



BIG THICKET BULLETIN

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BTA Board of Directors Meeting

January 11, 2020

BTA Board of Directors Meeting January 11, Field Research and Learning Station, Saratoga. Current Board members shown: Randy Beehn, Tracy Benson, Michael Black, Penny Clark, Phoebe Dishman, Nick Huckaby, Mary Catherine Johnston, Maxine Johnston, Aimee Lieby, Terrie Looney, Eric Newby, Vicki Newby, Dale Parish, Matt Pyne, Kathy Smartt, Charles Smith, John Stafford, Bruce Walker, Will Watkins, James Westgate, Randy Yoder.

If you are a BTA member and would like to nominate a candidate to the BTA Board of Directors, email the Nominating Committee Chair, Randy Beehn, at Beehner@att.net by May 31, 2020. He will send you a nominations form.



EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY

Job Posting for Executive Director

February 2020

The Big Thicket Association (BTA) is a 501 (c)3 non-profit headquartered in Beaumont, Texas and offers programs that support conservation, preservation, and education in the Big Thicket region. The Executive Director manages these programs under the direction of a Board of Directors with the support of various program committees. BTA is a "Friends Group" to the Big Thicket National Preserve (National Park Service, Department of Interior) headquartered in Kountze, Texas.

The Executive Director is the key management leader of the BTA. The Executive Director is a salaried position responsible for overseeing the administration, programs, and daily operations of the organization. Other key duties include fundraising, marketing, grant writing and community outreach. The position reports directly to the Board of Directors.

Professional Qualifications:

- A bachelor's in Business Administration, Marketing, Finance, or bachelor degree in related field of science with emphasis in management.
- MBA degree is preferred.
- Five or more years senior nonprofit management experience preferred.



To join the Big Thicket Association team:

Email resumes or inquiry to: btajobs18@gmail.com

Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust 2019 Accomplishments

by Mary Catherine Johnston and Ellen Buchanan

The Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust is committed to the protection and conservation of land, water, scenic beauty, plants and wildlife, natural, historic and cultural communities of the Big Thicket. In 2019, the non-profit successfully addressed these goals through partnerships.

A \$20,000 grant from the National Environmental Education Foundation and Toyota Motor North America and \$1,900 from Entergy Texas plus the support of the Big Thicket National Preserve, Kountze ISD, Sabine Neches Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists, Big Thicket Association's Thicket of Diversity, and the National Park Conservation Association facilitated restoration and resilience on Pine Island Bayou following Hurricane Harvey. Debris was removed along a 7.5 mile segment of the bayou. Students explored conservation strategies through service learning and citizen science. Youth participated in a Science Fair, native plantings, the creation of multimedia projects, and assistance in the collection of ants with researcher, Dr. Scott Solomon, of Rice University.

The Trust partnered with the Big Thicket National Preserve (BTNP) to support Public Lands Day and a cleanup at Baby Galvez on Village Creek and longleaf tree planting on the Martin Luther King Day of Service. Trust Directors served as guest speakers at the BTNP's Youth Summit, Leadership Southeast Texas, The Lions Club of Sour Lake, and a Regional Managers Meeting and an Intern Roundup for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Directors educated the public on Proposition 5, a constitutional amendment to fund Texas State Parks and historic sites. An exhibit was shared on Big Thicket Day in October at Colliers Ferry Park.



Sabine Neches Chapter Master Naturalist Nancy Angell works with Kountze Intermediate 4th Graders.

The Trust continued a wetland conservation project with Chemours and The Conservation Fund. The group is working to eventually hold a conservation easement on these mitigation properties and annually monitors the 500 acres. Properties owned by the Trust were surveyed and monitored in preparation for their donation to the National Park Service. To date 271 acres have been acquired by the BTNHT for donation to the Preserve.

A land fund appeal was conducted in December for the acquisition of new lands contiguous to protected properties. These targeted priority lands will reduce fragmentation, expand wildlife corridors and their fragile ecosystems, protect water resources, and mitigate the negative effects of flooding through the expansion of undeveloped wetland areas.

For information on the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, contact President Ellen Buchanan at bigthickettrust@gmail.com.

Community Youth Paddling Program

by Jason A. Ginder, NPS Chief of Interpretation and Education

This winter Big Thicket National Preserve officially launches a dynamic new community based youth paddling program. This program focuses on providing access to under-served populations by inviting local youth organizations such as schools, church youth groups, after-school programs, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA/YWCA, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, 4H groups, youth sports leagues and other recreational, academic and social clubs to participate in a kayak program in the preserve.

Through this effort we strive to promote awareness, access, resource stewardship ethics, and participatory citizenship values by introducing youth from the surrounding communities to the value and importance of federally protected lands, through engaging kayaking adventures in the preserve. All kayak programs have an interpretive component, introduction to paddling skills, volunteer experience through creek clean-up activities and an introduction to the NPS Mission.

The goal of this program is to remove a series of barriers that often prevent under-served communities from participating in park activities. By engaging youth in groups they will travel to the park with their friends and trusted adults, removing



the barrier of fear experienced by many when traveling to a new or unknown place. The park will provide all the equipment needed for these kayak trips, removing the financial barrier associated with purchasing or renting equipment. At the beginning of each program skilled park staff trained by the American Canoe Association will provide paddling instruction, removing the barriers presented by a lack of skill or experience.

In addition to removing these traditional barriers to participation and inclusion this program strives to build a stewardship ethic in the participants. By exploring the preserve, experiencing it first-hand, learning about it and then performing a bit of service work we hope that each participant will create a positive memory in the park. Service work will be conducted at the boat launch and/or along the

paddling route, where participants will be asked to pick up trash. This simple act of service in the park will hopefully provide a connection to the resource for each young community member.

As the wise Senegalese forestry engineer, Baba Dioum, reminds us, "In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught."

If you know of a youth group or organization that may be interested in taking advantage of this program, please have them contact the park team at bith_paddleprogram@nps.gov or 409-951-6726.



Mark Your Calendar

Saturday, April 11, 2020, 9:00 a.m. BTA Board of Directors Meeting

Neches River Adventures Public tours every Saturday. Private charters are available all year.
www.nechesriveradventures.org

BIG THICKET SCHEDULED EVENTS
Plan your 2020 outdoor adventures
www.nps.gov/bith/planyourvisit/calendar.htm

Saturday, March 28, 10:00 a.m. Longleaf Savannah Hike

Learn about carnivorous plants, longleaf pines, and fire ecology on this off-trail walk through a longleaf pine savannah adjacent to the Big Thicket Visitor Center. Meet at the visitor center with water and good walking shoes. Long pants are recommended. No pre-registrations required.

Saturday, April 4, 9:30 a.m. Pitcher Plants and Pines

Towering pines and carnivorous plants grow side by side along this trail. Learn about these plants and more on this 1-mile walk. Meet at the Pitcher Plant Trail on CR 4850, about 2 miles south of FM 1943, with water and good walking shoes. No pre-registrations required.

Saturday, April 18, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Junior Ranger Day

Mark your calendars for Junior Ranger Day! Kids and families can participate in fun activities to learn about Big Thicket wildlife and earn a Junior Ranger badge. Talk to a Wildland Fire Fighter, see the preserve's patrol boats, sit in a kayak, and more. No pre-registrations required.

April 28, 2020

David P. Lewis book signing, 2-3 p.m. at Kountze High School Library, 1488 FM 1293; 4-5 p.m. at Kountze Public Library, 800 South Redwood St. David is president of the Gulf States Mycological Society and 2010 recipient of BTA's R.E. Jackson Conservation Award. He has 4 species of mushrooms new to science named after him. His book is *Mushrooms of the Gulf Coast States*.



Ten Years of Reforestation and Partnership

by Jason A. Ginder, NPS Chief of Interpretation and Education

On a crisp Monday in January, the National Park Service and our partners from the National Parks Conservation Association, the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, the Dallas Zoo and others gathered to plant longleaf pine seedlings in the Big Sandy Creek Unit of the park. This tenth annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service event attracted 144 volunteers, who rallied to plant 10,000 longleaf pine seedlings in just three hours. Together over the past ten years we have planted nearly 200,000 seedlings.

Preserve staff is currently installing new waysides to recognize the importance of this long-term restoration effort. Three kiosks, holding three interpretive panels each, will be placed in the park. One will be located at the north end of the Turkey Creek Unit where the first longleaf pine restoration work was completed by the park in 2003; the second one will be installed near the preserve visitor center in the area locally known as the Solo Tract; and the third will be along Lilly road in the Big Sandy Creek Unit where hundreds of school students planted seedlings as part of the Centennial Forest campaign in 2015 and 2016. These signs were made possible in part with financial support from NPCA.



Volunteers of all ages celebrating their hard work after planting 10,000 seedlings. Credit: NPS Photo

This new wayside interpretive sign is the first to be installed, along Lilly Road in the Big Sandy Creek Unit. Credit: NPS Photo

Access along the Upper Neches River Corridor Unit

by Jason A. Ginder, NPS Chief of Interpretation and Education

In late 2019 preserve staff started working to curtail unauthorized off-road vehicle driving and minimize habitat damage near the TxDOT boat launch along Highway 96 in the Upper Neches River Corridor Unit outside of Evadale, Texas. Over the years, unauthorized vehicle access has created significant negative impacts on NPS lands. Erosion issues, vegetation degradation, and other harmful impacts have resulted from these types of unofficial social trails and roadways.

As local users remove park-established barriers and find new ways to drive into these natural areas, park staff continue to implement new visitor management strategies. Effective strategies put in place here may be duplicated throughout the preserve as needed. Once we successfully curtail vehicle access to this area, the preserve's Resource Management team will explore habitat restoration options for this site.



Photo credit: NPS Photo

Penny Clark Presents Larry Jean Fisher

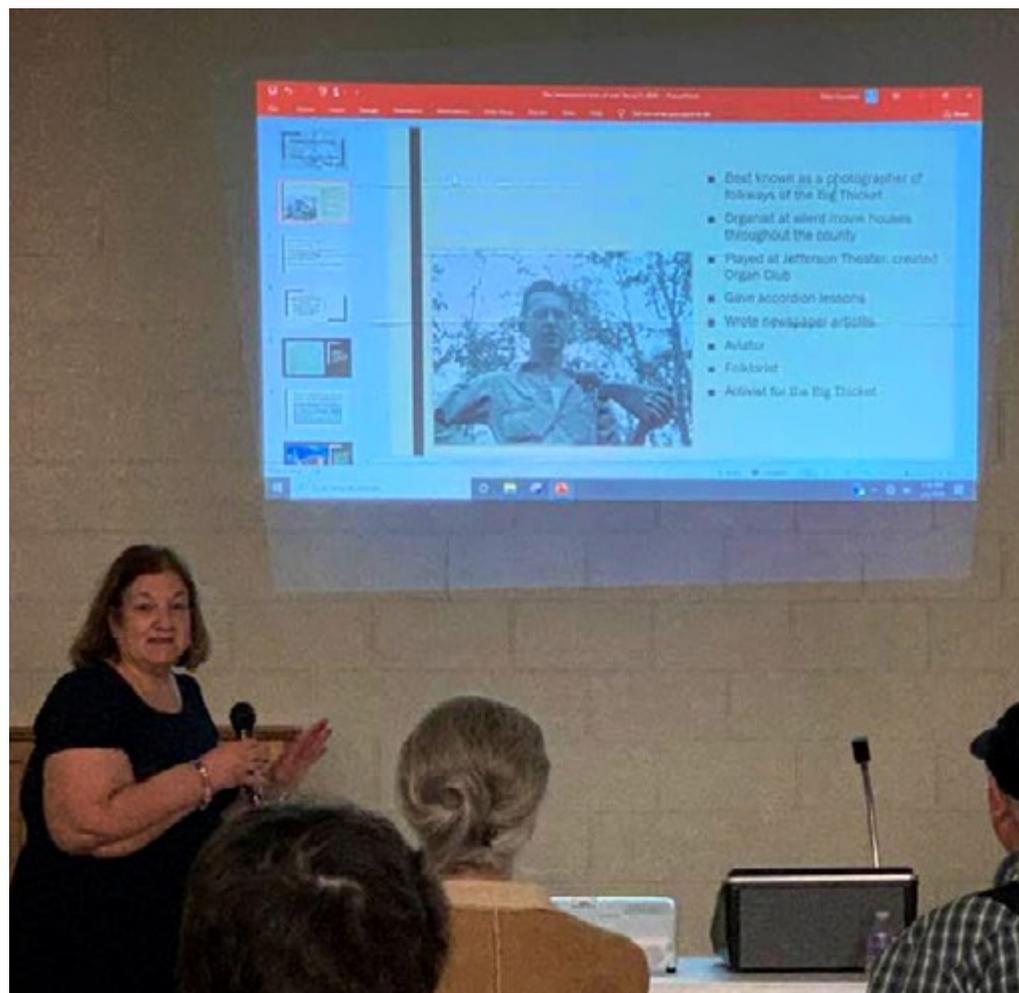
By Dale Parish

Lamar Librarian Archivist Penny Clark, also a Big Thicket Association Board Member, presented a fact-filled presentation on Larry Jean Fisher in Newton on Monday, 2020/01/06. The presentation was made at the monthly meeting of the Deep East Texas Archaeological Association, which meets at the Iris & Annie Howard Civic Center, 109 E. Court St, Newton TX on the 1st Monday evening of each month, at six-thirty.

The Lamar Library Special Collections has received a lot of material on Fisher, whom Clark portrayed as a "renaissance man." Fisher was an aviator, musician, photographer, playwright and filmmaker, and played a key role in the first movement to preserve the Big Thicket as a national park by photographing the flora and fauna there.

Many Beaumonters may be surprised to learn that at times, he earned a living as an organist, and was at times employed by Beaumont's Jefferson Theater as such. Fisher became interested in flying, and took flying lessons in Beaumont, receiving his private pilot's license in 1931. During WWII, he flew with the Civil Air Patrol on submarine detection missions. As a pilot, he became enamored with the Big Thicket and moved to Saratoga around 1940 to open a photography studio. He documented through his pictures life in the Big Thicket, both human and wildlife. Fisher also wrote two surviving plays—Keyser Burnout and Gusher—before getting interested in filmmaking.

Penny Clark told DETAS that anyone interested in the Big Thicket during the early part of the 20th century should visit the Lamar Library Special Collections and view the many photographs that are stored there. Some of the collection can be viewed online through the Portal to Texas History.



Birds of the Big Thicket: The Ivory Billed Woodpecker

A poem by Jim Blackburn

I've heard the story about my uncles
When they were boys –
A story about a bird they saw
Down in the Cocodrie Swamp –
A bird that my Uncle Charles called
The "Good God Woodpecker" as in
"Good God! Look at that Woodpecker."

It happened during the '30's
And I always wondered
If they were talking about
The Ivory-Billed –
A magnificent bird that has been
Denied to me.
A bird that I may never see
A bird that has apparently
Ceased to be.
It's just not here anymore.

It is not simply that one specimen died
But instead it's that an entire species
Has left the earth.
Left us with less.
Left me wishing for the Good God
For whom it was named,
The same God with whom
I am angry
For letting us humans be so blind,
For letting us destroy other living things
Without thought and without care.
AAGGHHHHHHHHHHHH.
Good God I miss that woodpecker.



Painting by Isabelle Scurry Chapman

Patricia Lewis

Patricia Lewis, a valued member of the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, strongly promoted conservation of Big Thicket lands and native species. Her skills as a CPA in the small organization were appreciated. To date, as a result of the Trust's cooperative efforts, over 270 acres have been added to the Big Thicket National Preserve.

Patricia supported her husband's life work in macrofungi research and was a voice for the Gulf States Mycological Society through its newsletter and website. She was an active participant in mushroom forays and other educational events.

As a past Director of the Big Thicket Association she assisted the Audit Committee, and currently served on the Advisory Board.

Patricia will be missed.



David and Patricia Lewis – Thicket of Diversity Mushroom Walk with Eastfield College Students



Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust Board Meeting



Mushroom Foray – Field Research Station



February 1st Sunday Explore Your Thicket Hike

Always a popular hike, even though it falls on Super Bowl Sunday! 35 participants of all ages hiked the Kirby Nature Trail. Thanks to Park Ranger Alex for leading the hike and sharing a wealth of information about the Thicket.



Photos by Bruce Walker

What's been happening?



New Infrastructure: In the hope of increasing use, visitor enjoyment, and recreational opportunities in the preserve, new concrete picnic tables and trash receptacles were added to a number of access points in the fall of 2019. There are some great new picnic spots out their waiting for you! Pictured here is the new table located at the Lakeview Day Use Area, part of the Beaumont Unit in Orange County.



Lamar University Students Volunteer at Big Thicket NP: A small crew of Lamar University students spent part of their winter break volunteering at the national preserve. In early January, this group, organized by LU's chapter of the National Collegiate Honors Council, spent a day planting 2,000 longleaf pine seedlings, learning about park operations, and hiking the Sundew Trail.



A look behind the scenes: In late 2019 the National Park Service invested nearly \$24,000 to upgrade the theater and film projection system at the preserve visitor center. Staff from the NPS Harper Ferry Center, an agency resource for all things media, traveled to Big Thicket National Preserve to install the new equipment. Along with being fully digital, the park films are now ADA and 508 compliant, ensuring that visitors with disabilities have the same access to the films as all other visitor to the park.



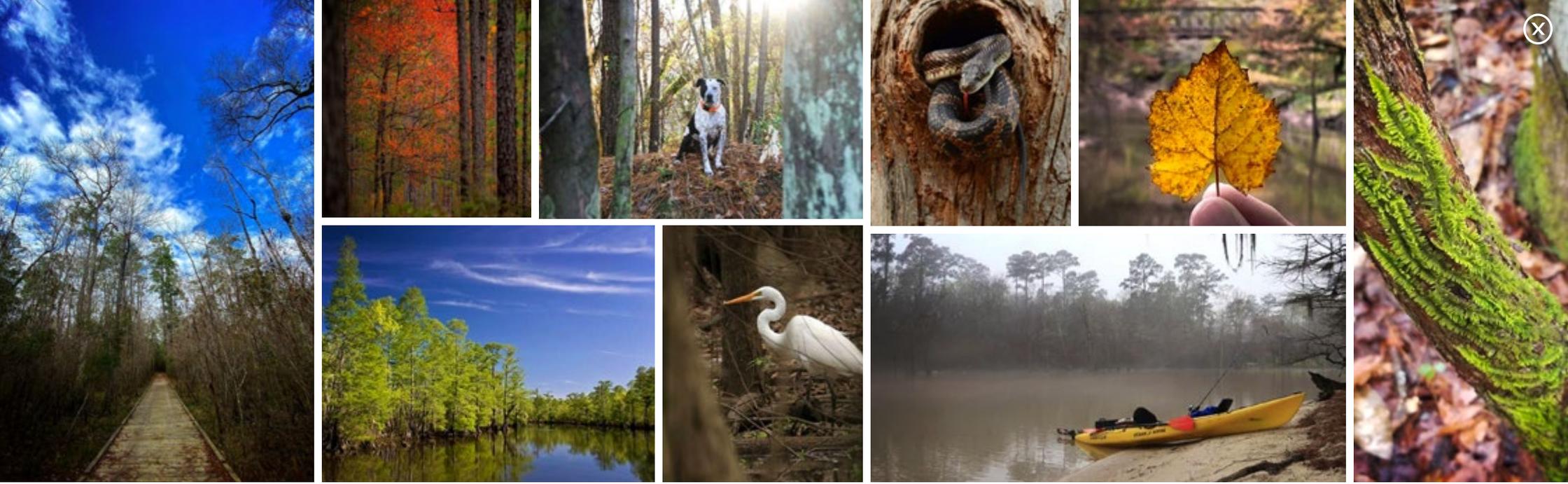
Preserve launches second year of Feral Hog Trapping Program: As part of the on-going efforts to manage the feral hog population in the national preserve, in 2019 the Resource Management staff launched a public hog trapping program. Through a free permit process, 25 local trappers were able to set up traps on preserve lands. In 2019 they removed 296 hogs from the park. On February 3rd, the Park Biologist began issuing 50 available trapping permits for 2020. More information about this program is available on the preserve website. (www.nps.gov/bith)



Monthly Flash Mob Clean-ups: The term "flash-mob" describes a large gathering where people perform an unusual or seemingly random act and then dispersing. The preserve's Flash-Mob clean-up is a short volunteer event for the public to participate in and help the preserve look more beautiful. This monthly event will take place on the third Saturday of each month and focuses on a different day use area each time. If you would like to learn more about the event or about volunteering in general, please call Megan Urban, Volunteer Program Manager at 409-951-6725, megan_urban@nps.gov. January's Flash Mob clean-up saw a record 16 volunteers.



SCA Work Crews: During the fall of 2019, Big Thicket National Preserve hosted a Student Conservation Association (SCA) Youth Work Crew for 8 weeks. They worked on multiple projects around the preserve, including clearing brush around the Field Research Station and the Pitcher Plant Bog, putting up new trail signs for the Village Creek Paddling Trail and re-painting the front porch furniture at the Visitor Center. They contributed to over 650 hours of service. This youth crew service was made possible through a grant from the National Park Foundation.



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/bith

Conservation Fund
www.conservationfund.org

Gulf States Mycological Society
www.gsmyco.org

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

National Parks Conservation Association
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 Black Bear Alliance
texasblackbear.weebly.com

Texas Conservation Alliance
www.TCAatexas.org

Village Creek State Park
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park

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

