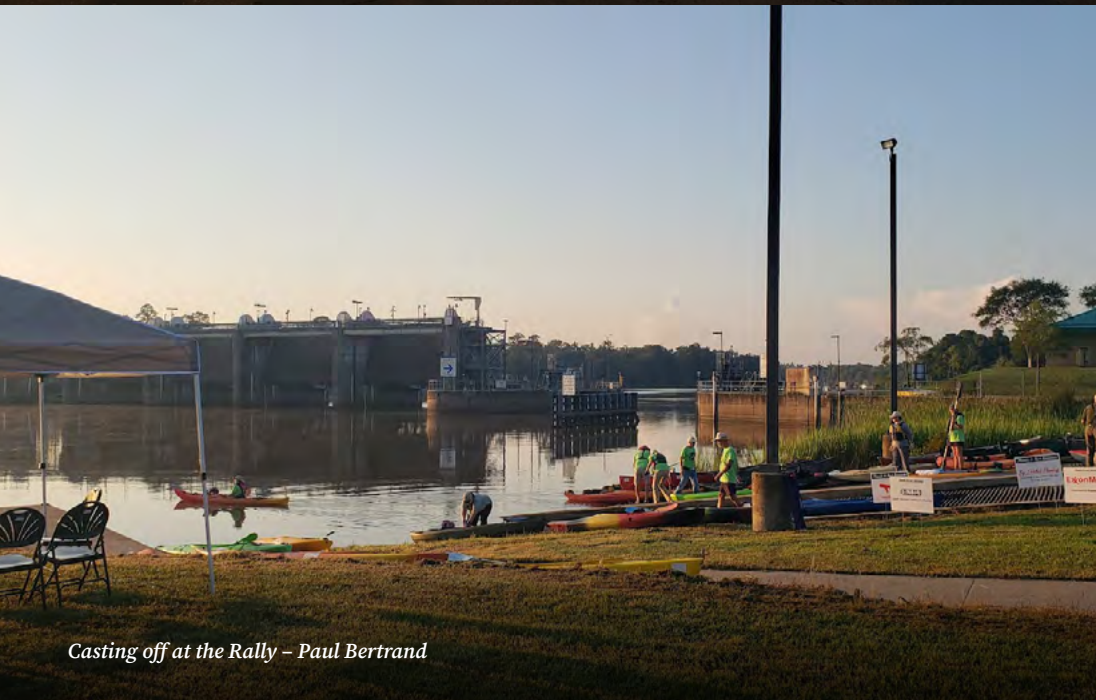
Held annually to celebrate the establishment of the BTA in 1964 and the Big Thicket National Preserve in 1974, Big Thicket Day is free and open to the public. BTA members helped with financial support.

A very special thank you to our major underwriting sponsors: American Valve and Hydrant, Beaumont Convention and Visitors Bureau, Big Thicket Plumbing, Port Arthur LNG, BMW of Beaumont, Port of Beaumont, LNVA, TotalEnergies, MobilOil Credit Union and WestRock.





Rally setup at sunrise – Paul Bertrand



Casting off at the Rally – Paul Bertrand

## Reflections on the Neches River Rally and Big Thicket Day

Gerald Cerda, Big Thicket Outfitters, owner/operator

The Neches River Rally is a very well-organized paddling event. It is organized by some very dedicated people at Big Thicket Association and their team of volunteers. The Rally is a community event that people attend who are typically familiar with waterways and paddling. At the Rally we also have the opportunity to expose people to the Big Thicket and its waterways and history who don't normally have the opportunity to experience it.

Big Thicket Day is an invitation to the community to join us in celebration of the founding of Big Thicket Association (1964) and Big Thicket National Preserve (1974), and it brings out the hearts and souls in the full diversity of our community. It is an absolute privilege to have the opportunity to be a part of that. Teaching guests about boating safety, waterways, canoeing, and kayaking skills is an amazing experience for me. It's the people that come out for this event that make the day and touch my heart. It's the grandmother who brings her grandchildren who have never experienced canoeing or kayaking. The children and parents come with some apprehension, but after they get in the boat you see an extraordinary transformation. They display confidence, are more secure, and are absolutely pleased they have accomplished something new by themselves. They don't want to get off the water, and the smiles on their faces tell the story.

After the Rally and after the hundreds of people that we've put in the water from all parts of the world, we get ready for Big Thicket Day. Big Thicket Day is the end of our event season. Big Thicket Day stands out there by itself. At the end of Big Thicket Day this year, I just wanted to sit on the bank of the Neches River and reflect on the wonderful families that I had met and helped that day and think over their experiences and responses. It is a touching and humbling experience for me to meet these wonderful community members and help them learn paddling and boat safety on our river. It's an honor to serve at Big Thicket Day and serve our community.



Teaching guests at Big Thicket Day on the Neches – Diane Thompson



Underway at the Rally – Paul Bertrand



Food and fellowship at the Rally – Paul Bertrand



Image courtesy free use website

## Essentials for the Trail

Aimeé Lieby, BTA director

*“Of all the paths you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt.” – John Muir*

Hiking is a phenomenal way to explore your world and immerse yourself in the beauty and peace of nature. Not much compares with the pleasures experienced on the trail: observing beautiful flowers in bloom, treading lightly near resident animals, and exploring the diverse terrain. Thanks to improvements in accessibility, hiking is now available to just about everyone! A hike can be as simple as walking out your door and checking out your own neighborhood or as involved as conquering the Grand Canyon. Wherever your path leads you, having the proper gear can make all the difference.

Most experts agree that there are several essential items for every hike. Starting with the basics, always carry hydration and food. Even a quick hike presents opportunity to need a drink and a lightweight snack is easy enough to carry around. If you are planning to be out for a while, pack a little more than you think you will need. You should also carry navigation tools such as a compass and map to ensure you know the path to follow. The environment can be cruel and fickle, so protect yourself by wearing sunscreen and protective clothing. Dress according to the weather but ensure you check the forecast and anticipate changes, especially as elevation increases. Layers are an easy way to have flexibility and lightweight pieces are easily available. A sturdy pair of comfortable shoes should also be part of your basic hiking wardrobe.

Day hikes are usually a safe bet, but plan for contingencies by bringing sources for light and fire. I personally like the wearability of a headlamp and the durability of a flint stone. In fact, a multitool and small hiking tool kit can be of great use on any hike and may save your life if something goes unexpectedly. These kits typically also include provisions for first aid and shelter, such as bandages and thermal blankets. Bundle everything in a backpack or hip bag and you are ready to go!

You do not have to invest a lot in fancy gear to enjoy a hike; however, carrying the essentials is absolutely necessary to ensure your enjoyable hike is safe and comfortable. Check with your favorite outdoor retailers for options, and happy hiking!





*Image from "Among the Wildflowers,"  
Cardinal Cadence magazine*

## Among the Wildflowers

*Maxine Johnston, tireless advocate for preservation of the Big Thicket, was recently honored with an article in Cardinal Cadence: The Magazine of Lamar University (Vol. 50, No. 2, Late Summer 2022). With permission from the magazine, some excerpts from "Among the Wildflowers," by Casey Ford:*

On a quiet upper floor of our library, deep in the back corners of rooms that smell like history, are Maxine Johnston's curated collections on people and places of the Big Thicket [National Preserve.] The files are vast and contain everything from photographs of flora and fauna to letters and photographs of her and colleagues with members of Congress, to personal journal entries and stacks of awards celebrating her lifelong commitment and service to conservationist and environmental protection organizations in Texas and beyond.

Johnston came [from Arkansas] to Southeast Texas at 14 ... While building a long and impactful career as a librarian and eventually becoming director of the Mary and John Gray Library, ... Johnston began building an archive that documents the history, industry and folklore of the Thicket.

Though she would prefer to gloss over the fact, Johnston's work, teaching and advocacy have rightly been widely recognized and awarded. In 1974, the Texas Library Association recognized her as the Texas Librarian of the year. She was the recipient of the NPCA's 1996 Marjory Stoneman Douglas Citizen Conservationist of the Year, ... the Beaumont Enterprise Jefferson Award, [and she earned accolades from] the Kodak American Greenways, the Lone Star Chapter Sierra Club and Texas Conservation Alliance. She was also the recipient of the 2018 Terry Hershey Award by Audubon's Texas Women in Conservation Program. Johnston is the first LU retiree to become a Spindletop member of the Lamar University President's Circle, which recognizes donors of contributions totaling \$1 million or more. Johnston has been a member of the Big Thicket Association since 1964, serving twice as its president (1973-75 and 1994-98). From 1988-2010, after her retirement from Lamar University, Johnston volunteered as [Big Thicket National Preserve's] librarian. She continues to serve on the BTA Advisory Board, and she is also a current board member of the Big Thicket National Heritage Trust.



*Maxine with oak from an acorn planted by Lance Rosier's grandfather on the day of his arrival from Alabama in 1861*

In the foreword to Howard Peacock's book, *Nature Lover's Guide to the Big Thicket*, Johnston writes, "... the Thicket communicates best with solitary wanderers, but it also speaks to companionable spirits. An important trick on the trail is to shift one's focus from the big scene to the minuscule. Take your time, folks. The Big Thicket is not a hurry-place." Not only is Johnston a librarian, a curator, an activist, but she is also, it seems here, a guru and a poet. And she is not a hurry-person. She is a vigilant raconteur whose decades of careful work—the work of listening, of shaking hands, of writing things down, of organizing and cataloguing, of looking closely—wait in the Gray Library archives for new discovery by the next great storytellers.



*Maxine, Grand Marshal of Lamar University homecoming parade, September 2019*

## The Song Rolls On

Phoebe H. Dishman, BTA director, Bulletin editor

Intrepid cultural preservationist William Owens could have got himself kilt. Instead, from a bad man's breast came a good fiddler's story, a story of the power of music to set us to dancing purt near all night, stirring birds on their branches outside. Speaking of birds, here are two songs to grace a foot-stomping night in the Big Thicket:

"Listen to the Mockingbird" pairs a man mourning his sweet Hallie with a paradoxically lively tune. Perhaps this gem from 1855 is meant to evoke the bright-sadness of life as we find it? To this day one may find the Texas state bird *Mimus polyglottos* in the Thicket, singing o'er graves, where the weeping willows wave.

"The Fox" is a sprightly folk song birthed in England untold centuries ago. In this tale of "vulpine larceny," Farmer John's wife hears something in the night, runs to the window, then cries out: "John, John, the gray goose is gone, the fox is on the town, oh." It gets worse: as the fox runs away with the gray goose—its legs all dangling down, oh—he promises it will soon grease the fox's chin, his wife's chin, their children's chins. Which is exactly what happens—and the little ones crunched the bones, oh. A domestic bird of the Thicket, *Anser anser*, doomed to honk no more.

Speaking of weighty words set to lively music, longtime friend and director of the BTA Dr. Pete Gunter wrote and recorded a song in the 1960's or 70's called "The Last Big Thicket Blues." Recently, Maxine Johnston shared her 45-rpm record with Dale Parish, who digitized it for us. I highly recommend listening to the song with thanksgiving for the ones who fought so hard to create the Big Thicket National Preserve. If the tune makes you want to clomb up on a joist and commence to fiddling, so much the better. With thanks to Maxine and Dale and permission from Pete: <https://btaboard.sharepoint.com/:u:/g/EQP3tWwdEONFpVRgw1sQ3lQBh1LRzqrWwNdAE-xfQ80SOA>



*There was an old fiddler on the road above Fred. Several people made him out to be a bad man and a good fiddler. One person I interviewed was direct when he warned me not to go see him: "He's kilt four men and he ain't a-feard o' killing another'n." ... I did go see him ... "One night," he said, "so many folks crowded in we didn't have room for fiddling and dancing, too." He looked up at the rough twelve-by-two joists. "We put the fiddlers up there. We clomb up there and set a-straddle where we was out'n the way o' the dancing. You never in your life heered sich fiddling and stomping. It purt near lasted all night."*

*Impressions of the Big Thicket*, William A. Owens, 1973



I N M E M O R Y



2010 - Dr. Bruce Drury (r) presents RE Jackson Conservation Award to macrofungi researcher David Lewis (l)

## Dr. Bruce Drury

1939-2022

by Mary C. Johnston, BTA director

In September, the BTA lost a past board president, Dr. Bruce Drury. The highly respected professor began as a football player with the University of Nebraska, served on the USS Princeton with the US Navy, and earned both masters and doctoral degrees. He began teaching political science at Lamar University in 1971 and was formally designated as a Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Political Science in 2005.

Dr. Drury served as Precinct 4 Chairman and assisted with elections and student voter registration. He promoted recycling and beautification projects and earned the Julie and Ben Rogers Community Service Award in 1993. Drury chaired the city of Beaumont's Community Development Advisory Committee and its Keep Beaumont Beautiful Commission. His environmental service encompassed the region of Southeast Texas as BTA President from 2007 to 2010 and as a long time director of our organization. He will be missed.





## SAVE THE DATES

### **Neches River Adventures**

Tour the Neches River's backwater channels into the Big Thicket National Preserve and the Port of Beaumont. Collier's Ferry Park, 5390 Pine Street, Beaumont, TX 77703. Public tours resume March 2023. Private charters and school tours continue. Fees apply. Check online scheduling at [www.nechesriveradventures.org](http://www.nechesriveradventures.org) for details.

### **Big Thicket National Preserve and Partner Organizations Restoration Days – Plant a Longleaf Pine Tree**

**Big Sandy Creek Unit – Dallardsville, TX**  
**All equipment provided; all ages welcome.**

Monday, January 16 (MLK Day) 9am – 12 pm

Monday, February 20 (Presidents' Day) 9am – 12pm

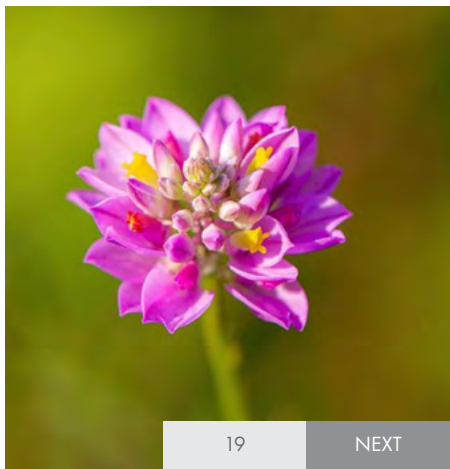
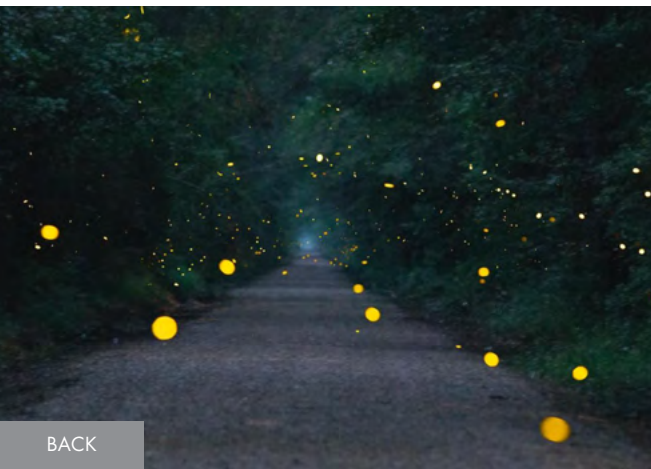




# BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

PARTNER IN PRESERVATION

#BIGTHICKET





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# BIG THICKET BULLETIN

*published quarterly by*  
Big Thicket Association  
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- Web Sites**
- Big Thicket Association  
[www.bigthicket.org](http://www.bigthicket.org)
  - Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust  
[www.bigthickettrust.org](http://www.bigthickettrust.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)
  - Neches River Flood Planning Group  
[www.nechesfloodplanning.org](http://www.nechesfloodplanning.org)
  - Outdoor Nature Club, Houston  
[www.outdoornatureclub.org](http://www.outdoornatureclub.org)
  - Sierra Club Golden Triangle Group  
[www.sierraclub.org/texas/golden-triangle](http://www.sierraclub.org/texas/golden-triangle)
  - Texas Black Bear Alliance  
[texasblackbear.weebly.com](http://texasblackbear.weebly.com)
  - Texas Conservation Alliance  
[www.TCAtexas.org](http://www.TCAtexas.org)
  - Texas Master Naturalist Association, Sabine Neches Chapter  
[www.txmn.org/sabine](http://www.txmn.org/sabine)
  - Village Creek State Park  
[tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/village-creek](http://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.

## Follow Us

