



BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE 133



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Minor Boundary Revision Grows Preserve

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By 2017 BTA President Kathy Smartt

The Executive Committee's cooperation during the transition period has been very helpful in bringing me up to speed, and I want to thank them for their time.

On January 14, the Quarterly Meeting established the areas of direction for my administration as; Membership, Thicket of Diversity, Advocacy, and Goals for BTA.

With membership as a focus, I'd like to ask members to assist BTA in bringing new members into the fold. When you talk to your friends, and they ask what you've been doing, do you bring up BTA? Most of us belong to other organizations that are conservation minded. When you attend meetings or talk with friends share what BTA is doing. Better yet, forward them a copy of this newsletter. It will give you a platform for discussion and maybe even offer some new information for them. Let's find commonality and look for ways that the organization can work with other groups to our mutual benefit.

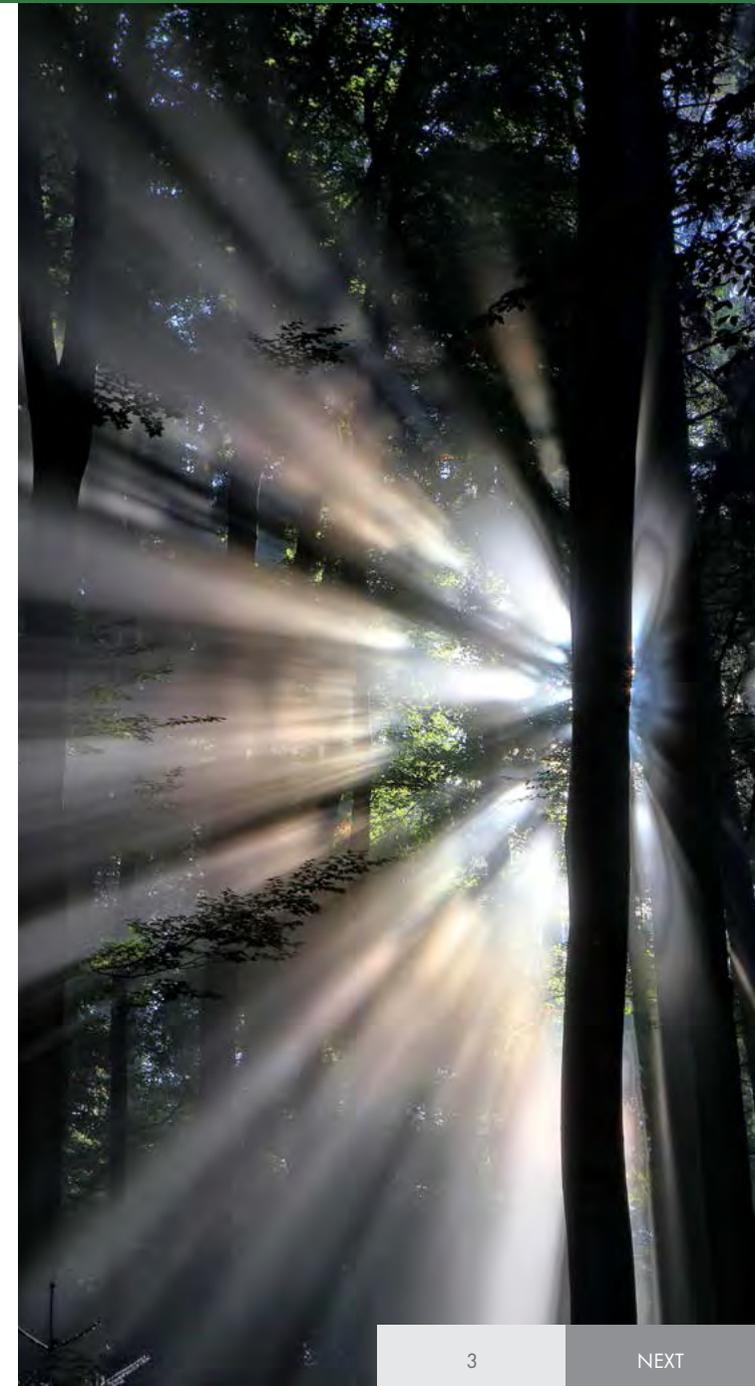
The Nominating Committee (NomCom) is looking for nominees for the next two-year term. Notify the NomCom, if you know of people who would be an asset to BTA on our board. We need your input.

Are there local events in your communities like Dogwood or Mayhaw Festivals where you could set-up a table and promote BTA? Volunteer! We have tables and displays and can help you man an information booth. We need to build up a list of functions where we can reach out. If you have other ideas, let us know.

The Ivory Bill is undergoing annual maintenance out of the water. After running garbage trucks for years, I know that ignoring annual maintenance ends up costing you big bucks for emergency repairs. The outboard motors are being serviced along with the hull coated, and we expect to have it back in the water by the end of February.

Alison Tarter was recently hired as our Lead Environmental Educator to oversee the public, private and education programs of the Ivory Bill, which will be a big help to our Executive Director and association.

The move to the Beaumont office, 700 North Street, Suite 79, has allowed us to be more efficient in use of time and getting volunteers to help in the office. It is closer to many of our members and, if you have time to help, we are working on routines which will allow volunteers to complete short jobs. Call the office at 409-790-5399 to set up a time when you can drop by and work for an hour or two.





BTA NECHES RIVER ADVENTURES HIRES ALISON TARTER AS LEAD ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATOR

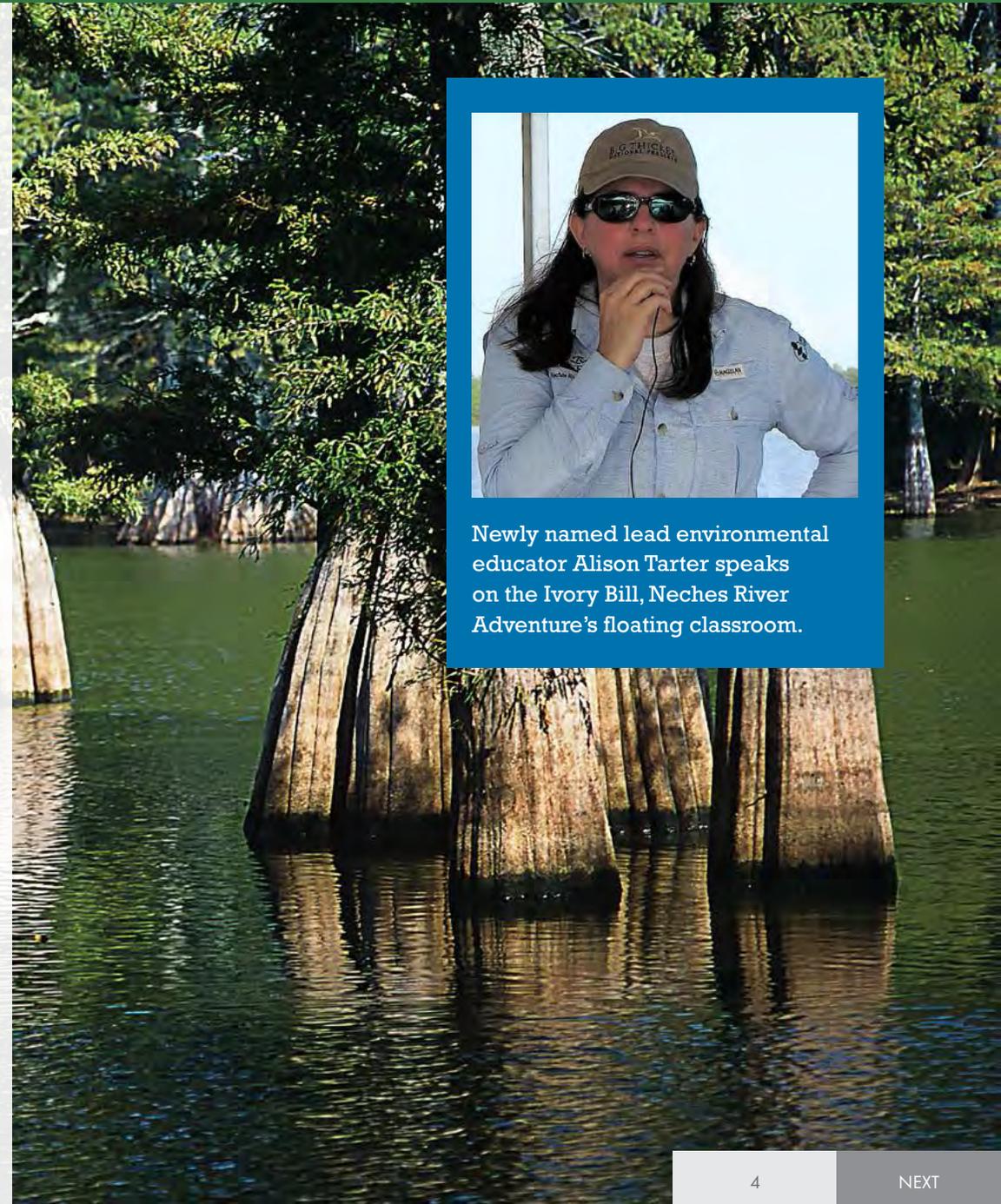
By Bruce Walker

The BTA environmental education program is contracting with Alison Tarter to be the Lead Environmental Educator on the Neches River Adventure floating classroom. Tarter will also take on many of the other duties associated with the Ivory Bill's operations, including reservations, tour scheduling, private charters, and public outreach. She will be an exciting addition to BTA's Saturday Eco-history Tours and school field labs.

Tarter graduated from Bridge City High School and received an undergraduate degree from Steven F. Austin State University with an emphasis on photojournalism. She worked as a park ranger for Travis County, Tex., and as a naturalist for the Lower Colorado River Authority. As a park ranger, Tarter used her knowledge of Texas flora and fauna to lead nature hikes, conduct group GPS activities, and give live animal presentations to visitors. She worked with children in summer camp activities like kayaking, rafting, rock wall climbing, and rope courses, as well as leading discussions about wildlife conservation.

Tarter works as a research assistant for the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment while working on her Masters in aquatic biology at Texas State University in San Marcos. As a researcher, she has extensive knowledge of Texas fish, aquatic invertebrates (including freshwater mussels), aquatic plants, and aquatic systems as a whole. Her special area of research focuses on the spawning habitat and recruitment of Alligator Gar.

As BTA's Lead Environmental Educator, Alison Tarter will serve as the Neches River Ivory Bill Committee Chair and on the Outreach Committee of the Thicket of Diversity. Tarter is an active member of the Sabine Neches Chapter of Texas Master Naturalist. She promises to be an invaluable asset to the Big Thicket Association.



Newly named lead environmental educator Alison Tarter speaks on the Ivory Bill, Neches River Adventure's floating classroom.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

BTA First Sunday in the Month Hikes

March 5, 2017

Village Creek State Park – BTA volunteers. Reservation not required. Meet at 12:30 p.m. at the Village Creek State Park parking lot near the trailhead.

April 2, 2017

Woodlands Trail, Big Thicket National Preserve. Details pending.

May 7, 2017

Big Sandy Trail, Big Thicket National Preserve. Details pending.

June 4, 2017

Beech Creek Unit, Big Thicket National Preserve. Details Pending.

July 2, 2017

Kirby Nature Trail & Sand Hill Loop, Big Thicket National Preserve. Details Pending.

NATURE CONSERVANCY NEWS

By Wendy J. Ledbetter, Forest Program Manager

The Forest Program of the Nature Conservancy is working with the Student Conservation Association on the Gulf Coast Fire Mentoring Program. Financial support for this work came from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation and the five Gulf States Nature Conservancy fire managers from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Managers came together in Jacksonville, Fla. to meet with the participants.

Twenty young adults selected from six southeastern partners: five Job Corps centers and one other youth-focused entity, all work with the Conservancy to help economically disadvantaged young adults. The Conservancy will deploy the students to the five Gulf State fire managers to six locations in five states to serve alongside the Conservancy’s professional fire personnel in a 17- to 20-week mentorship program. The four-person Texas crew will assist in prescribed fire operations and land and water stewardship tasks on the nine preserves of the forest program.

The Texas Society of Ecological Restoration held their November 2016 Conference in Livingston, Tex. Participants visited the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary for a field tour accompanied by Shawn Benedict, SE Texas Preserve Manager, and Zach Breitenstein, SE Texas Preserve Technician. Wendy Ledbetter, Forest Program Manager, served as the keynote speaker at the conference presented an overview of the historical, cultural, and ecological significance of the West Gulf Coastal Plain’s longleaf pine system.

The Nature Conservancy completed a two-year National Fish & Wildlife Foundation project in the Sandyland Preserve that included: 3,200 acres of prescribed burn, 545 acres of chemical and mechanical treatment to control shrub encroachment, 185 acres of reforestation with containerized longleaf pine seedlings, 3,200 pinehill bluestem grass seedling plants, and the broadcast of 15 pounds of regionally collected pinehill bluestem seeds. The work provided matching funds to secure a Longleaf Implementation Team leader, Kent Evans, a private contractor, who will serve in the statewide effort to advance longleaf pine conservation.

Editor’s Note: More on Longleaf Pines

Recently, an article in the Texas CO-OP Power, an online Texas Electric Cooperatives magazine featured the “Long Live the Longleaf,” efforts to nurture the heritage vegetation. Written by LaDawn Fletcher this in-depth look at the Texas A&M Forest Service work can be found at <http://www.texascoopower.com/texas-stories/nature-outdoors/longlive-the-longleaf>.

We mention this because the article cites the pioneering work of Wendy Ledbetter from the Nature Conservancy. “Wendy Ledbetter has been working with the Nature Conservancy on the longleaf initiative for almost 25 years and has seen how working with the landowner’s goals in mind has helped move many stakeholders toward more successful conservation.”

“If they are a timber investment management group, they are managing property for clients to achieve a financial return,” Ledbetter says. “While they may have biological objectives and goals, they also have an obligation to meet financial goals. That puts additional obligations on them,” she says. “Within this group, we are trying to find what can we agree on.”

“Within the last several years, the support, funding and attention given to the longleaf ecosystem from federal funding to private funding has increased. Everybody is communicating more, and the resources and knowledge are being shared.”

Please take the time to look up this article and congrats Wendy.



PRESERVE ADVENTURES WITH MAXINE JOHNSTON

By Ellen Buchanan, Director Big Thicket of Natural Heritage Trust

It was a beautiful mid-October day in the Big Thicket. Randy and Cristi Beehn, Ellen Buchanan, and Maxine Johnston met at the Kirby Nature Trail in the Turkey Creek Unit on an adventure to find the Sternberg Tract. Maxine knew the property and visited several times before it became part of the Preserve. The tract is located down one of the creek drainages off the trail and adjacent to Village Creek, which is covered with hardwood trees opening into a spectacular grove of cypress trees. The sight of the cypress within the Sternberg Tract and along the trail made the hike worthwhile. You can read more about the Sternberg Tract in the Bonney Guidebook, Page 593.



*Photo: (Left to right) Randy Beehn, Maxine Johnston, and Cristi Beehn on the trail.
Credit: Ellen Buchanan*

News from BTA Nominating Committee Seeks Input

The Big Thicket Association Nominating Committee: Penny Clark, Carol Pierce, and Dale Parish are seeking nominations for new board members. If you know of someone conservation-minded who appreciates the Big Thicket and would like to work with us during the next two years, we need nominations and resumes for the 2018-2019 term. We are interested in people with program management experience, volunteer coordination experience, legal experience, woodland management experience, computer instruction experience, and boat experience.

NomCom Members can be contacted at
dale.m.parish@gmail.com

Or, visit the BTA website at
<http://bigthicket.org/about/officers-and-board>



MINOR BOUNDARY REVISION GROWS PRESERVE BY 672.60 ACRES

By Ellen Buchanan, Director Big Thicket of Natural Heritage Trust

At the end of 2016, the National Park Service received a donation of six properties totaling 672.60 acres for inclusion into the Big Thicket National Preserve. The Conservation Fund, The Nature Conservancy, and the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust donated the resources as well as one individual. Four additional properties, totaling 145.11 acres are waiting in the technicality queue for donation. The properties are located in Canyonlands, Turkey Creek Unit, Village Creek Corridor, Little Pine Island Bayou Corridor, and the Beaumont Unit. The properties contribute rich resources; add buffers and close key gaps in the Preserve boundary.



2016 ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THICKET OF DIVERSITY

By Mary C. Johnston

For the last ten years, the Thicket of Diversity, of the Big Thicket Association, worked to implement vital species monitoring and to promote scientific research on the biodiversity of the Big Thicket. The ToD identifies non-native species or other threats to the Big Thicket and monitors rare species in the hope of expanding recovery efforts in protected areas. All information collected helps to determine the effects of climate change in contribution to the National Park Service 2010 Climate Change Response Strategy.



THICKET OF DIVERSITY 2016 MILESTONES:

By April 2016, the ToD inventoried 2,914 species in an All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory, including 378 species that are new to the Preserve, 133 species that are new to the state, and 14 that are new to science.

This includes 1,326 Lepidoptera species; butterflies and moths, along with some partial nematode data; worms. Additionally, Dr. Neil Ford's multi-year project collected 861 mussel specimens of which six are considered State Threatened. All information is cataloged in the Integration of Resource Management Applications, or IRMA, which is a searchable database offering a variety of applications and information for researchers.

The ToD involves national and international researchers along with service volunteers who stay at the Big Thicket National Preserve's Field Research Station (FRS) in Saratoga. The FRS serves as a home base for visiting scientists and as a meeting place for public outreach. FRS hosted Texas State University, San Marcos, in January 2016 to mist-net birds and trap small mammals for research. Volunteers from St. Michael's College and The Nature Conservancy's fire team used the facility along with the Dallas Zoo volunteers.

In February and March, the FRS hosted Park Service workers for day use, University of Central Oklahoma students to conduct an ecology class, Houston Zoo volunteers to plant trees, members

of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center to inventory invasive plants, and University of Texas researchers to conduct air quality monitoring.

Through April and May, FRS supported a graduate-level field trip to study wetlands by Tarleton State University students. Later, Sam Houston State University held a herpetology field trip while members of the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory lodged there to count birds. Throughout the summer, the FRS housed the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Sam Houston State University students, Wetlands and Aquatic Research Center researchers studying cypress trees in the swamp lands, and Colorado State University students who conducted a vegetation



inventory.

In August, the ToD Director submitted a request to extend Texas Parks and Wildlife to fund the publication of the 2015 Big Thicket Science Conference, “Biodiversity and Ecology of the West Gulf Coastal Plain Landscape.” It was accepted, and selected papers on Big Thicket research will be available for viewing online.

Through September and October, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife, staff of the Big Thicket National Preserve staff, and ToD researchers assisted Rice University students in a mini-bioblitz. At that time, the Big Thicket Association moved its office location from Saratoga to Beaumont, and the Thicket of Director moved her office into the FRS to be closer to the scientists.

Finally, FRS activities in November and December included students of Texas A&M, Corpus Christi to volunteer in service in the preserve.

THICKET OF DIVERSITY PUBLIC EDUCATION

The ToD’s goal is to promote the preserve and develop a greater public commitment to the Big Thicket National Preserve. In 2016, the ToD sponsored an annual science cafe featuring Leta Parker, a retired Big Thicket National Preserve

employee, who said, “Science Cafes were fashioned after international science cafes. It was to make science available in a casual environment and to make science available to more people.” The March crawfish science café led by Dr. Zachary Loughman, West Virginia University, was held at the Logon Café in Beaumont reaching an audience of approximately 35 people.

Two hikes in 2016 hosted by the ToD and David Lewis, President of the Gulf States Mycological Society led the mushroom forays in the Watson Rare Plant Reserve. Lewis partnered with international researcher, Dr. Bart Buyck, of France. Buyck is an authority on the genus *Cantharellus*, prized for its edibility. Buyck’s inventory project on mushrooms completed in 2016 described five new species of Chanterelles in East Texas, including *Cantharellus texensis*, a species originally described in the Lance Rosier Unit of the Preserve. Eddie Realzola, Sam Houston University, led an invasive plant walk for roughly 15 hikers in the Kirby Nature Trail.

In October, the ToD and Dr. Scott Solomon of Rice University brought students to conduct a mini-bioblitz for their Biological Diversity course. Approximately, 32 inaturalist volunteers connected with the student-experts to collect data on 3,839 observations and 846 identified species.

For more information see (<http://www.inaturalist.org/projects/2016-national-parks-bioblitz-big-thicket-mini-bioblitz>)

Also in October, the ToD and Kountze High School brought together building trade students to construct a bat house and presented it to the Park Service as part of Bat Conservation International’s Bat Awareness Week. Kountze ISD and the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust bussed 23 middle and high school students to plant 11,000 longleaf seedlings tree planting in the Centennial Forest (NPS). The ToD helped to bring Dr. Jonathan Hook, a keynote speaker at the 2016 Paris Climate Change Conference and author of *The Alabama-Coushatta Indians* to make five presentations to approximately 250 students. Hook shared a strong message of community to bring a holistic approach to understanding the needs of Mother Earth from a Native American perspective.

The ToD participated in the NPS Centennial Celebration at the Big Thicket Day hosted at the Preserve’s Visitor Center. An information booth with a new canopy and banner manned by Director Mona Halvorsen introduced the ToD’s goals and accomplishments to roughly 350 people.





THICKET OF DIVERSITY FUNDING AND RESEARCH

Funding for the ToD in 2016 was made possible by the Brown Foundation, Dr. Carl Knight, Carol Pierce, and individual donations. It is provided, in part, with penalty monies from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) enforcement action. The FRS is managed under an agreement with the Big Thicket Association and the Big Thicket National Preserve, which provides \$13,558 annually along with financial support for the mini-bioblitz and the cataloging of historical aquatic data under Dr. Richard Harrel of Lamar University.

For more information visit <http://www.thicketofdiversity.org/science/information-for-scientists/>

RESEARCH PROJECTS COMPLETED IN 2016:

Dr. Scott Solomon, Rice University, “Student Investigations of Biological Diversity in the Big Thicket.”

Dr. Neil Ford, University of Texas at Tyler, “Surveys of freshwater mussels of 9 units of the Big Thicket Preserve.”

Dr. Paul Tinerella, research of Entomologist MN, “Continued Biotic Survey: Aquatic True Bugs (Insecta: Heteroptera: Nemopha, Gerromorpha, Leptopodomorpha) and Aquatic Beetles (Insecta: Coleoptera) of the Big Thicket National Preserve, Texas, USA.”

Dr. Bart Buyck, Museum National d’Histoire Naturelle, Paris, France, “Root symbiotic fungi: key players in the forest ecosystems of the Big Thicket.”

Dr. Thomas Powers, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, “Baseline Inventory of Freelifving and Plant-Parasitic Nematodes of the Big Thicket National Preserve.”

ACTIVE TCEQ PROJECTS:

Eddie Realzola, Sam Houston State University, “Survey and Inventory of Gyrinids in Big Thicket Wetlands.”

Dr. Zachary Loughman, West Virginia University, “Crawfish Surveys of the Big Thicket National Preserve.”

Dr. Thomas Powers, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, “New Species Descriptions from Big Thicket National Preserve.”

Dr. Scott Solomon, Rice University, “Ant Community Dynamics in the Big Thicket National Preserve.”

Dr. Daniel J. Bennett & Dr. John Pascarella, Stephen F. Austin State University, “Bees of the Big Thicket National Preserve (Insecta: Hymenoptera: Apoidea).”

Dr. Matthew I. Pyne, Lamar University, “Population Survey of American Alligators within the Big Thicket National Preserve.”



CENTENNIAL FOREST LONGLEAF PINE PLANTING 2017

Photo: Martin Luther King Day, Jan. 18 volunteer crew of longleaf pine planters.

Reforestation of longleaf pine stands in the Southeast Texas Big Thicket National Preserve is a long-term project – decades long. Once large stands of longleaf pines adorned the region, but logging, wildfire, and economic development thinned those majestic woods.

Restoration efforts in the Big Thicket National Preserve included a partnership with the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), the National Park Service (NPS), and armies of volunteers who have been planting longleaf pine seedlings for many years.

On Martin Luther King Day, Jan. 18, 2017, that army descended on the Centennial Forest in the Preserve for the eighth year. Erika Pelletier, NPCA Texas program manager, welcomed the roughly 80 volunteers from the Magnolia Garden Club, the Houston Garden Club, the Big Thicket Association, the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, the Sierra Club, St.

Michael's College MOVE group, The Dallas Zoo, and a raft of NPS personnel.

“Many rare and endangered species make their homes in longleaf forests, including the red-cockaded woodpecker, the Louisiana pine snake, and the Texas trailing phlox. Bringing back the longleaf pine means a better future for a variety of animals and plants,” she said.

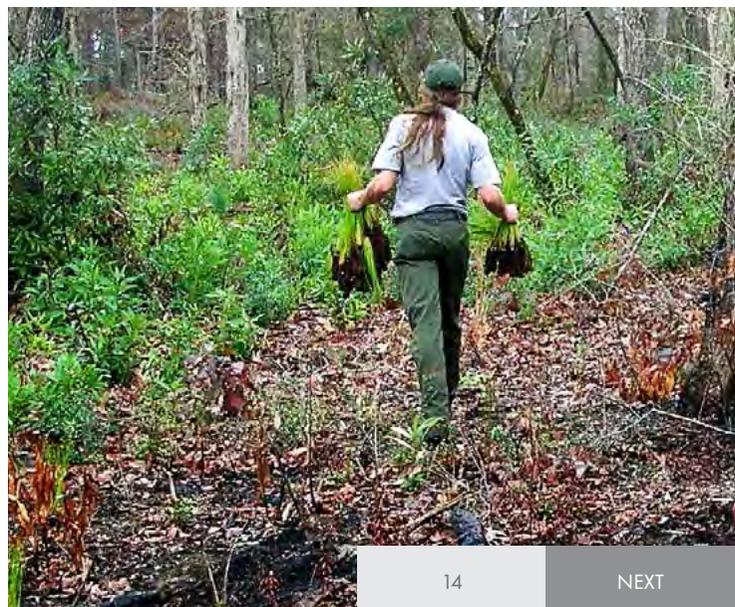
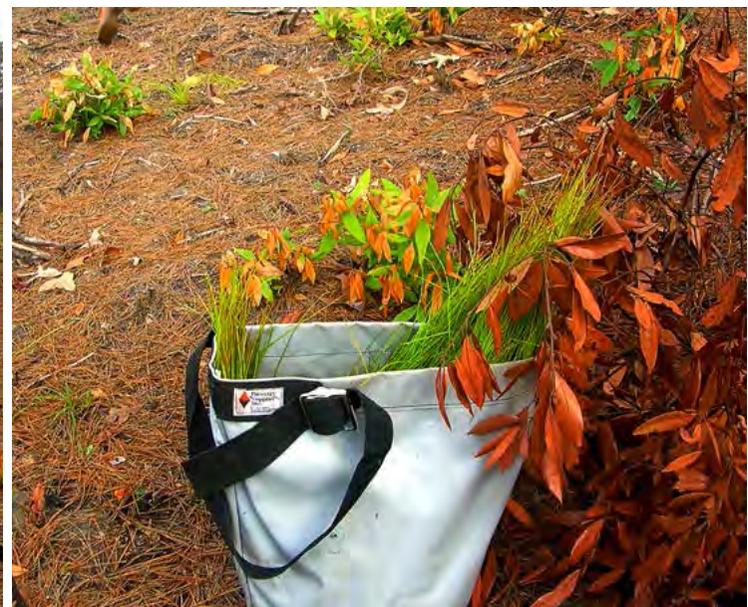
NPS Big Thicket Superintendent Wayne Prokopetz greeted the helpers saying that the effort to bring about longleaf pine reforestation has been a 20-year goal in the making.

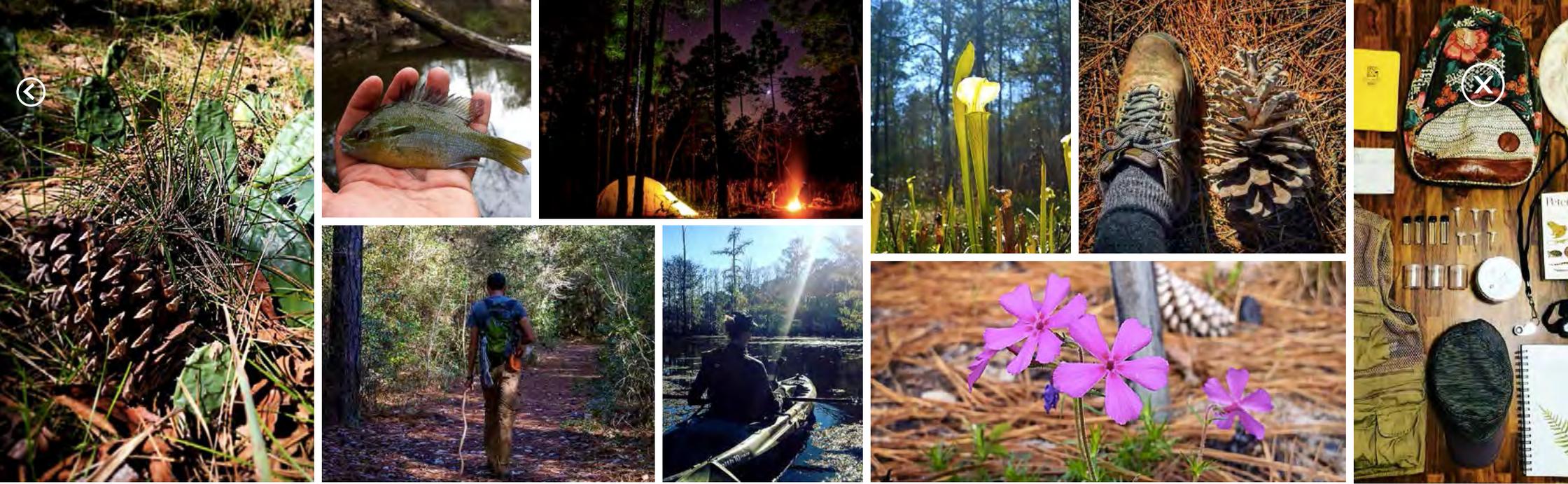
“Last year, was the first planting of our Centennial Forest with the ultimate goal of planting 100,000 trees. We did a business management plan, completed the prescribed the burn, and prepped the land for planting. With your help today, we planted 10,000 trees,” he said.



Special recognition of the Spanish live oak seen in the backdrop of the St. Michael's volunteers which was planted by Lance Rosier's grandfather Tom Jordan in 1861. Volunteers (left to right) in front of the live oak are: Evan Guera, Austin Flueckiger, Fallon Tierney, Phung Pham, Hannah St. Don, Zachary Minor, Meghan Feenan, Anita Curtis, Big Thicket Resource Chief Herbert Young, and Risa Berman.







BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

Partner in Preservation

#BIGTHICKET





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WEB SITES

Big Thicket Association
www.bigthicket.org

Big Thicket National Preserve
www.nps.gov/bthn

East Texas Black Bear Task Force
www.bttf.org

Conservation Fund
www.conservationfund.org

Gulf States Mycological Society
www.gsmso.org

National Audubon Society
www.goldentriangleaudubon.org
www.houstonaudubon.org

National Parks Conservation Association
www.npsa.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.sierraclub.org/goldentriangle

Texas Conservation Alliance
www.texascons.org

Village Creek State Park
www.texasstateparks.com

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.

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