

50TH YEAR CELEBRATION

BY JAN RUPPEL, BTA PRESIDENT



October 4, 1964, 50 years ago, was the beginning of the Big Thicket Association. What growth, changes and most important longevity have been established with this organization was due to the audacity and

determination of its leadership.

Former BTA president and Hardin County Commissioner Ken Pelt began the day with introductions; Supt. Douglas Neighbor welcomed us as we gathered at the BTNP Visitor's Center. Board Members, Past Presidents, and Life Members were recognized.

Ellen Buchanan presented two awards. The Thomas E. Lubbert Superior Achievement Award honored Fulton Jeansonne, Fire Management Officer for his achievements while serving at the BTNP. The R.E. Jackson Conservation Award was presented to Buddy and Ellen Temple for their exceptional preservation of our natural heritage. Buddy Temple delighted us with remembrances of his father, Arthur Temple and Charlie Wilson as they grappled with establishing boundaries and territory for the proposed Big Thicket Park.

Twice-president Maxine Johnston (1973-75 and 1994-98) was recognized. During these 50 years, she worked to develop the former Big Thicket Museum, becoming an activist for the preservation, protection and conservation of a Big Thicket national park.

The Hon. Jim Turner, former U.S. Representative of the 2nd Congressional District from 1997-2004, maintained efforts to fund land acquisition for the Preserve's 1993 Addition Act, as well as for Preserve operation. He secured appropriations for the Visitor



(L to R): Buddy Temple, Hon. Jim Turner, and Ellen Temple enjoy BTA's 50th Year Celebration.

Center construction and exhibits, and he encouraged the Texas Legislature to designate US 69/287 as the Big Thicket National Preserve Parkway. We are indebted to him for his allegiance to BTA and the Preserve.

One of Big Thicket's most effective and knowledgeable advocates, Dr. Pete Gunter, a 56-year Big Thicket advocate, who is also a philosopher, author, and singer/songwriter entertained and challenged us to new horizons in advocacy. As a graduate student of philosophy at Yale, Dr. Gunter read Mary Lasswell's, *I'll Take Texas*; its chapter on the Big Thicket and Lance

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CONSERVATION OUTLOOK

SCIENCE CONFERENCE IN NACOGDOCHES, APRIL 17-19, 2015

On April 17-19, 2015, Stephen F. Austin State University will host the sixth West Gulf Coastal Plain and Big Thicket Science Conference. The focus of this year's plenary session will be "Watersheds and Waterflow." Dr. Dan Saenz of the U.S. Forest Service is chair of the event.

The Science Conference provides a forum for scientists and resource managers to share their research in the West Gulf Coastal plain ecosystem, which comprises a variety of communities including southeastern pine

forests, bottomland hardwood forests, and prairies. All topics relevant to the ecology of the region are appropriate, including studies of plant communities, wildlife, restoration ecology, effects of climate change, invasive species, fisheries, and large-scale disturbance ecology.

More information will be available soon at www.bigthicket.org.

Neches River Workshop

The Neches River Workshop will be held on November 15 from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. at the Group Dining Hall in the Walnut Ridge Unit of Martin Dies State Park, north of US-190. Coffee and Lunch will be provided.

The Workshop will focus on the Steinhagen Lake issue, including threats, opportunities and solutions.

The event is sponsored by the Neches River Watershed Sentinels, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Marysee Prairie

Workdays continue at Marysee Prairie on the first Saturday of months (excluding June-Aug. and Jan.). On Saturday Oct. 25, Brandt Mannchen (Houston Sierra group) led a tour of the Prairie, identifying grasses and blooming species. The tour included a handout that covered the history of the Preserve.

After visiting the Prairie, the group continued to the Big Thicket National Preserve's Hickory Creek Savannah Unit.

Longleaf Pine on the Path to Healthy Numbers

by Matthew Tresaugue, *Beaumont Enterprise*, Aug. 3, 2014 (Excerpts)

...Estimates vary, but many experts figure the Southeast has lost up to 97 percent of its longleaf-pine forest. The all-time low of 2.8 million acres came in the late 1990s. Since then, the amount ... increased to 3.4 million acres ... Several states, including Texas, have set a goal of 8 million acres over the next 15 years.

At least half of the new acreage will come from 16 targeted areas, known as significant landscapes. In Texas, the restoration work mostly will be done in and around the Sabine and Angelina National Forests and the Big Thicket National Preserve...

The latest conservation easement involves nearly 5,000 acres of forestland managed by Campbell Global, a timber investment firm... Nature Conservancy and state and federal forest services agreed to pay

\$2.3 million to prevent it from being developed...

Texas A&M Forest Service will monitor and enforce terms of the easement... Campbell Global said such agreements reflect a commitment to sustainable forestry and preserving the land for future generations...

NPCA Longleaf Pine Restoration Project

NPCA will hold its annual longleaf pine restoration project in Big Thicket National Preserve on Jan. 19, 2015, 9:30AM-4:00 PM. Meet at the Preserve Visitor Center at the intersection of US 69-287 and FM 420 north of Kountze. Please wear long pants, closed toe shoes (hiking or work boots). Bring a water bottle that can be refilled. Water, snacks, and lunch are provided. If you can volunteer contact Erika Pelletier (epelletier@npca.org).

NECHES RIVER RALLY AND TP&WD PADDLING TRAIL

BTA hosted a canoe and kayak rally Sept. 6 at the LNVA Saltwater Barrier boat ramp in Beaumont. A feature of the Rally was the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department's Executive Director Carter Smith designation of a Texas Paddling Trail. Other officials attending included Dick Scott, Commissioner of TPWD, Jefferson County Judge Jeff Branick, and General Manager of LNVA, and host, Scott Hall.

Most of those attending the event canoed the trail and returned to enjoy a hamburger lunch. The Trail from Cooks Lake through a cypress-tupelo swamp to

Scatterman Lake has long been a popular canoeing experience through this area of the National Preserve's Beaumont Unit, and the official recognition should attract new users.

Sponsors of the rally included Beaumont Convention & Visitors Bureau, Port of Beaumont, JK Subaru, TOTAL, Five Point Credit Unit, MeadWestvaco, YMBL, Eastex Automotive and Big Thicket Outfitters.

Entry fees and sponsorships provided funds for BTA conservation, environmental education, and scientific research programs.



BTA President Jan Ruppel speaks at the Neches River Rally during dedication of TP&WD's Texas Paddling Trail.



Canoe launch at the LNVA Saltwater Barrier boat ramp in Beaumont.



Canoers enjoyed an early morning trip along the Texas Paddling Trail from Cooks Lake to Scatterman Lake.

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Rosier captured his attention and imagination. He wrote a letter to Sen. Ralph W. Yarborough asking him to sponsor Big Thicket legislation.

In 1971 Dr. Gunter was elected BTA President for two terms. He doubled BTA membership and attracted supporters for preservation during his travels in Texas. He wrote and recorded “The Last Big Thicket Blues”; he sang and talked about the need to Save the Big Thicket and the problems of clear-cutting. In 1972 his book, *Big Thicket: A Challenge for Conservation*, was published. He became Big Thicket Coordinating Committee Chair in 1973, and his efforts accelerated -- concentrating on passage of legislation, threats to the resource, and appropriations to acquire land. He guides us still today.

Keith Carter, an internationally known photographer, who has established his base in his southeast Texas roots, took us on an existential journey with his photography, poetry, succinct phrases, and his focus on life; which focuses on the

obscure, the blurred edge. Using his latest work, *The Blue Man*, Carter showed visually his connection to the Big Thicket region. He challenged us: think beyond the obvious.

Walking out of the auditorium recharged and full of momentum, we encountered a rush of people visiting exhibits, listening to Blue Grass Music by Steve and Sheryl Hartz, Herman Davis entertaining all ages with his enchanting whittling characters, children’s activities offered by Shangri La and BTA volunteers, the Black Bear Task Force had a discovery kit, and the food booth was being prepared for hungry Big Thicket Day gatherers.

After lunch the Alabama-Coushatta dancers performed to an enthralled crowd, followed by book signing by these visiting authors: Dr. F.E. Abernethy, Dr. Pete Gunter, Joe and Ann Liggio, Wanda Landrey, Adrian Van Dellen, Richard Donovan, Renee Hart Wells, Blair Pittman, Maxine Johnston, Michael Gracey and Jerry Craven.

In the auditorium a crowd was hosted by Ellen Buchanan, President of the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, as she presented Jerry Rashall, Supt. of Village Creek State Park on their 20th Anniversary; Richard Donovan, Author, Paddling the Wild Neches; Mona Halvorsen, ToD Director and Ed Reazola discussing results from Thicket of Diversity; and Michael Hoke, Director of Neches River Adventures, as he apprised the crowd of the direction the Ivory Bill pontoon boat is taking in the area of environmental education now, plus addressing future possibilities.

The day was beautiful, the atmosphere enchanting, the crowd was captured and not in a hurry to leave. Can’t get better than that.

I want to express my appreciation to the BTA and TOD staff, Board of Directors and BTNP staff for stepping up and making this celebration memorable.

50th Year Celebration Photos (page 5)

Clockwise from top left:

- ☞ A buffet luncheon was enjoyed by the 200+ attendees.
- ☞ Attendees gathered information at one of the many exhibit booths.
- ☞ Ofiera Gazzaway dispersed information at the Heritage Village exhibit booth.
- ☞ Alabama Coushatta Indian Dancers.

- ☞ Big Thicket authors Rene Wells, Dr. Abernethy, and Blair Pittman — background, Ann Roberts.
- ☞ Dr. Richard Harrel and others enjoyed a buffet luncheon.
- ☞ Dr. F. E. Abernethy sings with Steve and Sheryl Hartz, Bluegrass musicians.



SUPT. NEIGHBOR MOVES TO CARLSBAD

NPS-IMR News Release, Sept. 17, 2014

An Intermountain Region NPS news release reports that Douglas Neighbor, a 25-year veteran of the National Park Service (NPS) has been named superintendent of Carlsbad Caverns National Park in southeastern New Mexico. Neighbor assumed his new position on October 19, 2014. Neighbor was superintendent of Big Thicket National Preserve in Texas—a position held since July 2011.

Neighbor's other leadership positions with the NPS include superintendent at Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve in Idaho; superintendent at National Park of American Samoa, located in the South Pacific Ocean; and supervisory resource management specialist at Big Thicket National Preserve in Texas (1999-2003) and Bryce Canyon National Park in Utah. Prior to his NPS career, Neighbor worked with Texas A&M University as a research assistant and as a wildlife biologist with Texas Park and Wildlife Department.

Edward Comeau (Facility Manager) has been appointed Acting Superintendent.

Personnel

Jason Ginder is the new Chief, Division of Interpretation. Ginder has worked in eleven different NPS units. Prior to joining the Big Thicket staff, he was Supervisory Park Ranger (Interpretation) at Cape Hatteras National Seashore in North Carolina.

Justin Roberts is the new Budget Analyst in Administrative Services; Roberts was formerly with Grand Canyon NP.

Ryan Desliu, former lead Fire Effects Monitor, replaces Stephanie Burgess as Oil and Gas Manager.

A farewell party for **Deanna Boensch** was held Oct. 25 at Suga's. She served as Ecologist at Big Thicket both in Fire Management and Resource Management since 2003; she leaves Big Thicket Oct. 31, 2014. The Thomas Lubbert Superior Achievement Award recognized Boensch in 2008. Her new assignment is in Natchez Trace Parkway.

Leta Parker, Law Enforcement Program Assistant since June 21, 1987, will retire December 27, 2014.

The Thomas Lubbert Superior Achievement Awards recognized Parker in 2006.

General Management Plan

The first GMP was published in 1980. Subsequent efforts to update that document in 1997 and 2003 were abandoned. The current plan began studies and meeting in 2009 and has finally cleared all the hurdles in 2014. Copies and/or discs may be requested online (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bith>).

Picnic Areas

In anticipation of increased use with the completion of TxDoT's Bike Trail from Kountze on US 69-287, the Preserve has installed bike racks and new picnic areas.

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 15, 2014

Neches River Workshop, 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.
Walnut Ridge Unit, Martin Dies State Park.

January 10, 2015

BTA Board of Directors Meeting, Saratoga, Field Research Station, 9:00 AM

January 19, 2015

Longleaf Pine Planting, National Parks Conservation Association, 9:30-4:00; meet at the BTNP Visitor Center, north of Kountze on US69-287 at SH420.

April 17-19, 2015

West Gulf Coastal Plain and Big Thicket Science Conference, Nacogdoches (comerce@sfasu.edu).

EAST TEXAS MISCELLANY

The **East Texas Historical Association** convened in Nacogdoches for their fall meeting Oct. 2-4. Penny Clark, Lamar University Library, Special Collections Archivist, presided at a Big Thicket session. Papers were presented by Maxine Johnston, Dr. Pete Gunter, and David Lewis.

The **Texas Forestry Association** held its annual conference in Lufkin at the Pitser Garrison Conference Center, and speakers covered everything from the economics of forests to conservation efforts. This year marks the 100th year that the group has been in existence. Among the speakers were: William Goodrich Jones II, grandson of the founder; Mark Luetters, Exec. Vice-Pres. For Georgia-Pacific LLC; Lynn Wilson, Exec. Vice-Pres. Of Rayonier; Lawrence Seltzer, Pres.

& CEO The Conservation Fund; and Hughes Simpson, Coordinator Ecosystem Services for Texas A&M Forest Service. State Rep. Trent Ashby presided at one of the sessions, and U.S. Rep. Louis Gohmert spoke.

TFA has celebrated the century mark in many ways, including a ceremonial tree planting to mark the occasion. The tree is a Shumard Oak, planted in memory of Loren Leroy Bishop, first Forest Supervisor of the National Forests in Texas and the first Executive Secretary for Texas Forestry Association. Lufkin Mayor Bob Brown will be one of the speakers.

The **Hardin County Hike and Bike Trail Ribbon Cutting** was held October 17, 2014, at 10:30 AM in Kountze at the beginning

of the trail next to Kountze Big Thicket Trade Days. Those attending included Judge Billy Caraway, Rep. James White, Tucker Ferguson from TXDOT, Marc Shephard from TXDOT, Kountze Mayor Fred Williams, representatives from the Southeast Texas Bike Coalition, Big Thicket Supt. Douglas Neighbor, Kountze Chamber president Natosha Brown and other Chamber members. After the ribbon cutting many rode the trail.

Hardin County Historical Commission's annual Awards Luncheon is scheduled for Thursday Nov. 13, 11:30 at the County Seat Music Hall in Kountze. The speaker will be Susan Shine Kilcrease, whose topic is the Historic Downtown Silsbee Project.



A ribbon cutting ceremony was held in Kountze for the Hardin County Hike and Bike Trail. After the ribbon cutting, many rode the trail.



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Saratoga, TX 77585-0198

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

Big Thicket Reporter

published bimonthly 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 States 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

BTA Newsletters

Back in 1969, the BTA started a newsletter to keep members informed. The first issue of the *Big Thicket Bulletin* was May 1969 – at first mimeographed and later printed in cooperation with the *Liberty Gazette* until 1981. From 1981 to 1994, membership newsletters carried various titles and editors.

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 BTA reorganized in November 1994, the *Reporter* became the Association newsletter. We believe that the *Reporter* has served a useful function.

Recording BTA history has been rewarding—meeting and working with everyone from neighbors to scientists/writers/conservationists/legislators—who supported BTA efforts for a Big Thicket National Preserve, who encouraged establishment of state parks, and who worked with others to encourage private preservation projects.

Saying goodbye to our readers is a difficult task, but advancing ages suggest it is time to fold up the tent. We are certain that the Association will continue—and hopefully surpass—efforts to keep you informed. Thanks for all the memories!

—Maxine Johnston, Editor