

NPCA'S NEW LEADERSHIP



Clark Bunting, new President and CEO of National Parks Conservation Association was honored at a luncheon March 20 at the Art Museum of

Southeast Texas in Beaumont. He was introduced by Elizabeth Waddill of Beaumont (Board of Trustees for NPCA), who presided at the event. Bunting assumed office in November 2013, having previously served as President and General Manager of the Discovery Channel, capping 25 years of nature and adventure television programming.

After Bunting's remarks, Suzanne Dixon, Texas Office Director, talked about NPS parks in Texas and concentrated on the present effort to establish a Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area. The proposed area includes voluntary partners in four counties—Matagorda, Brazoria, Galveston, and Chambers—and offers recreation opportunities in natural areas and historical sites. Check the www.npca.org website for more information.

WE'VE GOT FRIENDS!

Recent BTA members may not be aware of how great our debt is for NPCA's support. Here's the SHORT list.

- *NPCA officials testified at all the Congressional hearings to establish a national park.*
- Their National Parks magazine monitored and reported on threats and progress in the effort to establish a national park.
- NPCA leadership still works non-stop to get funding for all our parks.
- Their board visited Big Thicket in 1981, and another Big Thicket field trip was held in 1999.
- Their regional representative supported a Georgia-Pacific "Partnership for Parks" grant for \$60,000 that began the project to renovate the former Museum building as a Field Research Station.
- NPCA helped recruit new members by authorizing use of their Texas membership list.
- On more than one occasion, their members responded to crises with amazing results.
- BTCA nominated Bill Jewell, NPS land acquisition officer for BTNP, to receive the NPCA's FIRST Ste-

phen Mather Award. In 1996 Maxine Johnston received the Margery Stoneman Douglas Award.

- Since 2004, Big Thicket National Preserve has been on NPCA's list of "Ten Most Endangered National Parks."
- In 2008 NPCA conducted a "State of the Parks" report on Big Thicket funded by another long-term friend – the Magnolia Garden Club.
- NPCA established a Texas Office, and among their continuing contributions to all our Texas NPS units, and among other services, they have organized volunteer Longleaf Pine Restoration projects in cooperation with the Big Thicket National Preserve.

A short honor roll of NPCA advocates – current and former -- includes David Simon, Destrý Jarvis, Randy Rasmussen, Laura Loomis, James Nations, Craig Obey, Suzanne Dixon, and too many leaders to enumerate.

If you are not a member of NPCA, think positive!

CONSERVATION OUTLOOK

Budget Increase Requested for Interior Dept.

(*Washington Post*, By Darryl Fears. March 4, 2014)

President Obama requested \$11.7 billion for the Interior Department in fiscal 2015, a slight increase from the year before. The spotlight will be on the \$1 billion designated for the president's climate resilience plan, for research into the impacts of climate change, a touchy partisan subject in Congress.

As it ramps up for the 100th anniversary of the National Parks Service in 2016, Interior wants \$40 million for staff and park operations, counting on increased visitation...

The budget also provides more money for ecological sustainability of waterways such as the Chesapeake Bay — currently under a strict pollution diet enforced by six bay states and the Environmental Protection Agency — and the Everglades National Park.

Finally, as western lands dry and wildfires burn bigger in an era of global warming, Interior wants a larger emergency fund to fight fires that burn out of control, such as last year's monster Rim Fire in Yosemite. In past years, Interior and its

firefighting partner, the Agriculture Department, were forced to switch tens of millions of dollars from other program budgets when they burned through their budgets to fight more fires than expected. Some of those funds, Interior's deputy secretary said, were for programs meant to stop the fires from starting.

Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust: The Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust board of directors met April 13 with President Ellen Buchanan presiding. After "house-keeping" details (minutes, treasurer's report) were completed, discussion focused on a proposed conservation easement on 400 acres in Orange County bordering the Neches River.

Neches River Workshop: A Neches River Workshop will be sponsored by Neches River Watershed Sentinels (501-C-3 organization) on Saturday, Oct. 4, 2014 at Martin Dies, Jr. State Park in the Dining Hall / Group facility, Walnut Ridge Unit. Participants may register with TP&W for campsites.

The workshop will address strategies to advance Neches River Valley preservation.

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 22-25

KISD exhibit at Kountze Public Library of Butterflies Art and multimedia.

April 25-27

Trail Between the Lakes: The Golden Triangle Sierra Club group plans a 3-day 28-mile hike on the Trail, Sabine National Forest (see page 5).

April 26

Trinity River NWR, Champion Lake Earth Day Event, 11:00 AM-2:00 PM (see page 4).

May 2-3

Hardin County MusicFest, Friday @ opens 4:00 PM; Saturday @ 9:00 AM, located near site of Super 8 Motel and Kountze Trade Days, sponsored by Kountze Chamber of Commerce (see page 5).

May 3

Davis Hill State Park Workday, Houston Sierra Club, contact Evelyn Merz, Conservation Chair, elmerz@hal-pc.org 713-644-8228

PRESERVE OVERVIEW

NPS-IMR has Supt. Doug Neighbor on temporary assignment to Carlsbad Caverns National Park for four months, pending their search for a new superintendent. Edward Comeau is Acting Superintendent at Big Thicket NP while Superintendent Neighbor is on detail.

NPS had issued a FONSI for the Environmental Assessment of

BTNP's Feral Hog Management Plan offered for public review from Dec. 18 – Jan. 20, 2014. The EA 1) analyzed a range of alternatives to meet project objectives, 2) evaluated potential impacts to park resources and values, and 3) identified mitigation measures to minimize the degree of impacts. Alternative B includes several control techniques, including

a directed shooting program, a directed trapping program, tracking using trained dogs, and the use of "judas hogs" – trap/radio collar/release. Programs would coordinate with neighboring landowners where possible and would include a public awareness campaign (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bith>).

ANN ROBERTS | PRESERVE VOLUNTEER



BTA NEWS

The BTA board of directors met March 12 at the BTNP Field Research Station in Saratoga. Pres. Jan Ruppel indicated her first year as president was directed toward development of projects, and her second year would focus on building structure, membership, and committee work.

Work on the Strategic Plan included a staff evaluation process, approving

the Financial Policy, selection of Kathy Barrios as our part time Environmental Education for the Neches River Adventures Program, and announced that the Big Thicket Association (BTA) will christen the Ivory Bill at Riverfront Park on Thursday, April 24th at 2pm during a Greater Beaumont Chamber of Commerce Ribbon Cutting.

Community outreach through

interaction with groups involved Lamar's JASON project, educators for the Neches River Adventure's "Ivory-Bill," contacts with the Rotary Club and Beaumont Convention and Visitors Bureau; trips on the Ivory-Bill for journalists, writers and TP&W.

The Neches River Rally Committee made plans and considered logistics for the September 6th event. Details will be included in the next Reporter.

DIVERSITY DISPATCH

Science Café Event

Dr. Jeff Pittman presented the program "Capturing the Big Thicket Digitally" on April 17 at the Logon Café. The program highlighted birds in the Big Thicket, research, and organizations that can contrib-

ute to stewardship. Pittman hiked northern units of the Big Thicket National Preserve along the Neches River and made audio-recordings at seven locations to learn about the sounds of birds and frogs and toads.

Pittman serves on the BTA Advisory Board and participates in website management. He currently operates a private software company. The website, geojeff.org, offers course materials and labs and educational pages about science.

"Capturing the Big Thicket Digitally" is made possible in part by a grant from Humanities Texas, the State Affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

DLIA Conference

Between March 20-22, Mona A. Halvorsen and Katie Winsett presented papers in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, at Discover Life in America's All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory Conference.

Halvorsen reported on the Thicket of Diversity (ToD) project

– a partnership with Big Thicket National Preserve. Taxa Working Inventory Groups (TWIGs) conduct biological field research in the Big Thicket region. Halvorsen coordinates activities of field biologists doing species inventory and research projects. Since the ToD's establishment in 2006, 2,901 species have been identified according to the February 2014 Taxa Tally. Of those, 12 are new to Science, 378 are new to the Preserve, 133 are new to the State, and one is new to the United States.

Kate Winsett presented a paper on "Myxomycetes Diversity at Big Thicket National Preserve" collected 2007-2011. From 948 specimens collected, 99 species were recorded resulting in 58 species that are new records for the Big Thicket National Preserve.



Dr. Jeff Pittman hiking in the Big Thicket.

EAST TEXAS MISCELLANY

LUFKIN MUSEUM

Sunday, March 30, the Lufkin Museum of East Texas hosted a Neches River Conversation with F.E. Abernethy, Adrian F. Van Dellen, Gina Donovan, Richard Donovan, and Cliff Shackelford. There was a “standing room only” crowd attending the event.

Let the River Run Wild: Participants could also enjoy the exhibition of photographs by Adrian F. Van Dellen and the opportunity to purchase autographed copies of the recently published book, *Let the River Run Wild! Saving the Neches*, by Dr. F.E. Abernethy and Adrian F. Van Dellen. The book is a photographic odyssey of the river’s past, its environment and efforts to preserve it. Copies may be available at your local bookstores or Texas A&M University Press Consortium.

OTHER NEWS

Tyler County on Tour: This first annual historical tour was sponsored by the Tyler County Historical Commission concurrent with the Tyler County Dogwood Festival of the Arts on Saturday, March 22, 2014. The tour included Heritage Village, the Hicks Home Place and Pedigo Cemetery in the historic Town Bluff area and the W. T. Colmesneil House built by a railroad engineer in the Tyler County city which bears his name.

Heritage Village held a book signing for *Just Between Us*, ed. by Dan K. Utley and Milton S. Jordan. The anthology includes stories by Utley, Jordan, Francis “Ab” Abernethy, Thomas Charlton, Richard Donovan, William Seale, Jo Ann Stiles, and many other authors who record experiences in counties throughout Southeast Texas. Visitors also had



Abernethy and Van Dellen canoeing on the Neches River.

opportunities to view spinners, weavers, and quilters -- all practicing their crafts in the Fiber Arts Building, the newest addition to the village complex.

Kountze ISD Big Thicket Programs: April 17 Kountze ISD sponsored a presentation by Dr. Jeff Pittman “Capturing the Big Thicket Digitally” at Kountze High School. That evening Pittman presented the program at the Logon Café in Beaumont. The High School’s King’s Regiment Band hosted on April 22 a Tribute to Native Americans. The concert highlighted Indian culture through music and dance. The Alabama-Coushatta Tribal Dancers performed at the event. KISD also scheduled an exhibit on April 22-25 at Kountze Public Library of Butterflies Art and multimedia.

BTA past-president Mary Catherine Johnson secured funding for these programs made possible by

South Hampton Resources Inc. with a special thanks to Mr. Nick Carter, President, for his support.

START Meeting in Liberty: The START group met at the Liberty Opry on April 10 hosted by Jay and Nina Cantu. Their schedule of events for the year offers numerous opportunities for country western, gospel, and special programs. Participants reported on upcoming events including a Bird Count April 22 at Cattail Marsh / Tyrrell Park; Jefferson County Historical Commission installation of Historical Markers; a “Mini-Mudder Romp” at Gladys City Boomtown on June 21; and the Hardin County MusicFest on May 2-3.

Champion Lake Earth Day Event: In commemoration of Earth Day 2014, Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge along with the Friends of Trinity River Refuge, will host an afternoon of outdoor activi-

EAST TEXAS MISCELLANY

ties at the Champion Lake Public Use Area. The fun-filled afternoon occurs on Saturday, April 26 from 11:00 am until 2:00 pm. Activities will include canoeing, kayaking, bird and butterfly viewing, walking the levee trail, dip netting and fishing lessons in the lake for the kids, and a “Wildlife Experience.”

Champion Lake is located at the end of CR 417, two miles east of FM 1409 in southern Liberty County. This is approximately 10 miles south of Dayton, TX from Hwy 90 or about six miles north of I-10 at the Cove exit (FM 565). Call the refuge office at 936/336-9786 for more information.

Marysee Prairie: On March 19 the Houston Zoo volunteers worked for their second year at Marysee Prairie with Stewardship Chair, Tom Madux. The Prairie was soggy from

recent rains, but that didn’t deter the gung-ho volunteers. Concurrently, the group performed services for the Big Thicket National Preserve.

The following day (March 20) Texas Land Conservancy’s Daniel Dietz joined a group to conduct a prescribed burn. Despite the wet prairie, dried grasses and pimple mounds benefitted from the effort. The “first Saturday” workday was also held in April.

Hardin County MusicFest: The MusicFest is scheduled for May 2-3 at the site of Kountze Trade Days near the Super 8. Gates open at 4:00 with music by Adam Tantillo, William Michael Morgan and the Blue Broussard Band, followed by Joe Diffie. Saturday includes a Power Wheels event, helicopter rides, and a Washer Tournament. Music begins at 5:00 with the Dallas Street Ramblers, Larry Tillery

Band, and the B&B & Co. Vendors are on site.

Trail Between the Lakes: The Golden Triangle Sierra Club group plans a 3-day 28-mile hike on the Trail Between the Lakes, Sabine National Forest, April 25-27. You can choose to hike the entire trail over 3 days or a part of the trail over 2 days, or just hike for 1 day. You can camp at designated spots on the trail, or you can carry a daypack only. A shuttle will deliver you to a group camp spot on the trail at the end of the day. For RV’s sites are available at Mill Creek Park, or other parks on the lakes. Contact philarogers@gmail.com (409-543-4616 cell) or John Paul jp46832@gt.rr.com (409-201-0005 cell) for information and reservations.

Davis Hill State Park Workdays: Houston Sierra Club has sponsored a series of workdays to clear invading species in the Park. The next workday is May 3. Contact Evelyn Merz, Conservation Chair, elmerz@hal-pc.org 713-644-8228 for details.

Watson Rare Plant Preserve: Joe Liggio and Pauline Singleton led a wildflower walk on April 12 at the Watson Preserve. The display of wildflowers and blooming shrubs was mind-boggling. Several insectivorous plants had blossoms – pitcher plants, sundews, butterworts, and a terrestrial bladderworts. Chapman orchids, jack-in-the-pulpit, mandrake, golden club were either blooming or near blooming. Boardwalks led through a variety of ferns.



Volunteers from the Houston Zoo worked at Marysee Prairie during March.



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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 States Mycological Society
www.gsmco.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

Postscript on Spring

The ripple of spring display has been glorious everywhere this year. Trees progressed from soft yellow-green through stages to the usual dark green. Driving through East Texas woods one sees yellow jessamine, mayhaws, redbuds, fringe trees, dogwoods to name only a few.

Then there's my neighbor (that I accuse of being kin to Ned Fritz) who refuses to have the grass/weeds cut and has spiderwort, evening primrose, Carolina buttercup, Philadelphia fleabane, scarlet pimpernel, Venus looking glass, rough-seed buttercup, self-heal, oxalis (pink), lyre-leaf sage, corn salad, Indian strawberry, false garlic, small bluets, Texas frog fruit, butterweed, dandelions and henbit — some knee-high — in her yard.

[If you don't know the Fritz story, ask.] M.J.

