

BIG THICKET BULLETIN

April · May · June 2015
Issue #126

BIG THICKET SCIENCE CONFERENCE



*ATBI slime mold researcher
Katie Winsett*

Plenary speaker Dr. Kirk Winemiller

*Tonkawa Sand Hills trip leader
Dr. James Van Kley (front left) checking
his species list.*

Plenary speaker Julie Shackelford

The 2015 Big Thicket Science Conference: Biodiversity and Ecology of the West Gulf Coastal Plain Landscape was hosted at Stephen F. Austin University's Student Center in Nacogdoches, April 17-19. After a welcome by the Conference hosts, two Plenary speakers led off the conference on Friday morning. Julie Shackelford of The Conservation Fund presented an overview of The Conservation Fund's mission in East Texas and provided an update of recent land acquisitions made by the Fund. Dr. Kirk Wine-miller, a Regents Professor in Texas A&M's Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, presented a talk based on his ecological research.

A poster session followed with 21 posters on a variety of research topics conducted across the Western Coastal Plain. (Note: the forestry definition of the Western Coastal Plain is different than the geologic definition which extends the Texas Coastal Plain westward across Texas to the Rio Grande River.)

After lunch an additional 10 presentations were held in the auditorium. The evening dinner and social was held at The Vineyard on the outskirts of Nacaogdoches.

Live music was provided by the Sawmill Vagrants from Kennard, Texas. On Saturday research presentations were given in a concurrent session format. Results of 33 ecologic and management studies were presented Saturday morning and afternoon. These included one by Big Thicket National Preserve ATBI slime mold researcher, Katie Winsett, a Lecturer in the Environmental Studies Program at North Carolina State University.

A choice of three field trips was offered on Sunday. Dr. James Van Kley led a trip to the Tonkawa Sandhills north of Nacogdoches where natural springs and sandy soils derived from the 45+ million-year-old beach sands of the Carrizo Sand formation provide both moist and dry habitats for unique floras. Dr. William Godwin and Jason Singhurst led a trip to the Joy Global Prairie near Longview. The Joy Global Prairie is the largest remnant of saline prairie in Texas and is home to several rare plant species. Cliff Shackelford led a birding trip to the Steven F. Austin Experimental Forest which is owned by the United States Forest Service. Although the trip had a foggy start, visibility improved later in the day.

WELCOME WAYNE PROKOPETZ



Wayne Prokopetz. Photo from National Park Service

DENVER, COLORADO – Wayne Prokopetz, a 40-year veteran of federal government service, has been named superintendent of Big Thicket National Preserve in southeastern Texas, according to Intermountain Region Director Sue Masica. Prokopetz begins his new assignment effective immediately.

Prokopetz's federal government career includes 24 years with the National Park Service. He comes to Big Thicket from Dinosaur National Monument (Colorado/Utah), where he served as chief of research and resources management, and cultural resources program manager.

"Wayne brings decades of experience in natural and cultural resource management to his new position," Masica said. "He will be a tremendous asset to the park and will work closely with local communities and stakeholders. I know Wayne

will excel in managing the resources at Big Thicket National Preserve."

Prokopetz's previous leadership positions with the National Park Service include archeologist in the former Pacific Northwest Region Office (Seattle, Washington), the former Southwest Region Office, (Santa Fe, New Mexico) and the Southeast Archeological Center (Tallahassee, Florida). Prokopetz's other federal government positions include regional archeologist for the Upper Colorado Region, Bureau of Reclamation (Salt Lake City, Utah) and archeologist for national forest lands (United States Forest Service) in Florida.

"I am honored to have been selected and am excited to work with the staff and world-class resources of Big Thicket," Prokopetz said. "I look forward to working closely with the southeast Texas communities that have worked so diligently to establish and protect the preserve. The preserve staff are planning great projects for next year's National Park Service Centennial and I am excited to work alongside them as we transition into a second century of stewardship and engagement."

Prokopetz is a graduate of the Department of the Interior's Department Managers Development Program. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees in anthropology from Florida State University and is "ABD" (all but dissertation) in history at the University of Utah.

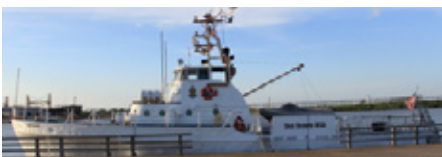
As superintendent of Big Thicket, Prokopetz will oversee a workforce of 22 employees and an annual operating budget of more than \$2.4 million.

Prokopetz and his wife Mary, enjoy all water sports and compete in Western and English horse shows.

On the Legislative Front ...

Great news – HB158, the bill to ensure that all the revenues from the Sporting Goods Sales Tax will be used for state parks and state historic sites, has passed *both* houses of the Texas Legislature!

Park advocates have been pushing for this for many years - this is a BIG victory in providing adequate funding for our state park system. *Thank you* for your help in making this happen!



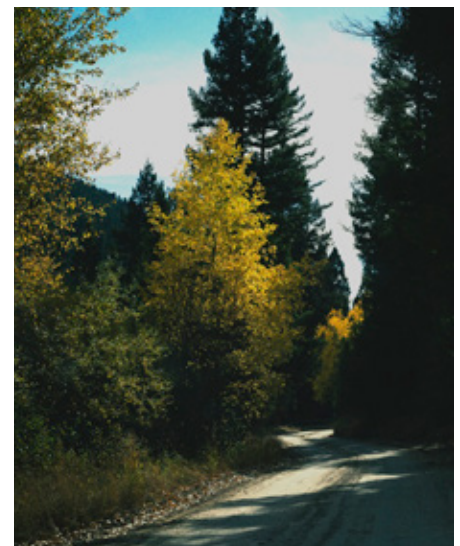
Sea Scout BSA Retired Coast Guard Cutter Point Glass

Seaport Saturday

Big Thicket Association joined the Seafarers' Center of Beaumont in celebrating National Maritime Day and National Transportation Week on Saturday, May 16, 2015 at Riverfront Park in Downtown Beaumont.

National Maritime Commemoration Wreath Laying Ceremony with Beaumont Yacht Club boat parade and Lone Star Bagpipes at 12:00 noon

"Ivory Bill" Neches River Adventures Tours conducted 30-minute tours with donation of 2 canned goods for Some Other Place.



Trail leading through forest

Tourism to Big Thicket National Preserve Creates Local Economic Benefits

A new National Park Service report shows that 109,957 visitors to Big Thicket National Preserve in 2014 spent \$6,743,000 in communities near the park. That spending supported 95 jobs in the local area and had a cumulative benefit to the local economy of \$8,632,900.

“Big Thicket National Preserve welcomes visitors from across the country and around the world,” said Superintendent Wayne Prokopetz. “We are delighted to share the story of this place and the experiences it provides. National park tourism is a significant driver in the national economy, returning \$10 for every \$1 invested in the National Park Service, and it’s a big factor in our local economy as well. We appreciate the partnership and support of our neighbors and are glad to be able to give back by helping to sustain local communities.”

The peer-reviewed visitor spending analysis was conducted by U.S. Geological Survey economists Catherine Cullinane Thomas and Christopher Huber and National Park Service economist Lynne Koontz. The report shows \$15.7 billion of direct spending by 292.8 million park visitors in communities within 60 miles of a national park. This spending supported 277,000 jobs nationally; 235,600 of those jobs are found in these gateway communities. The cumulative benefit to the U.S. economy was \$29.7 billion.

Accomplishments of the Thicket of Diversity

The Thicket of Diversity has made significant progress in its All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory of species in the Big Thicket region. In the 2014 Taxa Tally, 2901 species were identified out of the 118,891 inventoried collections. Since the program’s inception in 2006, 413 New Species including 378 New to the Preserve, 133 New to State of Texas, 1 New to US and 12 New Species to Science have been discovered.

Most significant was the submission of macro fungi or mushroom data by David Lewis. He submitted records from 1976 to 2013. Lewis is President of the Gulf States Mycological Society and annually guides mushroom forays into the Big Thicket several times a year. Internationally recognized Dr. Bart Buyck of the National Natural History Museum in Paris, France and Dr. Valerie Hofstetter, Department of Plant Protection in Nyon, Switzerland aided in the macro fungi research. Buyck is a world authority on the genus *Cantharellus* and described 5 new species of chanterelles from East Texas. He is also 1 of 3 scientists to describe a rare New Species to Science for the Big Thicket, *Russula texensis*.

Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary Opened April 25th, 2015

SILSBEE, TEXAS—The Nature Conservancy’s Sandyland Sanctuary was open for hiking, picnics, photography, nature study, and birding on Saturday, April 25th 2015, from sunrise to sunset. Nature Conservancy staff members were on site from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

The Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary is located between Silsbee and Kountze, Texas on State Highway 327 with the public entrance and parking area east of the Village Creek bridge. The preserve is approximately 20 miles north of Beaumont, Texas and about 1.5 hours northeast of Houston, Texas. The public entrance, parking lot, pavilion, and trailhead are accessible to the public year round. The Upland Trails (4 miles) and Self-Guiding Longleaf Loop Trail (0.8 miles) offer easy walking conditions on sand trails. The Floodplain Trail is closed due to recent rains and high water levels.

Important Reminders:

- » Visitors with special needs may contact the preserve manager for vehicle access to the pavilion and trailhead.
- » Visitors are advised to bring binoculars, cameras, insect repellent, sunscreen, hats and plenty of water to drink. Trails are marked, but carrying a compass or GPS unit is recommended.
- » For safety reasons, children must be supervised by their parents or other designated adults.
- » No pets with the exception of service dogs are permitted on the preserve.
- » Cooking fires and firearms are prohibited on the preserve.
- » Restrooms are not available on site.

Prescribed Burning on Private Lands: A Workshop for Southeast Texas Woodland Owners

A one day workshop was held on Thursday, May 21st. This workshop was sponsored by the Texas Longleaf Taskforce – working together to bring back Longleaf to its historic range in east Texas. This workshop is supported by the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the United States Forest Service; and partners within the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability’s Prescribed Fire Work Group.

Attendees learned about the benefits of burning, Texas laws & liability issues, where to find technical & financial assistance, smoke management and much more. This workshop gave landowners the opportunity to talk with organizations and vendors that support fire management on private lands.

SPECIAL THANK YOU FOR YEARS OF UNFORGETTABLE SERVICE

Big Thicket Reporters' Recognition Reception

The Big Thicket Association has a long history of promotion and protection of the natural resources of the Big Thicket of Southeast Texas. In 1969 the organization started a newsletter to keep members informed. The first issue of the Big Thicket Bulletin was May 1969

In January 1993, Maxine Johnston and Ann Roberts started publication of the Big Thicket Reporter as an independent personal newsletter sent to a list of friends, conservationists, and libraries. When Big Thicket Association reorganized in November 1994, the Reporter became the Association's newsletter. In 2003 the ladies were joined by Connie Blakely who gave the newsletter a new face by assisting with layout. Her work was saved digitally and recorded the history of the Big Thicket Association's efforts. Connie came on board with Issue 66. Big Thicket Reporter Issues 66 through 124 can now be viewed online at: <http://www.bigthicket.org/big-thicket-reporter/>

According to Maxine and Ann, recording Big Thicket Association history has been rewarding. They have interacted with everyone from neighbors to scientists, writers, conservationists, and legislators. The Reporter provided a dynamic service as a unifying voice for action. The newsletter supported the Big Thicket National Preserve, state parks and private preservation projects and facilitated networking between like-minded conservation groups.



Maxine Johnston



Ann Roberts



Connie Blakely, Maxine Johnston, Ann Roberts
Photo by Dr. Steven Lewis



Jan Ruppel, President,
Big Thicket Association

FOCUS FROM JANUARY TO APRIL

A new **COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT** with the National Park Service has been our focus this quarter; a new perspective, adjusting and adapting to their ideas, and discussion of options that might be available to us. These we presented to the Board of Directors in April. Negotiations continue.

Big Thicket Association Vice President John Stafford shouldered the responsibility of locating an individual to do design, layout and editing of the **BIG THICKET BULLETIN**. It took him time, diligence and an accidental conversation with a salesperson in Houston, but he found his man, Thomas Harris. Thomas is a Lamar University graduate with a Graphic Arts degree. John is continuing to use the same printing company in Livingston. To control our costs and office efficiency, we have determined only individuals without emails available to us will receive a printed copy.

The **TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE** of Dale Parish, Bruce Walker and Mona Halvorsen established a new website in 2013 – 2014 making registration for events like the April 17 – 19 Science Conference possible. The **WEST GULF COASTAL AND BIG THICKET SCIENCE CONFERENCE** Committee was elated with the user friendly results. Mona Halvorsen handled all website activity while Heather Gilley, Office Assistant, assisted with early registration. Charles and Wanda Smith, Maxine Johnston, Judy Aronow, Bruce Walker and I assisted with on-site registration, while Maxine Johnston and Bruce Walker assisted in underwriting for the conference.

The sale of the **DUNCAN PROPERTY** will be overseen by board member Dale Parish. Some members of the committee are in the process of determining a date for a visit to the site and plans for moving forward.

Big Thicket Association has initiated the following activities we want to encourage you to participate in over the year.

NECHES RIVER ADVENTURES has recruited board members Will Watkins, Bruce Drury and Jan Ruppel as

instructors for the boat's Environmental Education spring classes. If you are interested in volunteering for this activity call +1.936.274.1181 or email the FRS and let us know. Remember, when you are in Beaumont on a Saturday call ahead for reservations at +1.409.651.5326 for breathtaking riverside views of the Preserve and its wildlife.

Mark your calendar to partake in our annual fundraiser, **NECHES RIVER RALLY**. Watch for details of this pleasurable event designed to promote the Big Thicket National Preserve, allowing you the opportunity to experience paddling through a Cypress Tupelo Swamp while enjoying the beauty of the area.

ANNUAL MEETING, OCTOBER 10, and **BIG THICKET DAY** afternoon activities will all be held at Collier's Ferry Park in Beaumont. Our goal is to allow membership and guests the opportunity to view the Environmental Education land based site and what our future goals entail. Activities are being developed for all ages and stages. Join us on the right side of Texas for some southern hospitality.

Jan Ruppel

President, Big Thicket Association



Mark Your Calendar

Upcoming Events

July 4, 2015

Big Thicket Association & Golden Triangle Sierra Club will co-host a 4th of July Picnic at the Beaumont Yacht Club. The two organizations will provide the barbeque. Just bring the dish of your choice to round-out the meal. We will start to gather at 4pm, play games, eat, and socialize. Also, the Yacht Club is good location to watch the city's fireworks display, so bring your favorite lawn chair.

July 11, 2015

Big Thicket Association Quarterly Meeting from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. director@bigthicket.org

September 12, 2015

Neches River Rally. RSVP: +1.409.790.5399

August 25, 2016

National Park Service (NPS) turns 100 years-old!

2015-2016

ART WORKS "Imagine Your Parks!"

RECENT EVENTS

Temporary Trail Closures

Acting Superintendent Edward Comeau announced today that due to significant storm activity and record setting rains in the region, many of the hiking trails and paddling trails throughout the preserve are completely inaccessible and will be closed for approximately a week to ten days. Fallen trees, swollen waterways overflowing their banks and significant standing water throughout the preserve has prevented park staff from safely accessing many of our trails. Of the ten official trails in the preserve, currently only the inner loop of the Sundew Trail, the elevated boardwalk section of the Pitcher Plant Trail, and the Big Sandy Trail are open and safe for visitors to explore.

Visitors are reminded that flood waters and saturated soil can create many unsafe conditions. River banks can easily collapse and foot bridges can be weakened due to the waterlogged conditions. Do not walk through moving water. Six inches of moving water can be enough to create a significant hazard. Do not drive on flooded roadways. Just a few inches of flood waters can sweep away you and your vehicle. For more information about how to safely respond to flooding conditions visit the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency resources at www.ready.gov/floods.

In the coming days and weeks, park staff will begin work to remove fallen trees, repair foot bridges, and restore the preserve trail network to the high standards of safety that we have come to expect. Look for updates on trail conditions on your website at www.nps.gov/bith and our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/BigThicketNPS.



Flooded trail areas

50th Year Celebration Photos (page 7)

From left to right, top to bottom:

- | | |
|---|---|
| n BTA Environmental Program | fringe marshes around Powderhorn Lake. Photo by: Earl Nottingham / Texas Parks and Wildlife |
| n The Sawmill Vagrants entertaining the Big Thicket Science Conference evening. | n Landscape image of trees and grass |
| n BTA Environmental Program | n Landscape image of the Big Thicket |
| n An aerial view of | n BTA Environmental Program |



Left: Southern Leopard Frog in the Atchafalaya Basin, Louisiana



Right: United States Geologic Survey researcher Brad Glorioso

Science Cafe: Effects of Salinity on Amphibians in the Big Thicket

The Big Thicket National Preserve Science Café program series continued this May with a presentation from United States Geologic Survey researcher Brad Glorioso on Wednesday, May 13th, at 6 p.m. at the Logon Café in Beaumont, Texas.

Mr. Glorioso is an ecologist with the United States Geologic Survey at the National Wetlands Research Center in Lafayette, Louisiana. His current research focuses on long-term amphibian monitoring in the Atchafalaya Basin of south-central Louisiana and in Big Thicket National Preserve, as part of the United States Geologic Survey Amphibian Research and Monitoring Initiative, led by principal investigator Hardin Waddle. They have over 50 sampling locations along bayous and other waterways in the lower part of the Beaumont Unit in Big Thicket National Preserve, where they have so far identified 14 species of frogs, as well as over 22 species of reptiles.

Increased water salinity in these wetlands, due to storms, sea level rise, and loss of freshwater from upstream, can have very damaging impacts on amphibian populations. Frogs and toads are particularly vulnerable to increased water salinity due to their water-permeable skin and, in the case of tadpoles, their inability to escape excessively saline water. These factors make it important for us to understand the abundance and distribution of amphibians in our coastal wetlands, and how they may be affected by future management decisions.

The Science Café is free and open to the public. This program was held at Logon Café, 3805 Calder St., in Beaumont at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, May 13th. For more information or updates on future events, contact Park Ranger Mary Kay Manning at +1.409.951.6720.



Big Thicket Association

Preservation for generations yet to come





Big Thicket Association
P.O. Box 198
Saratoga, TX 77585-0198

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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.bbcc.org

Conservation Fund
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Gulf States Mycological Society
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Native Plant Society of Texas
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Nature Conservancy
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Outdoor Nature Club, Houston
www.outdoornatureclub.org

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

Texas Conservation Alliance
www.TCAtexas.org

Village Creek State Park
www.tpwd.state.tx.us.park

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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 visit: <http://www.bigthicket.org/>