

# BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE 129

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# QUARTERLY MESSAGE from THE PRESIDENT

*Letter from Jan Ruppel, president of the Big Thicket Association*

Each year I have been lead by events to determine the focus of the New Year. In 2016 **Advocacy** seems to be leading the charge with the threat of the 105 Toll Road proposal with intent to pass through 1.8 miles of the Preserve in Orange County. A coalition committee has been formed of approximately 8 organizations. We have written op eds, visited the affected city councils of Beaumont and Vidor and Jefferson County Commissioners. Plans are being developed for future intervention. It is possible you will receive an alert to contact one or more of the county or city officials requesting to protect the Big Thicket National Preserve from intrusion of this road. **Stand with us and respond if this infringement of this protected area is necessary.**

This year with our newly adopted Friends Agreement with National Park Service (NPS), our team has determined our focus for 2016 will be on Thicket of Diversity (TOD) and strengthening the project. Big Thicket Association (BTA) has seen a very positive increase in interaction with the NPS since signing of the Friends Agreement. Being this is NPS' Centennial Celebration we will be hosting the event at the Visitor's Center on Saturday, October 1, 2016. As the year progresses watch for upcoming activities and log onto NPS and BTA's websites for current information.

[www.bigthicket.org](http://www.bigthicket.org) and [www.nps.gov/bith](http://www.nps.gov/bith)

BTA moved its offices to the newly renovated Brammer House in late 2015. Director of TOD, Mona Halvorsen, oversaw the reconstruction of the Brammer House for BTA. The challenge was increased with a nearly twelve inches of rain in late November. The staff completed the time consuming process in late December. Our sign indicating its location will soon be posted.

**BTA continues to evolve.** Fifteen years ago this was an organization run strictly by volunteers. Since 2006 we have added three programs, Thicket of Diversity, Neches River Adventures, and Neches River Rally. Each has demanded an increase in workload and staff. Our BTA goal in 2015 was to reduce some BTA duties of the Director of TOD. The Vice President, John Stafford, took over most of the membership and Legacy responsibilities using Donor Perfect, while Mona expanded the responsibilities of the Office Assistant. This has been a significant change.

***It's renewal time for your membership.***  
*We need your help in securing numbers for our organization to make a strong impact as we move forward in our Advocacy for the Big Thicket National Preserve. Please take the time and go online to join BTA.*



## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

### Upcoming Meetings and Events

**April 5**

Thicket of Diversity Council Meeting 4:00 p.m.

**April 9**

BTA 2nd Quarterly Meeting, Field Research Station, 9:00 a.m.

**September 10**

Neches River Rally

**October 1**

BTA Annual Meeting/Big Thicket Day Celebration



# UPCOMING CENTENNIAL EVENTS

**Sunday, April 3, 1:30 pm**

## **BEECH WOODS HIKE**

Earn mileage towards your Centennial Club award on this exploration of the Beech Woods Trail and Beech Creek Unit. Meet at the trailhead on FM 1992, 1.5 miles north of FM 1013; or meet the ranger at the visitor center at 12:30 pm and caravan to the trailhead. Please call the visitor center at 409-951-6700 to register.

**Saturday, April 16, 9 am**

## **CANYONLANDS HIKE**

Explore Your Thicket and earn mileage towards your Centennial Club award on this exploration of the rugged Canyonlands Unit. The three-mile round-trip hike to the Neches River follows old logging roads and cross-country routes. There may also be an optional longer hike to Crescent Lake. Bring plenty of water and lunch. Meet at the Exxon Mini-Mart in Spurger. Call the visitor center at 409-951-6700 to register.

**Saturday, April 16**

## **NATIONAL JUNIOR RANGER DAY**

Join us for fun kids' activities and earn a Junior Ranger badge to celebrate National Junior Ranger Day! More details to come, so check with our visitor center at 409-951-6700 as the date nears.

**Sunday, April 17, 10 am**

## **PADDLING TRIP**

Join park rangers for a guided canoe trip on the waters of the preserve. This program targets the casual and novice paddler. Canoes, PFDs and paddles will be provided. Trip locations vary and space is limited, so call our visitor center at 409-951-6700 to find each trip location and to register.

**Thursday, April 21, 6:30 pm**

## **BLACK BEARS IN THE BIG THICKET**

Learn about the history and ecology of black bears in southeast Texas at this evening program. Meet at the Big Thicket Visitor Center. Approximately 45 minutes.

**Friday, April 22, 8 pm**

## **EARTH DAY! FULL MOON NIGHT HIKE**

Celebrate Earth Day with a full moon night hike on the Sundew Trail. Bring water, good walking shoes, and a flashlight or headlamp with a red lens for this one-mile walk. No light-up shoes. Meet at 8 pm at the Sundew Trailhead, located seven miles north of the Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center. You can also meet the rangers in the Visitor Center parking lot at 7:30 pm and caravan to the trailhead.

**Sunday, May 1, 1:30 pm**

## **TURKEY CREEK TRAIL HIKE**

Earn mileage towards your Centennial Club award on this exploration of the Turkey Creek Trail from the Pitcher Plant Trail to CR 4825 and back. The full round-trip distance is six miles; hikers can choose to hike a shorter or longer distance. Meet at the Pitcher Plant Trailhead on CR 4850, two miles south of FM 1943 east of Warren, with water and snacks. Please call the visitor center at 409-951-6700 to register.

**Sunday, May 15**

## **PADDLING TRIP**

Join park rangers for a guided canoe trip on the waters of the preserve. This program targets the casual and novice paddler. Canoes, PFDs and paddles will be provided. Trip locations vary and space is limited, so call our visitor center at 409-951-6700 to find each trip location and to register.

**Saturday, May 21**

## **NATIONAL KIDS TO PARKS DAY**

Join us for fun activities and earn a Junior Ranger badge to celebrate National Kids to Parks Day! More details to come, so check with our visitor center at 409-951-6700 as the date nears.

**Friday, May 27, 8:15 pm**

## **NIGHT HIKE**

Engage your senses and learn about nocturnal animals on this 1.7-mile walk. Bring water, good walking shoes, and a flashlight or headlamp with a red lens. No light-up shoes. Meet at 8:15 pm at the Kirby Trailhead, located 2.5 miles east of the Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center. You can also meet the rangers in the Visitor Center parking lot at 8 pm and caravan to the trailhead.

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Find additional information on all the preserve's upcoming events and programs on our [website](#) on [Facebook](#), or by calling our visitor center at **409-951-6700**.



# THICKET OF DIVERSITY

Summer 2015 activities at the Big Thicket National Preserve Field Research Station began with a flurry of activities and ended with a General Membership Meeting of the East Texas Black Bear Task Force.

On May 26-28 Alison Pollard of the Houston Zoo brought ExxonMobil sponsored 2015 Collegiate Conservation Program interns to the Big Thicket to learn about the piney woods habitat and to practice conservation field techniques.

In June researchers from near and far convened at the station to participate in a MiniBioblitz and to conduct species inventories through the Thicket of Diversity All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory. The Field Research Station provides a classroom, small lab, dormitory space, laundry equipment and a kitchen. Individual or small groups may be housed at the site if their work is Big Thicket education related.

Dr. Thomas Powers, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, gave a Big Thicket Nematode Workshop and continued roundworm inventory with his team of researchers. Edward Realzola, a Sam Houston State University gyrenid researcher, assisted. David Lewis, President of the Gulf States Mycological Society, hosted a biannual fungi collecting trip in the Lance Rosier Unit and a Fungi Blitz and workshop, and Lijin Zeng of the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory worked on Breeding Bird Monitoring surveys.

In July Shawn Benedict of The Nature Conservancy and his fire crew utilized the facility to house a crew for prescribed burning, a practice necessary for healthy ecosystem management. Evelyn Anemaet of the National Wetlands Research Center conducted fieldwork at bald cypress swamps in the Beaumont, Big Sandy Creek and Lance Rosier Units.

In August, Edward Realzola returned to continue his gyrenid research and to survey sites for bryophytes.

Ashley Lovell of Texas Land Conservancy delivered an educational presentation at the East Texas Black Bear Task Force summer meeting. Black bears are slowly and naturally returning to the forests of East Texas.

**Look for more Thicket of Diversity events to come in 2016.**



**Nematode Workshop with Dr. Thomas Powers Fungi Blitz evaluation at Field Research Station.**





## BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION RECEIVES FUNDING FOR NECHES RIVER ADVENTURES AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CLASSES

The Port of Beaumont Commissioners and TOTAL recently presented checks to the Big Thicket Association for our Environmental Education Classes on-board the Ivory Bill.

Donations by the Port of Beaumont, TOTAL, and other sponsors also provide funding for advocacy programs that promote conservation and habitat protection in the Big Thicket. President Ruppel thanked the port commissioners for their continuing support of Big Thicket Association projects and noted that “2016 is an important year for the Port of Beaumont and the National Park Service, because both will be celebrating their Centennial Anniversaries this year”.

Wendy Ashworth, Senior Manager of TOTAL's Human Relations and other representatives from TOTAL toured the Neches River with the late Michael Hoke, Big Thicket Association Director of Environmental Education Classes. Hoke lead the group, on-board the Ivory Bill, to Ten Mile Bayou where BTA Neches River Adventures conducts its outdoor classrooms. Ms. Ashworth said, “We, at TOTAL, are pleased to be able to support the Big Thicket Association's projects that benefit the citizens of the communities in which we live and work”.

Funding and grants provided by area businesses, industries, and organizations gives the Big Thicket Association the opportunity to offer these educational experiences free of charge to schools in the region. Staff on board the Ivory Bill includes a licensed captain, deckhand, and a certified teacher trained in providing aquatic experiences for students. Other donors include LNVA, TLL Temple Foundation, BASE, WestRock, Beaumont CVB, YMBL, and members of the Big Thicket Association.

### TOTAL SUPPORTS NECHES RIVER ADVENTURES AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CLASSES

TOTAL Petrochemicals & Refining, USA, Inc. recently presented a \$10,000 check to the Big Thicket Association's Environmental Education Classes. Pictured with Wendy Ashworth, Total's Senior Manager-Human Resources (center) are other representatives from TOTAL. The group toured the Neches River with the late Michael Hoke, Big Thicket Association Director of Environmental Education Classes. Hoke lead the group, on-board the Ivory Bill, to Ten Mile Bayou where BTA Neches River Adventures conducts its outdoor classrooms.

This generous donation to the Big Thicket Association will be used to fund the Neches River Adventure's Environmental Education Classes, the Neches River Rally, and Big Thicket Day.

Donations by TOTAL and other sponsors also provide funding for scientific research in the Big Thicket and advocacy programs for conservation and habitat protection. “We, at TOTAL, are pleased to be able to support the Big Thicket Association's projects that benefit the citizens of the communities in which we live and work” said Ms. Ashworth.

The Neches River Adventures Program is an environmental education program developed by the Big Thicket Association in which students travel in the Neches River aboard the Ivory Bill, a 45 foot pontoon boat. While on-board, students take part in a variety of instructional programming much of which involves a hands-on exploration of the Neches River and various tributaries. Funding and grants provided by area businesses, industries, and organizations gives the Big Thicket Association the opportunity to offer these educational experiences free of charge to schools in the region. Staff on board the Ivory Bill includes a licensed captain, deckhand, and a certified teacher trained in providing aquatic experiences for students. Other donors include LNVA, TLL Temple Foundation, Port of Beaumont, WestRock, Beaumont CVB, YMBL, and members of the Big Thicket Association.

# NEWS

## BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE

FIRST QUARTER OF TWO THOUSAND SIXTEEN

### **BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE SPRING 2016 RANGER-LED PROGRAM SCHEDULE**

Throughout 2016 we are inviting visitors to “Explore Your Thicket.” This 100 mile challenge is part of the preserve’s National Park Service Centennial Celebration. During the 12 months leading up to the 100th anniversary of the creation of the National Park Service (August 25, 2016), the staff at Big Thicket National Preserve invites you to rediscover your national park. This program challenges visitors to travel 100/50/25 miles, depending on age, through the preserve during our centennial year (August, 2015 through August, 2016). Participants can paddle, hike, run, jog, travel on horseback, and even trek off-trail through the thicket. As you explore, you track your mileage and once you reach the targeted miles, contact preserve staff so we can welcome you to the Centennial Club. We can also help you track your miles! Simply call the visitor center and tell us what you’ve accomplished.

**Looking for other ways to participate in the Big Thicket’s Centennial year?** We encourage everyone to participate in our “Share Your Thicket” Centennial Photo Contest while exploring the preserve. Park visitors are invited to submit photos via Instagram for entry into a year-long contest using the hashtag **#BigThicketPhotoContest**. Monthly winners will be chosen in three categories and displayed in our park visitor center, with an overall winner chosen in the fall of 2016.

### **SCIENCE CAFÉ: CRAYFISH OF BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE**

Big Thicket National Preserve and the Big Thicket Association, Science Café program series continues in March with a presentation from West Liberty University researcher Dr. Zachary Loughman on Friday, March 18th at 6 pm at the Logon Café, Beaumont.

The Science Café is free and open to the public. This program will be held at Logon Café, 3805 Calder St, in Beaumont at 6 pm on Friday, March 18th. For more information, contact Park Ranger Mary Kay Manning at 409-951-6720.

### **ARTWORK OF BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE’S OSAGE ORANGE FEATURED IN NEW EXHIBIT AT UNITED STATES BOTANIC GARDEN IN WASHINGTON, D.C.**

A new Washington, D.C. exhibit of artworks depicting familiar, rare and iconic plants and trees of America’s national parks includes a colored pencil drawing of Big Thicket National Preserve’s Osage Orange created by Betsy Barry. This beautiful flowering plant is plentiful in the northern units of Big Thicket National Preserve.

“Flora of the National Parks” opened Thursday, Feb. 18 in the United States Botanic Garden (USBG) on the National Mall. Free of charge and open to the public every day through October 2, 2016, the exhibition features more than 75 illustrations, paintings, photographs, and other art forms.

Osage orange trees are a common sight on the Great Plains including the Big Thicket region. These hardwood trees were often used by Native Americans and early pioneers. They were often planted as living fences, or hedges, along the boundaries of farms and provided superior wood for boat making. Osage orange trees are easily recognized by their glossy, lance-shaped leaves and short stout thorns. The large dense green wrinkled fruit, measuring up to six inches in diameter, is inedible to humans.

# THANK YOU

## FOR YOUR COMMITMENT TO THE BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE.

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*It is through great delight we share news that Janice Bezanson, TCA Executive Director, has been selected for the Terry Hershey Award, presented by Audubon Texas. We know what fabulous work Janice does and it is wonderful to have other organizations recognize her!*

*The Terry Hershey Award, named for a long-time conservation activist and former Texas Parks and Wildlife Commissioner, is presented each year to Texas women who have made significant contributions to conserving Texas' amazing natural world. The award also honors the founders of the National Audubon Society, two young Texas women who launched a campaign in 1899 against a feather fashion craze that was rapidly wiping out populations of more than 40 species of water birds along the Texas and Louisiana coasts.*

*Other award recipients this year were Deborah Clark of the Birdwell and Clark Ranch, Mary Leonard of Fort Worth, and Ann Hamilton from Houston.*

*Our enthusiastic congratulations to Janice and these other exceptional conservationists.*

**MACK TURNER, CHAIRMAN**

**Texas Conservation Alliance**  
**TCATEXAS.ORG**



# REMEMBERING THOSE WHO GAVE SO MUCH



**LORRAINE G. BONNEY**

Lorraine G. Bonney was born and educated in Canada—graduating from the University of Alberta in 1948. She met Houston attorney Orrin H. Bonney in 1954 while climbing mountains in Wyoming. After their marriage they divided her time between their cabin in Kelly (near Jackson Hole) and their home in Spring, Texas (“Happy Oaks”). They collaborated on numerous books, *Bonney’s Guide to Jackson Hole and Grand Teton National Park*; *Grand Controversy*; *Wyoming Mountain Ranges*; *Battle Drums and Geysers*; *Field book: the Teton Range and the Gros Ventre Range*.

Orrin and Lorraine were among the founders of the Lone Star Chapter, Sierra Club. Later Orrin became the first chair of the Big Thicket Coordinating Committee (1968), recruiting organizations to support establishment of a Big Thicket National Park. The Bonneys produced slide shows and brochures to promote the work of the committee.

Before Orrin’s death in 1979 they had begun work on a Big Thicket guidebook. The project was abandoned until resurrected in the first decade of the 21st century. With a friend Lorraine retraced and elaborated the text for the fifteen tours as well as the historical background. The manuscript exceeded 1200 pages, and after editing by Pete Gunter and Maxine Johnston, the huge guidebook of 850 pages was published in 2011.

By the time the book was published, Lorraine had returned to Canada near her family, and her health deteriorated. She died at 93 years on February 8.

Among her numerous Big Thicket friends, Lorraine enjoyed being one of “Three Sajs” (Sagittarians): Lorraine Bonney, Ann Roberts, Maxine Johnston.



**MICHAEL HOKE**

Big Thicket Association Officer, Michael Hoke, 68, died in February. Michael had been active in the Big Thicket Association for years, dating back to being a young volunteer at the Big Thicket Museum (now the Field Research Station) in Saratoga. Michael was serving as the BTA Environmental Education Director for Neches River Adventures and was BTA’s leader of the committee to develop an environmental education center on the Neches River adjacent to Collier’s Ferry Park. He was recently elected to serve as BTA Secretary 2016-2017. We are totally devastated by Michael’s sudden passing. Please keep his family in your thoughts and prayers.

Michael was active in several environmental and conservation organizations including Golden Triangle Sierra Club and Clean Air and Water. He was to serve as the Local Chair for Sierra Club 2016 – 2017 and was very excited about his first year. Michael was also very active as a board member and volunteer with the Beaumont Children’s Museum and the Science Super Stars.

Michael is best known for his accomplishments at Shangri-La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center and the Garden’s first Executive Director. Michael was a super hero in all matters regarding education and working with youth in science and in environmental education. He was well known across the nation and was often asked to speak to groups about his experiences and accomplishments in developing education and conservation programs.

Michael’s passing is a major loss for the Big Thicket Association. He was so excited about the future of the Big Thicket Association and all the organizations that he touched. When he spoke about his programs and projects, you could not help but to also share that excitement. He knew how to motivate, and he knew how to teach. He had a major impact on his students and the many organizations that he served.





# GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER SCHOOLS 1947 - 1967 • MONUMENT DEDICATION

*Submitted by: Mary Catherine Johnston*

February is recognized as Black History Month, and for residents in Hardin County a new historical monument proudly commemorates the site of George Washington Carver Schools, a facility which originated from the Kountze Colored Schools. In 1947, under Superintendent Nelson Long, Kountze ISD purchased a lot in the Smith-Feagan addition and erected a white frame building with five classrooms. Willie E. McKinney served as Principal. The school only went through the tenth grade.

As enrollment increased, two additional classrooms, restrooms and a separate building for assemblies were added. In 1955, the Honey Island Colored School was consolidated with Carver further increasing the student population. Construction began on a gymnasium. Grades 11 and 12 were added in 1956 and the mascot changed from the Eagles to the Pirates. A new brick building was built in 1960.

Professor McKinney retired in 1963, and Mr. Joseph Scott was hired as Principal. He served in that capacity until the school's closing. In 1967, as a result of Civil Rights Legislation, the Kountze ISD School Board voted to integrate the faculty and Hub Sutton, of Saratoga, was hired. 1967 was the last graduating class for George Washington Carver. Kountze was fully integrated in that year.

Graduates of George W. Carver reunited at Kountze North Park on Saturday, December 5, 2015 to unveil and dedicate their monument. The long awaited project had finally materialized. In 1994 the famous Mohammed Ali toured Kountze at the invitation of then Mayor Charles Bilal.

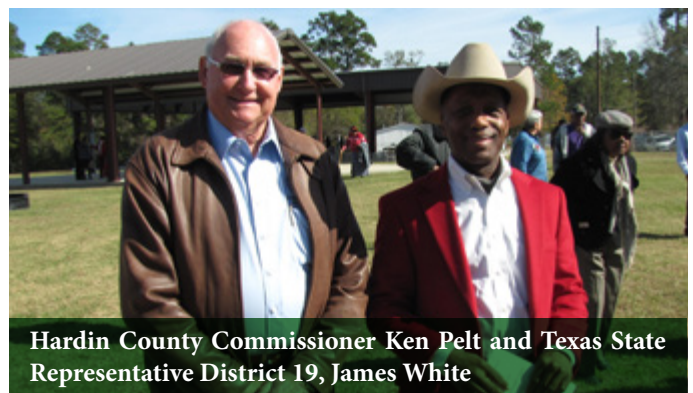
The Mistress of Ceremony was Ms. Bendy M. Davis Lee. Kountze Mayor Fred Williams welcomed guests. Reverend Freddie Haynes shared the opening prayer. A former teacher, Mrs. Gloria Branch, shared her educational philosophies and urged the audience to train their children for the future. Shirley Coleman located another teacher, Mrs. Weber, living in Georgia. She was able to communicate with the audience through a cell phone line. Mr. Jimmy McKim of the Hardin County Historical Commission shared the marker's importance

for preserving yesterday, informing today and inspiring tomorrow. Texas State Representative District 19 James White said on the issue of segregation-desegregation that our country is searching, evaluating and self-correcting. He shared a Proclamation recognizing the school's vital role in the community. Shirley Simon recognized the Classes of 1957, 1966 and 1967. Mary Adams of the Kountze City Council provided further acknowledgements. Fred Arline and Houston Samuel conducted the unveiling of the monument while Mr. Charles Bilal sang the Carver School Song.

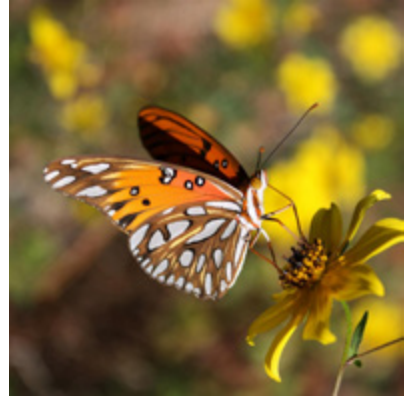
The Monument Committee included blueprint and drawings by Houston Samuel Jr., design by Shirley Coleman Simon and consultants: Bendy M. Davis Lee, Carl Matthews and Freddie Anderson. Incorporated into the monument is a clock that was donated by teacher Hub Sutton. It was his responsibility to attend the clock and regulate the bells, a task he found to be challenging. In order to keep it working, he sometimes used rubber bands. This original clock is set and visible inside the monument.

The day concluded with the catering of a delicious meal for guests at the Hardin County Music Hall provided by Caroline and Arthur Yarbough, owners of Caroline's Quality and Quantity Barbecue.

Segregation practices in Hardin County were real. The George Washington Carver Monument is a symbol of community pride and provides an opportunity for thoughtful reflection on our county's past.



**Hardin County Commissioner Ken Pelt and Texas State Representative District 19, James White**



# BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

*Partners in Preservation*





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# BIG THICKET BULLETIN

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## WEB SITES

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

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

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

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

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

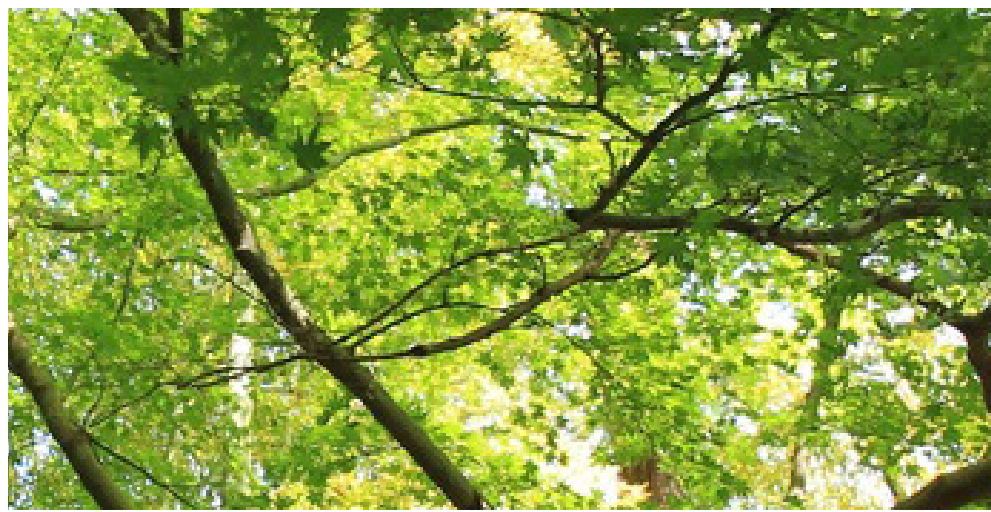
Outdoor Nature Club, Houston  
[www.outdoornatureclub.org](http://www.outdoornatureclub.org)

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

Texas 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)

## FOLLOW US



## 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.

