



BTA Board Votes for “ADVENTURES”

by Jan Ruppel, President

BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION Board of Directors meeting was held January 26 where the board was presented with a report and recommendation from the Ad Hoc Cardinal Committee. The committee’s recommendation was to acquire operations of the Cardinal from Richard Bothel who established the 501-C-3 non-profit company known as the Neches River Adventures. The Association appreciates the generosity of this gift of the boat and operating funds.

Cardinal Adventures has served as an educational tool for regional schools, chartering groups and individuals. The committee worked with Dr. Bothel since July learning and examining the pro and cons of including the Cardinal & Neches River Adventures in BTA initiatives and programs. The board determined the Executive Director could proceed with acquiring the boat.

The objectives that the Neches River Adventure met were to promote the conservation of natural resources and natural history of the Big Thicket area, promote and fund environmental education within local school districts; support Thicket of Diversity research on the Neches River Basin and in the Big Thicket National Preserve; expand public awareness of the Big Thicket National Preserve, the Neches River and Big Thicket Association; promote membership growth and community participation in BTA and Big Thicket National Preserve activities; leverage Neches River Adventures to attract corporate funding and grants



to support all BTA projects; establish and expand partnerships with other conservation organizations, county and city governments, and area businesses and industries.

STRATEGIC PLAN

The board spent the remainder of Saturday working on a strategic plan with Anjali Kaul Zutshi, Consultant, and Carolyn Vogel, Consultant. We reviewed our mission, vision, values, goals and objectives. On Sunday we prioritized the goals and objectives, identified our needs and costs, and assigned board members tasks. It was two long grueling days and I appreciate those who were able to make it a priority to be there and participate in this project to help us be more efficient and productive in our work for the Big Thicket Association.

Conservation Outlook



NATIONAL PARKS CANNOT AFFORD ANOTHER BUDGET CUT

(Excerpted from NPCA Report)

As NPCA reports, our national parks have been underfunded for years and the park service

budget experienced another six percent cut over the last two years. The decade ahead looks grim. Some parks might close campgrounds, and visitor centers might close (or shrink hours). Staff shortages would be inevitable, maintenance reduced, and ranger programs and tourism could be drastically reduced. The economy of many local communities would suffer since national parks generate more than \$30 billion in spending and more than a quarter million of private sector jobs.

Fiscal Cliff: There appears to be agreement among decision-makers to punt the debt ceiling debate until May, leaving the remaining two bargaining chips for more cuts the sequester deadline of March 1st and then on March 27th, the expiration of the continuing resolution funding the federal government. The fight to prevent further cuts to non-defense discretionary spending will be more challenged, and a sequester taking place and/or a federal government shutdown in March are real possibilities.

The American Taxpayer Relief Act of the New Year reduced the size of the sequester to as much as 6%, though in reality more than that if you adjust for the fact that it would have to be absorbed in the final months of the fiscal year... Some are suggesting a comparable cut that would allow greater flexibility than the sequester, which might sound nice at face value, but would still be very damaging to parks...

New House Appropriations Committee assignments:

The Subcommittee members for Interior are Republicans Mike Simpson (ID), Chair; Ken Calvert (CA), Tom Cole (OK), Tom Graves (GA), Jaime Herrera Beutler (WA), David Joyce (OH), David Valadao (CA); and Democrats Jim Moran (VA), Ranking Member, Betty McCollum (MN), Chellie Pingree (ME), and José Serrano (NY)

House Natural Resources National Parks Subcommittee agenda—budget-related items: Here are items

from the majority's agenda for the 113th Congress that are related to park budgets:

- ◆ Budget and Spending - The Subcommittee will review the Fiscal Year 2014 budget request for programs under its jurisdiction.
- ◆ Strengthening the Core National Park Functions of Stewardship, Visitor Experience and Maintenance of Park Facilities – The Subcommittee will conduct oversight on ways to ensure that budget constraints, should they occur, do not fall on the traditional National Park Service visitor services and property maintenance portion of their budget.
- ◆ New Parks – Proposals for additional parks and park expansions will be examined with due regard for the merits of the proposal, spending constraints, our national need for access to vital resources, and the protection of private property rights.
- ◆ National Park Management - The Subcommittee will conduct oversight on ways to reduce the maintenance backlog and enhance public enjoyment of the parks.

(Editor's Note: If you aren't a member of NPCA, you SHOULD be.)

STATE PARKS NEED MORE

Beaumont Enterprise, editorial, Jan. 21, 2013

Supporters of state parks in Texas had two reasons to be disappointed in the first draft of the budget for the Parks and Wildlife Department. The department wanted \$18.9 million more in state funding, but the Senate's budget proposal only increased its amount by \$6.9 million. The Legislature also has not stopped diverting money derived from the Sporting Goods tax, set up in 1993 to provide stable funding for Texas parks.

This is not just another budget battle. State parks have been underfunded for years, and wildfires connected to last summer's drought damaged several state parks. Department officials said they might have to close 20 of 95 state parks if they can't get adequate funding.

That shouldn't happen in a state that has a surplus in its \$100 billion budget. The first step in that process should be ensuring that funds dedicated for state parks go to them, not some other part of a vast state budget.

Conservation (cont'd.)

TEXAS FOREST HEALTH

The January issue of *Texas Forestry* (published by Texas Forestry Association) has alarming reports on forest health. The Texas A&M Forest Service reports 2012 data indicating that 301 million trees died across the state – 6.2 percent of the total number of trees alive prior to the drought. Another 5.6 million trees in urban areas died as a result of the drought. The TFS study found that southeast Texas had less damage than other areas with 1.3 percent of our trees lost to drought.

Further drought damage involves increased activity of pine engraver beetles and hypoxylon canker. The survey includes data on mortality in thinned pine plantations (1.2%) and unthinned (4%).

WATSON NATIVE PLANT PRESERVE

By Pauline Singleton

Watson Rare Native Plant Preserve received donations totaling more than \$7,000.00 during 2012. This will allow Preserve volunteers to start some much-needed repairs. More will be needed to replace the narrow boardwalk and repair the cabin. The generosity of donors will cover some repairs to the boardwalk on the savannah on the north end, and the little shelter, and we hope to use more durable materials. Several hundred hours of volunteer labor have been donated as well, and to each and every volunteer we are very, very grateful.

Dr. Jyotsna Sharma of Texas Tech University in Lubbock is working on a project involving the Chapman's orchid, *Platanthera chapmanii*. She had earlier collected seed from orchids at Watson Preserve, which were germinated in the laboratory, and later grown out in a greenhouse. DNA studies have confirmed that the little plants are *chapmanii*. This fall, Dr. Sharma brought some of the nursery-reared orchids and planted them at the preserve. This demonstrates that the orchids can be reared in a greenhouse and later re-established in suitable habitat. The intent is to provide a source of orchid plants that can be used to re-establish populations in areas where the orchid has been extirpated, for their range has shrunk and few populations remain in the wild.

We hope to have several events in the next few months for the enjoyment and/or education of anyone interested

in our native flora. Joe Liggio will lead a guided tour on April 27. Visit www.watsonpreserve.ning.com for the most up-to-date announcements about up-coming events.

EAST TEXAS BLACK BEAR TASK FORCE

The Task Force met Jan. 31 near Jasper at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Fish Hatchery. Updates were presented by Paul Davidson and Chris Comer. David Holderman (TPWD) reviewed sighting from 1978-2012, discussed the revised Wildlife Action Plan. Gary Calkins (TPWD) presented the TPWD Nuisance Bear Protocol. Breakout sessions were followed by lunch and a tour of the facility. The afternoon breakouts covered Habitat and Education with Donna Work (TFS) and Raymon Hedges (USACE). The next meeting was scheduled for July – possibly at the Big Thicket Field Research Station in Saratoga.

Nathan Garner (TPWD) received an award in recognition of his outstanding work.

TEXAS CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

Congratulations to Janice Bezanson, Executive Director of TCA, who became one of 15 Texas women leaders honored Dec. 7 for an exhibit opening at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin. She was chosen to illustrate the importance of conservation; the display describing her work includes pictures kayaking on the Neches.



Nathan Garner (left), TPWD, received an award recognizing his outstanding work with black bears. Also shown is Dr. Chris Comer (SFASU).

Preserve Overview

by Ann Roberts

BTNP Supt. Doug Neighbor reports that in December deeds were received for land acquisition that include the 1993 Addition Act plus acquisitions by The Conservation Fund and Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust. The grand total acreage was 2,575.13. The acreage by Unit includes 1,018.43 in the Village Creek Corridor, 122.49 in Big Sandy Creek, 52.74 in Canyonlands, 41.41 in Beech Creek, and 1,340.06 in Beaumont.

Leslie Dubey, Chief of Interpretation, Education, and Partnerships retired January 3, 2013. Leslie began her service as a Park Ranger-Interpreter on Jan. 7, 1976 – almost 37 years of outstanding service. According to Supt. Neighbor, “she outlasted every Superintendent with her commitment and devotion to educating the children (and adults) of East Texas about the wonders of the special place called Big Thicket National Preserve.” She has organized Camps for Kids, Chautauquas, and similar events plus a legion of classes from public schools. BTA recognized Leslie in 1999 with our Thomas Lubbert Superior Achievement Award. Her work also led to several environmental education awards.

Deanna Boensch, formerly Fire Ecologist, has moved to the position of Ecologist for the Resources Management Division. She replaces Brian Lockwood, whose position title was Biologist. Supt. Neighbor reports that “Deanna brings knowledge about fire ecology to the Resource Management Division; however, she will focus on many other facets of the Big Thicket ecosystem.”

Ryan Desliu was employed as the Lead Fire Effects Monitor in November 2012. He comes to us from Florida where he worked at Everglades National Park as a fire effects monitor and the State as a Biologist.

Planning documents being reviewed include **Fire Management** (comment period closed Jan. 6) and **Feral Hog Management** (scoping meetings held in Woodville Jan. 23 and Beaumont Jan. 24).

Diversity Dispatch



Since its inception in 2006 the Thicket of Diversity, All Tax Biodiversity inventory has 216 species new to the Preserve, 124 species new to the State, and 12 species new to science (others are pending).

Taxa Working Groups (TWIGs) continue with 18 groups in 2012. The Bryophyte group led by Dale Kruse (Texas A&M) and funded by the Western National Parks Association has completed its work. During 2012 Dr. Michael Barger (Peru State College) received three-year funding of the National Science Foundation for work on Aquatic Ectoparasites.

Among those submitting reports and receiving Park Partnership funds are Dr. Larry Brown, Spring Branch Science Center Herbarium; Dr. Paul Tinerella, University of Minnesota; Dr. Stephen Hatch, Texas A&M University; and Dr. Autumn Smith Herron, Sam Houston State University.

November 10, 2012: A Mushroom Walk for the Thicket of Diversity All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory was guided by David Lewis, President of the Gulf States Mycological Society. Jay Justice of Arkansas attended as well as other specialists. The group forayed into the Lance Rosier Unit of the BTNP, collected species, and returned to the Field Research Station to discuss and record the morning's work.

November 14, 2012: Joe Liggio discussed Big Thicket orchids at a “Science Café” in Beaumont’s Logon Café. Liggio has been studying and photographing wild orchids for over 30 years, and he and wife, Ann Orto Liggio, authored the book Wild Orchids in Texas. Of the 54 species of wild orchids found in Texas, the majority—36 species—are found in the moist woodlands of East Texas.

November 30, 2012: Ed Realzola presented “Whirligigs! Looking Up or Down?” in a Science Café at the Logon Café. Mr. Realzola has identified eight species of whirligigs that are new to the Big Thicket and one more species that may be new to science.

East Texas Miscellany

McFADDIN-WARD HOUSE MUSEUM hosted an event on Jan. 31 recognizing authors of *Just Between Us; Stories and Memories from the Texas Pines*, edited by Dan K. Utley and Milton S. Jordan, and published by Stephen F. Austin State University Press. The book contains 30+ contributions by as many authors. Present at the event were Mr. Jordan, Dr. William Seale and JoAnn Stiles.

TYLER COUNTY EVENTS

Heritage Village in Woodville has scheduled March 23 for a Quilt Show, Spinners & Weavers, Blacksmithing, Live Music PLUS dinner on the Grounds Sunday. There will also be Street Art Shows in the Downtown Art District.

Western Weekend, March 29-30, will include a Rodeo at 7:00 PM Friday, a Trail Ride Parade Saturday at 2:00 PM followed by a Rodeo at 4:30 PM and a Western Dance from 8:00–12:00 PM.

Queen's Weekend, April 6, has numerous events beginning at 7:00 AM with the Dogwood Dash; Arts/Crafts Festival and Antique Car Show, 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM; Dogwood Festival Parade, 2:00 PM; the Queen's Coronation at 7:30 PM followed by a Historical Outdoor Play / Pageant, and a Fireworks Finale.

PORT ARTHUR Convention and Visitors Bureau has scheduled concerts on February 7, 9, and 10 featuring numerous bands and entertainers. Check it out at www.mardigras.portarthur.com

The **Golden Triangle Quilt Guild** will hold a "Carnival of Quilts" March 2 in Beaumont at Lamar University's Gray Library, 8th Floor that includes a luncheon and auction. Tickets are available at Sew What Bernina, the Fabric Store, and guild meetings. Part of the proceeds will benefit Habitat for Humanity and American Heart Association. Go to www.goldentrianglequiltguild.com for additional information.

The Stark Foundation in Orange offers a cornucopia of museums and events (www.starkculturalvenues.org) For conservationists and outdoor types the first stop is Shagri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, W.H. Stark House, and the Lutcher Theater for the Performing Arts.

UPCOMING EVENTS

February 9

Adams Bayou Trash-Off; contact Joe Murphy 409-883-6126

February 16

Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust Board Meeting, Saratoga, 10:00 AM

February 21

"Queen of the Sun; What the Bees Are Telling Us"; Magnolia Garden Club, Jefferson Theater

February 23

Calcasieu and Cameron Parish Field Trip, Audubon (www.goldentriangleaudubon.org)

February 23–24

Houston Sierra Forestry Group visit Big Sandy and Marysee Prairie

March 2

Marysee Prairie Workday

March 3

Sunday in the Park, Larsen Sanctuary, Silsbee, 1:30 PM

March 23–24

Festival of the Arts at Heritage Village and Woodville Art District

March 29–30

Western Weekend, Dogwood Festival

April 6

Dogwood Festival with Queen's Coronation and Historical Play/Pageant, etc.

April 13

BTA Board Meeting, Saratoga

WE REMEMBER ... ROBERT PAUL MADRULLI, 1929-2012

Bob Madrulli died in December 2012. He was the son of Italian emigrants and spent his boyhood years in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He earned a BS in chemical engineering at MIT in 1951, began his 42-year career with DuPont, married Gertrude Galvin in 1952, and moved to Beaumont in 1968. When he retired in 1993, the family moved to Austin.

According to his obituary, when he came to Beaumont, he "got involved with the Sierra Club and Audubon Society and was soon tramping around the Big Thicket on bird counts..." Although BTA was not mentioned, Bob was a member, and when he moved to Austin, we called him "our man in Austin" because he performed numerous services for us there.

Volunteers Make A Difference

Big Thicket has benefited immensely from a dedicated and committed group of volunteer workers – from adult advocates to student recruits.

First came **St. Michaels College students** from Vermont on Jan. 6-11 – 10 gung-ho enthusiasts who “Think Globally and Act Locally.” They stayed at the Field Research Station in Saratoga. St. Michaels has fielded groups for BTNP volunteer projects for 15-20 years – each visit was one week. BTNP and others have benefited from the work of these young, energetic volunteers who have planted trailing phlox, planted longleaf pines, eradicated exotic invaders, performed trail work, helped clear Marysee Prairie (Texas Land Conservancy preserve), and a variety of other chores.

Wendy Ledbetter (Forest Program Manager, The Nature Conservancy) reports that this year the group worked at the Roy E. Larsen Sandylands Sanctuary planting 5,000 longleaf pine seedlings which were donated by the Apache Foundation. They also did trail maintenance on Larsen’s Floodplain Trail. They started with a canoe trip down Village Creek and helped clean trash along

the way. They worked in the rain to clear planting areas for the longleaf pine at Big Thicket National Preserve.

Because of rains (welcomed by drought-ridden East Texas) the volunteers looked for indoor projects and were subjected to BTA Powerpoint presentations on a variety of subjects. They also made the obligatory visit to Ghost Road with Maxine Johnston one night – that has become a tradition. Deanna and Bob Boensch joined the group for Texas BBQ and introduced them to king cake enjoyed in the field while planting trees.

The **Houston Zoo** will again bring young high school volunteers to Big Thicket from March 11-15 for their “Alternative Spring Break”. There will be 10 students from high schools throughout the Houston area, who will do service projects and learn about natural areas and resource management. Mary Kay Manning, Park Ranger, reports they will do work within the Preserve including a clean-up project on Village Creek. Other projects may include work at Village Creek State Park, the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary, and Marysee Prairie.



Students from St. Michaels College in Vermont spent the week of January 6 helping with volunteer projects in the Big Thicket National Preserve.

More Volunteers




A group of 50 volunteers helped plant longleaf pine seedlings in the Big Thicket. The event was hosted by National Parks Conservation Association.

NPCA ANNUAL LONGLEAF PINE RESTORATION EVENT

On Martin Luther King Day, National Parks Conservation Association hosted their annual longleaf pine planting at BTNP. They provided 4,000 seedlings to a group of 50 eager dibblers. The seedlings were placed in the Big Sandy Creek Unit near Lily Rd and FM 1276, where past Southern Pine Beetle and hurricane damage had destroyed much of the overstory. Preserve Ecologist Deanna Boensch again helped with the logistics.

NPCA also provided lunch, treats, and t-shirts to all the volunteers. More seedlings will be needed next year as our volunteers become more experienced and efficient tree planters. They worked in pairs – punching holes / planting seedlings between the trail and Turkey Creek. At the end of the day 4,000 seedlings were on their way.

We  our volunteers
Thank You!



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NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 1

Big Thicket Reporter

published quarterly by
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(www.bigthicket.org)

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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

www.conservationfund.org

Gulf Coast Mycological Society

www.gsmyco.org

National Audubon Society

www.goldentriangleaudubon.org

www.houstonaudubon.org

National Parks Conserv. Assoc.

www.npca.org

Native Plant Society of Texas

www.npsot.org

Nature Conservancy

www.nature.org/texas

Outdoor Nature Club, Houston

www.outdoornatureclub.org

Sierra Club Golden Triangle Group

www.texas.sierraclub.org/triangle

Texas Conservation Alliance

www.TCAtexas.org

Village Creek State Park

www.tpwd.state.tx.us.park