

# Reporter

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## **B.T.A. NEWS**

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BTA directors convened at July 10, 9:30 AM at the Village Creek State Park Nature Center. The agenda was long and interesting. A revised statement of positions on "issues" was considered and adopted "provisionally" pending further study. Updates were given for State Parks and the BT Natural Heritage Trust, by Past-President Ellen Buchanan; an update on BTNP affairs was offered by Supt. Todd Brindle (See Preserve Overview), and Wendy Ledbetter, Executive Council President for the Thicket of Diversity (see Diversity Dispatch).

The Nominating Committee offered a slate to fill expiring terms of officers and board members. Ballots will be mailed to the membership 30 days before the annual meeting October 9. Awards Committee recommendations will be headlined in the next issue.

The group moved to the Pavilion to hear a great program of "pickin' and singin'" presented by Shaun Hunter and son Hunter Davis. Some additional friends and park visitors joined us.



**MEMBERS:** Ballots to vote for officers and directors will be mailed soon to current members. Memberships are for the calendar year, and the label on this newsletter contains the date of your last renewal. If you are not current, send dues to BTA at PO Box 198, Saratoga TX 77585. New members are needed. Why not join for one of your friends? Active \$15; Supporting \$25; Seniors/Students \$10.

## **WATER ISSUES**

**By Bruce Drury**

### **Wild and Scenic Neches**

The Neches River flows some 400 miles from near Tyler to its mouth at Sabine Lake near Port Arthur. It traverses the Neches River National Wildlife Refuge, the Davy Crockett and Angelina National Forests, Martin Dies Jr. State Park, and the Big Thicket National Preserve.

The river's water is important to bottomland hardwood forests along its route and to the Sabine Lake estuary and coastal marshes that serve as the nursery to Gulf Coast fishes, shrimp and other forms of aquatic life. Its occasional floods are critical to the ecology of the Big Thicket, and for this reason and others, it is important the Neches remain free flowing. One way to do that is to have the river designated "Wild and Scenic", thus protecting the river, and those who use and enjoy it, from dams and diversion of the water and highlighting the river as a tourist and recreational opportunity.

According to a white paper distributed by the Texas Conservation Alliance, the process for Wild and Scenic designation begins with a law passed by Congress authorized a study of the river. The authorizing statute would create a study team which would probably include experts from the National Park Service, the US Forest Service and others specified by the law. The study team would solicit input from all of the river's stakeholders---landowners, industries, local governments, hunters, fishermen, recreational officials---as to the river's eligibility and suitability for some form of Wild and Scenic designation. If the study team concludes from the testimony that some action is justified, a management plan for the river would be developed. The final step is consideration by Congress after an appropriate bill is introduced by a local member of Congress. Congress can apply the Wild and Scenic designation to all of the river, or part of it, or none.

The Texas Conservation Alliance, Friends of the Neches and Citizens Protecting the Neches River are seeking support for the study. Citizens who want more information can go to <http://thenechesriver.org/> web site for more information. We hope all of those who love the Big Thicket will support this effort to protect the Neches River.

### **Water Planning**

The East Texas Regional Water Planning Area covers twenty counties from the city of Tyler in the north to Port Arthur to the south and from the Sabine River in the east to the Trinity basin in the west (Region I of the Texas Water Planning Board). The East Texas Regional Water Planning Group is in the final stages of approving its 2011 Water Plan.

The Initially Prepared Plan, the working document, recognizes that East Texas has sufficient water resources to meet the area's demands for population growth and economic growth through 2060, although the plan projects a small shortfall in developed sources. The IPP puts much more emphasis on water conservation and reuse than did the 2006 plan, and it recognizes that the Fastrill dam and reservoir, planned primarily for the sale of water to Region C (an inter-basin transfer to the Dallas area), can no longer be considered in the water management strategy. This is a significant victory for the conservationists who supported the Neches River Wildlife Refuge.

The only major project in the water plan is Lake Columbia, a dam on Mud Creek, a tributary of the Angelina which is in turn a tributary of the Neches. This Cherokee County project of the Angelina-Neches River Authority, (ANRA) would cover about 10,000 acres and is designed to provide water

for users in the immediate area, not for export as was the case with Fastrill. ANRA has applied to the US Army Corps of Engineers for a permit to construct the dam and reservoir. ANRA's application is now on hold because the Environmental Protection Agency found the accompanying Environmental Impact Statement unsatisfactory as to the effect on wetlands and water quality, and the EPA noted that the mitigation was insufficient for the amount of habitat affected by the dam and reservoir. ANRA will apparently submit a new EIS.

The 80<sup>th</sup> Texas legislature (2007) passed a water planning bill know as Senate Bill 3. SB3 established a process for studying the flow in rivers and estuaries in order to specify the flow required to maintain a healthy environment in the estuary. The first study was that of the Sabine and Neches Rivers and Sabine Lake. Various representative were appointed to the Stakeholders Committee whose main job was to appoint a Bay and Basin Expert Science Team which would study and report recommendations for environmental flow for the Sabine and Neches Basins.

Although the BBEST was to work from existing science, the Sabine/Neches group rejected the standard position of a five percent of mean flow during a period of drought and said that TWO per cent would be enough to maintain a healthy environment in the Sabine/Neches Estuary. The BBEST Report was accepted by the Stakeholders Committee, in spite of strong opposition by some of the stakeholders. The report, along with similar reports from other river basins in Texas, has been submitted to the SB3 Science Advisory Committee and the Legislature.

## **DIVERSITY DISPATCH**

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### **Biodiversity Days, June 10-12**

Events began with a Science Cafe at Sertino's Cafe in Beaumont on Thursday June 10 where Dr. Paul Tinerella (University of Illinois) discussed his research on "Aquatic True Bugs" with 29 attendees. Friday evening, June 11, two night walks were held -- bats with Leigh Stuemke (SFASU) and Amphibians with Paul Crump (Houston Zoo)

Saturday June 12 field trips started at 10:00 in the Rosier Unit: TWiG leaders David Lewis, Gulf States Mycological Society (fungi), Katie Winsett, University of Arkansas (Myxomycetes); and Dale Kruse, Texas A&M (Bryophytes). A Fern Foray on the Sundew trail was led by Garrie Landry, and Joe Liggio, led another group there to look for orchids. A total of 77 participated, for a total of 717 hours, and collected 975 specimens.



Saturday afternoon seminars were given by Juliana Hilton (McNeese) on waterbears; Leigh Stuemke (SFASU) on bats; and Rickey Maxey (TP&WD) on black bears. Eastfield College Students presented data on their studies. Seminars attracted 60 individuals.

### **Executive Council Meeting**

The Executive Council met July 9 with recently-elected President Wendy Ledbetter presiding.

**The Science Committee** report was presented by Dr. Jerry Cook (SHSU) in behalf of Dave Roemer, Resource Management Chief. TWiG activity was reviewed that include recommendations for 10 new groups. The Committee reported approval of an NPS Park Partnership Program that will provide \$60,000 in matching funds, and BTA will allocate a similar sum from grant funds, all of which must be obligated by April 2011.

The Science Plan is being revised by a sub-group composed of Deanna Boensch, Linda Brindle, Dale Kruse, Wendy Ledbetter, Dave Roemer, Brian Lockwood, and Mona Halvorsen.

## **CONSERVATION OUTLOOK**

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### **Biomass Plant at Woodville**

Robert and Sue Wood of Woodville appeared at the BTA board meeting July 10 to request support for their effort to get an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) on plans to construct a biomass plant near Woodville. BTA will support the request.

The East Texas Electric Cooperative, Inc. applied for a permit from TCEQ in February, 2010 (see last issue of the Reporter), and has received \$65 million in Clean Air Renewable Energy Bonds (CREBs), with \$40 million for the biomass plant to be completed by 2014 and \$25 million for a hydroelectric plant at Lake Livingston to be completed by 2013.

TFA and their members are supporting legislation for biomass as "clean, renewable energy" claiming that the Woodville plant's "annual delivered value of the local woody biomass services ... is estimated at around \$20 million."

*New York Times* (4/23/10) reports that nearly 100 forestry organization urged Senators Kerry, Graham, and Lieberman to place no limits on the harvest of forest materials for biomass-power production. NYT quotes Franz Matzner, the National Resources Defense Council, and Michael Degnan, Sierra Club who oppose pending legislation: "Clearing forests to generate biomass fuel would quickly outpace environmental gains from the switch to biomass from fossil fuels."

More information is available online. Stay tuned.

### **Native Plant Conference**

The 5<sup>th</sup> Lone Star Regional Native Plant Conference assembled in Nacogdoches, June 2-5. Field trips were scheduled Thursday, June 3 to Matlock Hills, Boykin Springs, Stewart Ranch, Tyler County, Ivy Payne Preserve, Jasper and Newton Counties, and Little Sandy Hunting and Fishing Club. The Jasper and Newton County trek, led by Eric Keith of Raven Environmental Services

enjoyed viewing the nodding yucca (*Yucca cernua* -- only site in Texas), visited the pyramid magnolias, the silky camellias, and Scrapping Valley.



Friday June 4 was devoted to tours, workshops, and lectures with intriguing titles like, "Petals, Prickles, and People" (Steven Chamblee); "Ilex You a Lot" (David Creech); "Forensic Botany" (Barney Lipscomb); and "Tigers of the Bog" (Bill Finch). More field trips and workshops were held June 5, and Saturday Night Live" included dinner, drama and dancing!

### **Citizens Protecting the Neches River**

Two public forums are scheduled July 26 and 27 to discuss a proposed study of the Neches River as a Wild and Scenic River. The first will be held at the Dishman Art Museum, Lamar University, 6:00 PM. The meeting is co-hosted by Clean Air and Water, Inc., Coastal Conservation Association-Texas, and Texas Conservation Alliance.

On July 27 at 6:00 PM, the second public forum will convene in Lufkin City Council Chambers, 300 East Shepherd, Room 102. Lufkin, TX 75901

Panelists include Attila Bality, National Park Service and Debbie Caffin, U.S. Forest Service.

### **Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary, by Wendy Ledbetter**

The self-guiding interpretive booklet for the 0.8 mile Longleaf Loop Trail at Sandylands has been revised and is now in booklet form -- thanks to Mary Catherine Johnston, her Kountze M.S. students and Amy Roemer for the project.

From July 2009 to July 2010 Larsen Sanctuary had 649 registered visitors (some visitors do not sign in), 50 volunteers, 532 vol. hrs. and outreach to 263 folks.

Among other activities at Sandylands:

- An orchid survey will be conducted this month at Sandylands, looking for Chapman's orchids in particular on recently burned areas
- A freshwater mussel survey on Village Creek is scheduled in August
- The state TNC Fire Management Team and volunteers prescribe burned over 1,000 acres in April on TNC Southeast Texas preserves

- Paul Crump and his team collected and inventoried 42 turtles representing 8 of the 12 species found in the Big Thicket. The Eastfield students and their mentors were very productive.

## **Pyramid Magnolia Report**

At the October 2009 annual membership meeting, BTA members approved forming a partnership of organizations to raise funds in order to acquire a 296-acre tract in Newton County with several populations of threatened pyramid magnolias. To date, six organizations have joined the partnership. Eastfield College Science Club is also actively raising funds.

Participants agreed that any person or group donating \$1,000 would be saving one acre. The Magnolia Garden Club, the Native Plant Society - Beaumont, and Lamar University Retirees accepted the opportunity. Individual donors include Lane Harrison and two individuals who have each "saved" acres. One generous individual contributed \$10,000. At present approximately \$45,000 is available for the project.

*More funds are needed to protect the pyramids. Send your gift to BTA Land Fund, PO Box 198, Saratoga, TX 77585. Gifts are tax deductible.*

## **PRESERVE OVERVIEW**

**By Ann Roberts**

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**Supt. Todd Brindle** reports that

- The Preserve has 27 seasonal workers hired as well as five Teacher-Ranger-Teachers.
- The General Management Plan has progressed to an internal draft of Management Zones and Management Alternatives. Public meetings are planned for November.
- A visitor contact facility in Beaumont is being planned with the General Services Administration to be located near downtown or near the I-10/US 69 junction. It will take approximately 2 years to work through the process.
- The Maintenance Division has repaired, seal-coated and striped the Kirby Nature Trail parking lot and has begun renovation / restoration of the Staley Cabin grounds; behind the cabin has been restored to grade and a split rail fence has been installed along the road.
- An emergency generator is being purchased for the Field Research Station.
- Resource Management has focused on the new Lower Cypress Tract because of climate change / effects on estuaries and also because of the oil spill.
- New lands acquired raised coastal zone acreage to over 8,250 acres (approximately 8% of the Preserve); preparing for hurricane season and for collection of baseline conditions in the Lower Cypress tract in collaboration with NPS, USGS, and FWS
- Gulf Oil Spill efforts include assignments of Jalyn Cummings and Eric Wortham for five weeks to Alabama and Florida. Pollard Mobley was assigned for two weeks to give contracting support for Oil Spill Recovery Work in Mobile, AL.
- The Preserve was funded \$72,000 in FY11-12 for climate change research / effects on baldcypress swamps, using Beth Middleton, USGS Wetlands Center in Lafayette. Beth has started early and already installed 5 surface elevation tables (SETs) to measure subsidence.
- Still awaiting word on \$92,000 climate change and freshwater inflow study for FY2011.

- Working with Texas Railroad Commission to remove the 2 Marshall Wells in the Neches River, using ARRA funds (slated for this winter when river is up) and clean-up of contaminants and equipment from Campbell Tank Battery in Turkey Creek Unit.
- Completed EA's for directional drill near Beech Creek (Ergon) and replacement of exposed LPG pipeline in Menard Creek (Chevron).
- Completed Japanese climbing fern treatments in Lance Rosier Unit (Teel/Cotten Rds) and Kirby Nature Trail
- Prepared mechanical fuel break around Pitcher Plant trailhead, mechanical thinning for fire protection around HQ/VC (in-progress); will begin fuel break on west side of Beech Creek Unit (contracted).
- Two prescribed burns planned in NE Lance Rosier Unit and Turkey Creek Pitcher Plant Trail

## **Big Thicket Preserve Welcomes New Junior Rangers**

**By Candace Doerr, Teacher-Ranger**



Local children earned their badges and became the Preserve's newest junior rangers last week after attending a three day summer camp at Big Thicket National Preserve. Thirty five participants between the ages of six and twelve learned about nature and the region's diversity.

Groups were organized that rotated to different stations where they met a park ranger to complete learning activities, crafts, and games. Some of the activities included examining owl pellets, making models of animal tracks, learning wilderness survival techniques, painting snakes, creating spiders, building birdfeeders, and even concocting carnivorous plants!

The children learned how animals use camouflage to survive and also found evidence of habitats, made leaf rubbings, and discovered the joy of camaraderie among new friends. During the junior ranger ceremony, the group proudly promised to protect and preserve nature for future generations to enjoy.

Big Thicket and National Parks throughout America offer free junior ranger day camps every summer, as well as ranger-guided hikes and programs throughout the year. Contact the Big Thicket National Preserve at (409) 951-6700 for information on more exciting outdoor opportunities.

## **EAST TEXAS MISCELLANY**

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### **Kountze Blueberry Festival**

The first Kountze Blueberry festival was a huge success! The Blueberry pancakes breakfast was the early attraction with more than a hundred folks lining up to eat pancakes served with blueberry syrup. Doing the “flipping” were Citizen’s Bank President Gehrig Brown, Ronnie Stockholm and Gerri Spring, while Shelly Wilson kept the refreshments flowing.

The Blueberry Dessert contest judges selected first, second and third place, Mother and daughter Jenny & Reese Parrott, cousins Hannah Burke & Harley Perkins, and Evonye Gates, as the winners. Terry Boyett won the \$50.00 Savings Bond for the “Guess the Marbles” in a jar contest. Children’s coloring contest winners were Kelsey Woodard, of Silsbee, and Harley Perkins.

Ann Boyett, President of the Chamber of Commerce, reported because of the success of the festival checks for \$1000.00 were given to the Kountze Volunteer Fire Department and Boy Scout Troop # 770, and a scholarship will be given to the Kountze High School Salutatorian.

### **EVENTS CALENDAR**

**Sept. 10-11** - Oil Patch Festival, Batson

**Sept. 18** - BTNP, Rosier Unit, Driving Tour. Meet at Field Research Station, Saratoga, 9:30 AM

**Oct. 8** - Thicket of Diversity Executive Council, Field Research Station, Saratoga, 10:00 AM

**Oct. 9** - Big Thicket Day, Annual Membership Meeting, Field Research Station, Saratoga, 9:30 AM  
(More details later)

**Nov. 13** - BTNP, Big Sandy Creek Unit, Woodlands Trail Hike. Meet at parking area on FM 1276

### **WEB SITES**

#### **Big Thicket Association**

[www.bigthicket.org](http://www.bigthicket.org)

#### **Big Thicket National Preserve**

[www.nps.gov/bith](http://www.nps.gov/bith)

**East Texas Black Bear Task Force** [Nathan Garner at TP&W requested this be added.]

[www.bbcc.org](http://www.bbcc.org)

#### **National Audubon Society**

[www.goldentriangleaudubon.org](http://www.goldentriangleaudubon.org)

[www.houstonaudubon.org](http://www.houstonaudubon.org)

#### **National Parks Conserv. Assoc.**

[www.npca.org](http://www.npca.org)

#### **Native Plant Society of Texas**

[www.npsot.org](http://www.npsot.org)

#### **Nature Conservancy**

[www.nature.org/texas](http://www.nature.org/texas)



**Outdoor Nature Club, Houston**

[www.outdoornatureclub.org](http://www.outdoornatureclub.org)

**Sierra Club Golden Triangle Group**

[www.texas.sierraclub.org/triangle](http://www.texas.sierraclub.org/triangle)

**Texas Conservation Alliance**

[www.TCA texas.org](http://www.TCA texas.org)

**Village Creek State Park**

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/>