



# BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE 136



PARTNER IN PRESERVATION

Start



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# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by *Kathy Smartt*

It is my honor to report that the Big Thicket Association and National Preserve weathered Hurricane Harvey's wrath with minimal damage. This quarter has been challenging for members who suffered personal loss from the storm, and we hope life will return to normal for them soon.

The Ivory Bill survived Hurricane Harvey with only a few cosmetic blemishes, but thanks to Bruce the Ivory Bill was spared severe damage. Bruce was able to get to the marina to prepare the boat for the incoming storm. Afterwards, Big Thicket Association hired a welder to do some repairs, bringing the Ivory Bill back to seaworthiness.

I am excited to share our new, convenient Monthly Giving Program. This program allows you to conveniently spread your BTA donation throughout the year. Or, if you prefer to make a one-time donation right now, mail a check to the BTA Beaumont Office, or log-on to our web site under "Support" and make a secure donation-Support /Big Thicket with your Donation, visit our web site <http://bigthicket.org/support-bta/donations/>.

Remember that BTA depends on the generosity of our members and donors to fund our conservation and educational programs. Even though the damages to the Ivory Bill were minimal, two of our "income producing" programs were greatly impacted by Hurricane Harvey. We were forced to cancel our 2018 fundraiser, Neches River Rally, and the Neches River Adventures program was down for 49 days. I am asking that you consider us with your donations.



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT: NECHES RIVER ADVENTURES

by **Bruce Walker**

This year has been challenging; the greatest being “weather related issues” due to heavy spring rains followed by the record breaking amounts of rain produced by Hurricane Harvey.

Climatologists say Harvey was the worst rainfall event in the country’s history. The National Weather Service confirmed a record of 64.58 inches of rain fell in Nederland during Harvey’s five-day onslaught.

The associated flooding inflicted major damage to the Beaumont Marina where the Ivory Bill is moored and shut-down the Neches River Adventures program for 49 days. We canceled seven Public Tours, seven Private Charters, and two School Labs.

The Ivory Bill suffered relatively minor damage mostly due to the overhead canopy. The biggest loss was the over eight feet of water in the boat’s storage unit, which split the unit open and floated the roof and its contents down river. We lost over \$6,000 in PFD’s and roughly \$2,000 in school supplies. The Ivory Bill fared well compared to many other boats in the marina that broke from their moorings and were heavily damaged, capsized, or sunk.

Beaumont’s Riverfront Park was totally destroyed and will be closed indefinitely. Collier’s Ferry Park also closed due to flooding, although it now open with newly replaced boat docks and piers. Both parks play a key role in our Neches River Adventures program as access points to the River and the Beaumont Unit of Big Thicket National Preserve.

The good news is that the program is still strong despite recent setbacks. The season for the Saturday Public Tours has now ended, although we are still booking Private Charters and Environmental Education Classes while the weather holds. We are taking reservations for Charters and School Classes for Spring 2018.

Since 2013, we’ve taken 6,712 students on our “floating classroom” from each of the seven counties of the Big Thicket Region. We have hosted 8,380 Eco-History passages into the Big Thicket via the Neches River. A total of 15,092 students and tour passengers.

Since 2015, the program has generated over \$217,000 in grant and corporate income and has produced over \$58,000 in fees for public and private tours with supporting funds from corporate partners: LNVA, TOATL Inc, West Rock, BASF, and Port of Beaumont. We have received foundation grants from TLL Temple, National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF), H.E. Dishman, H.H. Houseman, East Texas Communities Foundation and others.

The Neches River Rally 2017, our only fundraising event, was canceled and the dedication of our new paddling trail into the Big Thicket, “Collier’s Ferry to Lake Bayou” is delayed until next year.

Many of our friends, members, volunteers, and NPS associates suffered significant losses. We are mindful of their loss and pray that all are recovering. Southeast Texas demonstrated the strength and will to pull together when the need arose. We are proud of the region and especially, of our Big Thicket community.





## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

### **Sunday, December 17, 2017**

Longleaf Forest Hike in the longleaf pine forest restoration area of the preserve in the Big Sandy Creek Unit, start at 10 am. Please call the visitor center at (409) 951-6700 to register and information.

### **Wednesday, December 27, 2017**

Canoe Trip with park rangers guided on the waters of the preserve, 10 am. For the casual and novice paddler. Canoes, PFDs and paddles provided. Trip locations vary and space is limited, so call the visitor center at (409) 951-6700 to register.

### **Wednesday, January 31, 2018**

Full Moon Night Hike starts on 6 pm. See the Big Thicket under a full moon. Hike locations vary and space is limited, so call the visitor center at (409) 951-6700 to register.

## ANNUAL ELECTIONS OF BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION DIRECTORS

The ballots for the Big Thicket Association annual election of officers was delayed because of damages suffered by Tropical Storm Harvey. Ballots and envelopes were destroyed and had to be redone.

The mailing lists from the different programs that keep track of email addresses, donations, and payments did not reconcile – nor did they show life memberships with any age on them. President Kathy Smartt has made a commitment to have this corrected going into the new year. If you did not get a ballot, we apologize.

Nominees for the two officers positions: Wendy Ledbetter, Secretary, and Mary Catherine Johnston, Treasurer, were both elected.

Incumbents reelected to the board: Randy Beehn (alphabetically), Pete Gunter, Dale Parish, Charles Smith, and James Westgate.

New directors elected to the board: Alcien Beth Flosi, Amiee Lieby, Terrie Looney, Robin Troy, and Karen Warren.

Based on the attendance reported by the secretary, one director elected last year did not attend any meetings in 2017. According to Section 4 of Article V, this position should be declared vacant and a replacement director should be appointed by the President to be approved by the Board of Directors.

The 2017 Nominating Committee included Penny Clark; Chair, Carol Pierce, and Dale Parish.

## NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY

### Picking up trash in the Big Thicket National Preserve

By Mary Bernard

After Hurricane Harvey's devastation, many of the Big Thicket's supporters were anxious to clear debris from the launch areas and waterways as soon as possible.

On Saturday, Sept. 29, 2017, volunteers came together to clear trash on National Public Lands Day in two day-use areas of the Big Thicket National Preserve.

Clean-up efforts were organized by Preserve personnel who posted the request on Facebook bringing in volunteers from the Big Thicket Association, the Big Thicket National Preserve, the Texas Master Naturalists, and the Golden Triangle Sierra Club.

Armed with gloves, grabbers, and shovels the crew cleared flood debris at the Cooks Lake Day-Use-Area and the Edgewater Trail units which was piled high ready to be hauled away.

Mounds of trash were collected by the team from in and around the trees along Pine Island Bayou.

The National Public Lands Day is designed to give volunteers a chance to connect with the lands they love by tidying up recreation areas, but Harvey's collected flood debris surpassed any amount of trash gathered on a normal year.

What makes this year's clean-up all the more poignant is that some of the participants were affected personally by the storm. And yet, all the volunteers said the time spent clearing debris in the Big Thicket National Preserve was time well-spent.

Guess it's true: when it comes to conservation "doing leads to caring," as Benjamin Jones, Dean Dallas Zoo's Wild Earth Academy said.

The group vowed to return before the next National Public Lands Day to help keep recreational areas of the Big Thicket clean.



# DOING leads to CARING

By Benjamin Jones, Dean of Wild Earth Academy, Dallas Zoo

We've just celebrated 43 years of the Big Thicket National Preserve. I am grateful for the conservation champions who fought to preserve this special place. To all those involved, thank you for saving this treasure for all of us.

I sometimes wonder, "who will care when we're gone?" Who will care for the long leaf pines, the pitcher plants, the cypress knees, red-cockaded woodpeckers, and the box turtles?

**Environmental Degradation:** organizations like ours strive to save species and protect the beautiful places we have left. We work to get people to care. But evidence is showing that the presumptive route from knowledge to caring to action may be a dead-end. Our emphasis on knowledge, awareness, and caring could be misplaced.

**Doing Leads to Caring:** some organizations are starting with action. They lead with behavior and let the caring take care of itself. A doing versus caring approach is emphasized through productive and active investment such as: habitat restoration, reforestation, and invasive species removal. Involvement is the best way to promote involvement. Doing leads to caring.

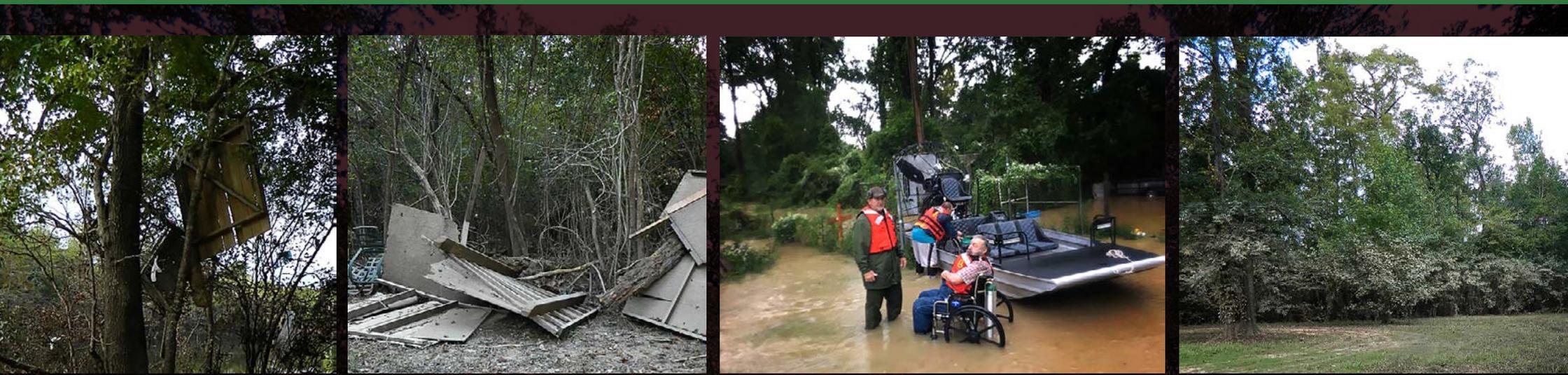
**Opportunities for Doing:** much of our work to cultivate caring omits the most proven recipe of doing. We often default to talks and presentations. The challenge is to offer an opportunity to do and to be physically involved. It's a challenge in today's hyper-litigious environment with the pervading and often hysterical drive for total risk management. We've managed risk so effectively that our kids have never been more obese and more emotionally and physically debilitated than ever before. Few organizations offer action-based opportunities because of a fear of lawsuits and because such



opportunities require a lot of planning and effort. The sad irony is that this approach is the most effective route to cultivating a caring ethic. If we want people to care about the Big Thicket, we need to continue to offer creek and trail clean-ups, hikes, invasive plant removal, habitat restoration, planting trees, boat and kayak trips, and hands-on environmental classes for area students. These opportunities are designed to entice people to care for our Big Thicket. That's when the caring comes.

I'm grateful for the conservation heroes who stood up for this extraordinary place. Who are the Big Thicket conservation heroes of tomorrow? Who's introducing today's youth – so urbanized and culturally detached from nature – to this unique place? Who'll care when we're gone?

If you're like me, you dream about the Big Thicket's future. I lie in my bed in Dallas and count the days until I'm in the woods again. I dream of bear tracks in the sand along Village Creek and Turkey Creek and White Oak Creek. But it takes a lot more than dreaming and a lot more than caring to secure the future as the founders and champions of these amazing 113,000 acres can attest. It takes doing.



*Flood debris shows the height of the water in Cooks Lake DUA.*

*Harvey flood debris deposited at the Cooks Lake Day Use Area.*

*BITH Ranger Hughes assisted Texas officials in rescue operations.*

*Water line marked by the dull green vegetation shows the height of the flood.*

## BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE NEWS

The response to Hurricane Harvey by the Big Thicket National Preserve management and staff was nothing short of excellent.

“We are pleased to report that all park employees are safe,” Big Thicket NP Superintendent Wayne Prokopetz said, speaking at the last quarterly meeting on Oct. 14.

None of the park buildings were damaged, although damage to the preserve’s infrastructure was significant in some areas.

The timeline of events began with the closure of the preserve on Aug. 25, allowing staff to prepare the facility for Harvey and give them time to prepare their

dwellings.

“On Aug. 29, the BITH Type 3 Incident Management Team stood up supported by the Intermountain Region Incident Management Team on Sept. 2,” he said.

Throughout the storm, BITH personnel assisted their neighbors in rescue and recovery operations.

After the storm three days later, the park opened to the public with limited access and the Intermountain Region team demobilized.

“On Sept. 25, the Intermountain Region Damage Assessment Team arrived in the preserve,” he said.

The final determination found that only 22 miles of trail of the total 40-plus miles in the preserve were accessible.

The following trails remain closed: Turkey Creek Trail between Pitcher Plant and the damaged metal bridge over Turkey Creek, the Outer Loop of the Kirby Nature Trail, and approximately seven miles of the Big Sandy Trail with just first two miles open.

Two roads in the Lance Rosier Unit: Cotton Road and Teel Road, need repair due to wash-out conditions.



## BIG THICKET AUTHORS

Annual Big Thicket Day, Oct. 14, featured book signing by Big Thicket authors. Hosted by the Big Thicket National Preserve and the Big Thicket Association the authors signed books at the Preserve's Visitor Center north of Kountze. Participating authors are: Wanda Landrey (left to right), Adrian Van Dellen, Roy Phillip, Jr., and Gina Donovan. Participating but not pictured are: Dr. Pete A.Y. Gunter, Thad Sitton, Michael Gracey, and Jerry Craven.



# THICKET OF DIVERSITY

## DR. BETH MIDDLETON SPEAKS ABOUT VANISHING CYPRESS SWAMPS IN TEXAS

*By Mary C. Johnston*

Dr. Beth Middleton of the US Geological Survey Wetland and Aquatic Research Center in Lafayette, La., was a guest presenter to 150 Kountze High School students.

She shared information on American Baldcypress Swamps and the Impacts of Climate Change. Dr. Middleton is President Elect of the Society of Wetland Scientists and a USGS Researcher. She has researched cypress swamps, monsoonal wetlands, mangrove swamps and floodplain wetlands in sites all over the world.

Dr. Middleton has noted that salinity is devastating cypress swamps. Cypress trees in Texas are not regenerating.

The death rate for trees shorter than 30 feet is very high, and there are few seedlings or saplings. Salinity is not as serious in Louisiana where elevation is higher, and trees appear healthier and grow faster.

Dr. Middleton encouraged students to begin thinking about the whole river concept and whole problem analysis. She stressed the need to improve group problem solving skills as this will be an important skill needed to address the problem of climate change.

Dr. Middleton's team is compiling multi-year research in the Big Thicket National Preserve. She was invited by the Thicket of Diversity's Mona Halvorsen and Kountze ISD's Mary C. Johnston. Her presentation begins the educational outreach for 2017-18 funded through the Brown Foundation to the Big Thicket Association.

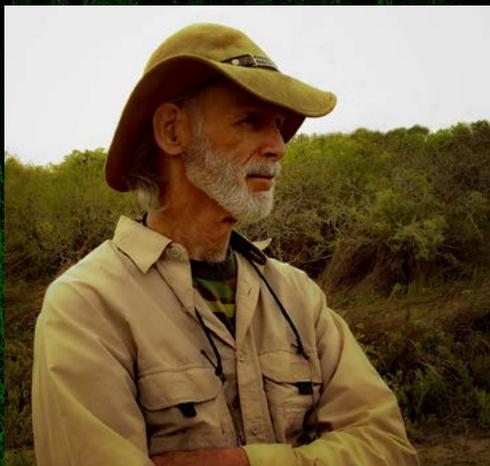




## BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION AWARDS THREE CONSERVATIONISTS AT BIG THICKET DAY CELEBRATION

*By Mary Catherine Johnston and Mary Bernard*

The Big Thicket Association has a 53-year commitment to the preservation of the history, culture, and environs of the Big Thicket in Southeast Texas. Over time, many people contributed substantively to the creation of the Big Thicket National Preserve and have since supported its existence in conservation. Among these the Big Thicket Association recognized three local stand-outs this year at the Big Thicket Day on Oct. 14, 2017, in Kountze.



**R.E. Jackson Conservation Award** recognizes Silsbee resident Adrian Van Dellen, who is a well-known preservationist involved in the establishment of an Upper Neches Wild and Scenic River designation. Van Dellen's work is showcased in his photographic essay book "Let the River Run Wild – Saving the Neches." Van Dellen also co-authored a Neches River User Guide with Gina Donovan and remains as president of the nonprofit, Neches River Watershed Sentinels. In 2017, He became Chairman of the Texas Black Bear Alliance.



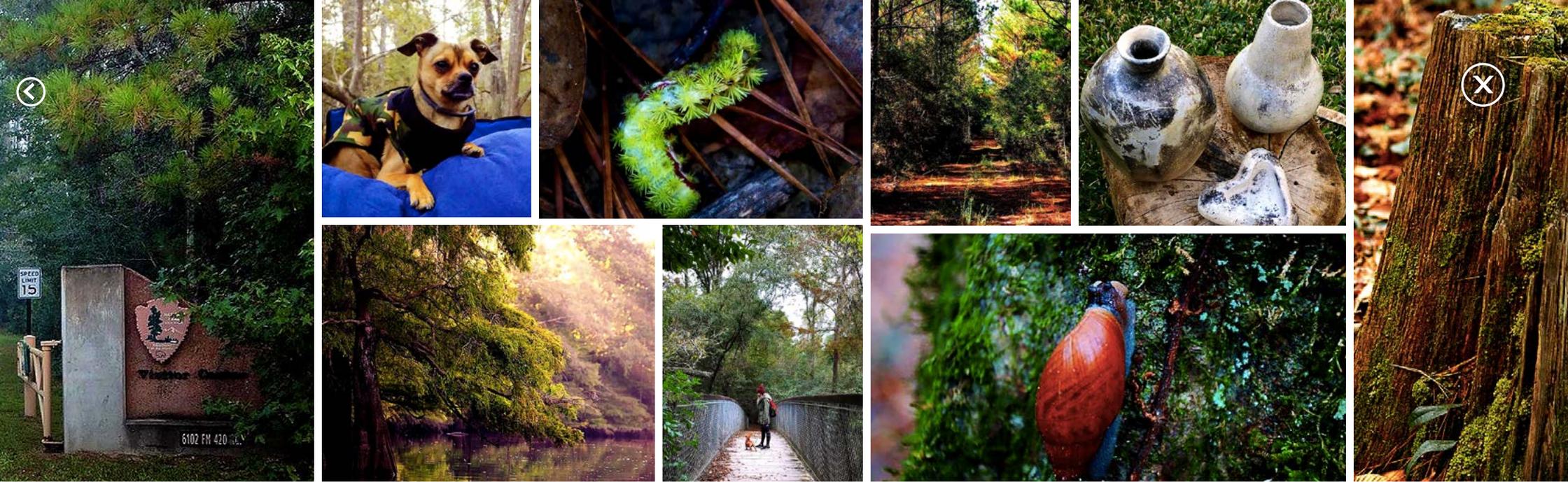
# CONGRATULATIONS



**Thomas Lubbert Superior Achievement Award** honors Davin “DW” Ivans, the Prescribed Fire Specialist at the Big Thicket National Preserve. Ivans graduated in 1984 with a bachelor of science degree in Forest Management from Stephen F. Austin State University, working as a forester with Kirby and Louisiana Pacific timber companies. Ivans joined the National Park Service in 2002 and has since stewarded the land using his forestry training to make site specific prescriptions for Preserve lands. His is a recognized leader in national park’s fire management, serving Zion National Park, Glacier National Park, Mesa Verde National Park, in the Guadalupe Mountains and Big Bend National Park.



**Maxine Johnston Distinguished Service Award** acknowledges the contribution of J. A. McKim III, Chair of the Hardin County Historical Commission, in placing Texas Historical Commission markers at numerous cemeteries, churches, and local historic places. He also supported work of the Hardin County Genealogical Society to establish the Museum of Hardin County in the old bank building. As owner of Hooks Title & Abstract Company, established in 1902, McKim has extensive knowledge of local history. Working with the Big Thicket National Preserve and the Big Thicket Association, McKim has managed land sales to the Preserve, including the Saratoga property purchased in 1964 and transferred in 1995. Today, he works with the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust to transfer donated property to the Big Thicket National Preserve. McKim has consistently supported preservation of Big Thicket history and is to be commended for his years of public service and significant accomplishments.



# BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

*Partner in Preservation*

#BIGTHICKET





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## WEB SITES

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

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

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

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

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

National Audubon Society  
[www.goldentriangleaudubon.org](http://www.goldentriangleaudubon.org)  
[www.houstonaudubon.org](http://www.houstonaudubon.org)

National Parks Conservation Association  
[www.npsca.org](http://www.npsca.org)

Native Plant Society of Texas  
[www.npsot.org](http://www.npsot.org)

Nature Conservancy  
[www.nature.org/tx](http://www.nature.org/tx)

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

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

Texas Conservation Alliance  
[www.texasconservation.org](http://www.texasconservation.org)

Village Creek State Park  
[www.texasstateparks.com](http://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.

## FOLLOW US

