

Rep. Brady at Silsbee Town Hall

Cong. Kevin Brady held a Town Hall meeting in Silsbee at the Community Center on January 10. Upfront Brady said that recent events in the “Tucson Tragedy” would not deter him from holding similar meetings. The issues discussed were wide-ranging including health care, social security, and the Afghan-Pakistan wars.

After the meeting, Bruce Drury asked if Brady planned to reintroduce legislation to expand Big Thicket boundaries by purchasing land from **WILLING SELLERS**. Brady said he would and asked that we contact Todd Stephens, his Director of Regional Issues. We will, and you can, too: E-mail todd.stephens@mail.house.gov or telephone 936-441-5700.



Pictured at the Town Hall meeting in Silsbee are (L to R): Supt. Todd Brindle, Ann Roberts, Cong. Brady, Bruce Drury.

Supt. Brindle Accepts Position at Glen Canyon

The Preserve recently announced the departure of Supt. Todd Brindle to become Superintendent at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and Rainbow Bridge National Monument in southern Utah and Northern Arizona. A 33-year NPS veteran, Brindle came to Big Thicket in 2006. Previous assignments included Sequoia, Channel Islands, Yosemite, Everglades, Sunset Crater National Monument, Guadalupe Mountains NP, Big Bend NP, Amistad NRA, and Fort Davis NHS.

During his tenure at Big Thicket the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory (ATBI) began, locally called “Thicket of

Diversity.” He has worked with the Conservation Fund to add significant adjoining lands to the Preserve, and he leaves with a General Management Plan in progress.

Also leaving Big Thicket are Mark Peapenburg, Chief Ranger for Law Enforcement, and Chris Peapenburg, Facility Services Manager. The Peapenburgs came to Big Thicket in 2002 from Amistad National Recreation Area. Their next assignment is Mojave National Preserve.

The BTNP staff will hold a luncheon on Friday, February 4, at 12 noon to honor Brindle and the Peapenburgs.

Conservation Outlook

Oil and Gas Regulations

USNPS will prepare an EIS for a proposed revision of the regulations that govern nonfederal oil and gas development within the boundaries of NPS parks. Check out www.parkplanning.nps.gov/WASO. Information is also available on the Federal Register website.

Eleven of NPS 394 parks (including BTNP) have active nonfederal oil and gas operations within boundaries. The present regulations have been in effect more than 30 years. Deadline for public comment is February 28.

Trinity River N.W.R. Environmental Assessment on Hunting

The Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge in Liberty County analyzed the environmental impacts associated with offering additional units for hunting of big game (deer and hog) and upland game (squirrel and rabbit). The refuge published a draft environmental assessment, draft hunt plan, and draft compatibility determination. Public comments deadline was January 21, 2011. The draft is available on the web at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/txrefuges.html>.

The refuge's preference is to offer hunting on three additional units

for deer, feral hogs, squirrels and rabbits. The new units total 3,150 acres. When added to the current 4,800 acres hunted, this brings a refuge total to nearly 8,000 acres, which is a little less than one-third the total size of the refuge.

Nature Conservancy

Wendy Ledbetter will begin serving as the Forest Program Manager for the Texas Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. She will continue her role in southeast Texas, and will coordinate with other habitat program managers on forestry issues on Nature Conservancy preserves.

Birders have been taking advantage of the hiking trails at the Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary. There have been several observations of American woodcock along the upland trail. Additional observed species are recorded at the trailhead.

Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust

The Trust met Sunday, January 9, with President Ellen Buchanan presiding. The group discussed properties pending acquisitions that will be transferred to BTNP: one on Menard Creek and one on Village Creek.

Congress just renewed a tax incentive for private landowners—especially working family farmers—who

protect their land with a voluntary conservation agreement. The incentive, which had expired at the end of 2009, helps land trusts work with willing landowners to conserve acres of productive agricultural lands and natural areas between 2006 and 2009. Conservation-minded landowners now have until December 31, 2011, to take advantage of a significant tax deduction for donating a voluntary conservation agreement to permanently protect important natural or historic resources on their land. When landowners donate a conservation easement they maintain ownership and management of their land and can sell or pass the land on to their heirs, while foregoing future development rights.

The enhanced incentive applies to a landowner's federal income tax; raises the deduction a donor can take for donating a voluntary conservation agreement from 30% of their income in any year to 50%; allows farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income; and increases the number of years over which a donor can take deductions from 6 to 16 years. To learn more about the enhanced incentive visit: www.lta.org/easementincentive.

Conservation Website Links

National Park Service Oil & Gas Regulations	www.parkplanning.nps.gov/WASO
Trinity River N.W.R. Environmental Assessment	http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/txrefuges.html
B.T. Natural Heritage Trust Landowner Incentive	www.lta.org/easementincentive

BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION NEWS

Changing of the Guard

Mary Catherine Johnston, Kountze ISD Middle School teacher, assumed the office of President on January 1 and began her tenure in high gear. Outgoing president, Dr. Bruce R. Drury, will continue on the Executive Board and will serve his second hitch as Conservation-Legislation Committee Chair. Drury's achievements in the last four years would require a lengthy report—and the Reporter sends “telegrams.”

January Retreat

The first meeting of 2011 on January 8th was a “Retreat” held in Beaumont at the Southeast Texas Nonprofit Development Center with Marcia Stevens as facilitator. The board reviewed committees and their duties, reviewed position statements on issues, and discussed the BTNP Strategic Plan. The BTA owes Texas-size thanks to Bill Clark Pest Control for underwriting expenses. Clark has been a life member of BTA since the 1970s.

Brookshire Brothers Grocery provided food for the event.

During the business meeting, the board selected a nominating committee including Judy Aronow, Rosalie Rogers, and Gilbert Adams that reports at the July meeting. The April board meeting was moved to the 16th to avoid conflict with the West Gulf Coastal Plain and Big Thicket Science Conference on April 8-9-10 in Nacogdoches (see story, page 6).

Meet The Director

Members and friends will “Meet the Director” Dr. Teresa Tomkins-Walsh at an open house, February 17, at the BTNP Field Research Station in Saratoga. Dr. Tomkins-Walsh came on board early in December 2010, and she is busier than somewhat learning about projects, activities and goals as well as coping with accounting and assorted minutiae. We predict she will survive and prosper—in our behalf!



← *Dr. Teresa Tomkins-Walsh joined Big Thicket Association as Executive Director in December 2010.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

February 5

Marysee Prairie Workday

February 17

BTA Open House at BTNP Field Research Station in Saratoga to meet BTA's new Executive Director, Dr. Teresa Tomkins-Walsh, 1:00-5:00 PM

February 22

Autograph Party / Art Show for Boyhood Memories written by County Commissioner Ken Pelt, Kountze Public Library, from 4:00-6:00 PM

CANCELLED — March 5

Field trip to Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary. To be rescheduled.

April 2

Woodpecker Hill and Trailing Phlox Project, led by Ragan Bounds (Hancock FMG), meet at Hillister intersection of US69 and FM1013, at 9:30 AM.

April 8-9-10

West Gulf Coastal Plain and Big Thicket Science Conference, Nacogdoches (check website for details of registration, program, etc.)

April 16

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

REPORTER

Schedule Change

BTA operating costs continue to increase, and the editors have proposed that we change to a quarterly instead of a bi-monthly publication.

Reporter text is also online, but many readers don't have access to online, and those with access often prefer a print version. [The editors agree!]

Preserve Overview

Ann Roberts | BTA Administrative Asst.



← *Volunteers from Saint Michael's College in Vermont spent their winter break working in the Big Thicket National Preserve in Jack Gore Baygall unit and Old Wagon Road.*

Volunteers Plant a Forest

Excerpts from BTNP News Release – plus inserts

In January, ten students from Saint Michael's College, Vermont, donated their winter break to contribute 360 hours of service at Big Thicket National Preserve and the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary. They built wood duck boxes, cleared trails, and planted longleaf pine seedlings in the Turkey Creek Unit

working alongside staff from the National Park Service, the Nature Conservancy, and fellow volunteers of the Big Thicket Association.

But there were still trees to plant! On January 15 members of the Houston Sierra Club and Big Thicket Association helped restore a wetland pine savannah area in the Lance Rosier Unit by planting longleaf pine seedlings. The hard clay soils in the treatment area put up a good fight but the group was up

to the challenge! The Sierra group stayed overnight and visited Marysee Prairie on Sunday.

On January 17, volunteers from the National Parks Conservation Association, Magnolia Garden Club, Houston Garden Club, River Oaks Garden Club, and Big Thicket Association pitched in to help restore longleaf pine forest habitat in the northern part of the Turkey Creek Unit. Everyone lunched at Carol Bailey's Twin Lakes Farms near Woodville.

→ *Volunteers from Houston Sierra Club and Big Thicket Association working in the Lance Rosier Unit.*



Preserve Overview



← *Volunteers from National Parks Conservation Association, Big Thicket Association and local garden clubs (including Magnolia, Houston, and River Oaks) helped restore longleaf pine forest in the Turkey Creek Unit.*

Thanks to these dedicated and hard working volunteers 13,026 longleaf pine seedlings were planted in a 52-acre area in the Turkey Creek Unit and a 10-acre area in the Lance Rosier Unit. Although miniscule in relation to the 60 million acres that were once covered in longleaf pine, this work is part of continuing restoration efforts to advance Big Thicket National Preserve's mission of maintaining high quality examples of representative vegetation communities. The longleaf pine ecosystem provides habitat for rare species including the red-cockaded woodpecker and Texas trailing phlox.

National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts

by Rose Ann Jordan

A record number of birders traveled to the Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center on 12/18/10 and to Town Bluff (north of Spurger) on 12/29/10.

The 15 participants for the Turkey

Creek Count (12/18) found 5,130 birds representing 74 species. The previous high was 75 species in 1986 but 74 species were also seen (for the second highest total) in 1988.

Those participating were Sherry Gibson, Lisa and Keith Hansen, John Haynes, Rose Ann and Harrison Jordan, Diane and Brian Lockwood, Steve Mayes, Dave Roemer, Christine Sliva, Wanda and Charles Smith, Ken Sztraky, and John Whittle.

In spite of overcast skies and later, rain, the Beech Creek Count (12/29) attracted 17 participants. They found 86 species totaling approximately 7,800 individual birds, a normal total in spite of the rain. Kathleen Appelbaum, Sherry Gibson, Lisa and Keith Hanson, Drue Jarvis, Don Jeane, Rose Ann and Harrison Jordan, Dave Roemer, Amy Silver, Wanda and Charles Smith, Ken Sztraky, Bill Wright, Karl and Lauren Yust, and John Whittle were the participants in this count.

Interpretation

The Interp staff scheduled a Night Hike at the Pitcher Plant Trail on January 21 "in search of nocturnal neighbors! Plants, Birds, Bats, Stars and More" according to the flyer.

Visitor Notes

Often when Christmas season arrives, we get a chance to spar with former Chief of Management Resources, Rick Strahan. This year we shared a lot of reminiscences and updates for about three hours—and we encouraged the rascal to retire and come back to Texas. He is now with the BLM in Oregon.

This week word arrived that former superintendent Tom Lubbert and wife Erma—now in Lakewood, Colorado—will be visiting their daughter in Houston sometime in March. We are looking forward eagerly to renew old debates and to play "catch-up." —M.J.

Science Conference in Nacogdoches, April 8–10

On April 8-10, 2011, Stephen F. Austin State University will host the fifth West Gulf Coastal Plain and Big Thicket Science Conference. The focus of this year's conference will be "Changing Landscapes and Changing Climate," which will be addressed by plenary speakers Dr. Camille Parmesan, Associate Professor of Integrative Biology at the University of Texas and Dr. Neal Wilkins, Director, Institute of Renewable Natural Resources at Texas A&M University. 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. In addition to the general call for papers, symposia or special sessions are planned for Ecology and Restoration of Longleaf Pine Communities, Avian Conservation Planning and other topics. Selected manuscripts will be published in a special issue of the peer-reviewed journal, *Southeastern Naturalist*.

Abstracts for papers can be submitted online at www.bigthicket.org/science-conference-2011 by March 1. Registration fees are \$100 by March 18; late registration is \$150

and student registration is \$25. Registration for only one day is \$60. Check the website at www.bigthicket.org/science-conference-2011 for additional information.

Optional field trips are not included in fees. Three trips are planned: 1) East Texas Sand Caves, led by Will Godwin; 2) Tonkawa Sand Hills, led by Jason Singhurst, and 3) Birding in the SFA Experimental Forest, led by Cliff Shackelford.

Sponsors of the event include the Big Thicket Association, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USFS Southern Research Station, Stephen F. Austin State University, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Big Thicket National Preserve.



Dr. Camille Parmesan (left), a featured speaker at this year's Science Conference, is associate professor of integrative biology at The University of Texas at Austin. In 2007, she was awarded the National Conservation Achievement Award for exemplary leadership in protecting the environment and natural resources.

Parmesan is renowned for her climate change expertise, giving seminars for the White House, government agencies and non-governmental organizations, and serving as a lead author of the Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

Parmesan's work has been featured in many scientific and popular press reports ... and also served as a crucial foundation of the National Wildlife Federation's amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in *Massachusetts v. Environmental Protection Agency*.

[Above information was excerpted from University of Texas website.]

Editors Note: Parmesan's mother, the late Dorothy Parmesan, served for many years on both BTCA and BTA boards of directors. As a high school student, Camille wrote a letter to Senator Ralph Yarborough about saving the Big Thicket, and he read that letter at one of BTA's annual meetings.

East Texas Miscellany



← Cong. Charles Wilson statue at VA Outpatient Clinic, Lufkin; unveiled by Buddy Temple, Payton Walteers and Charlie's wife Barbara.

Wilson Statue

The late Con. Charles Wilson family and friends gathered at the Charles Wilson VA Outpatient Clinic in Lufkin on January 12 at 2:00 PM to unveil a statue entitled "Standing Tall with Charlie Wilson." Friends and colleagues reminisced about his life and work. His wife Barbara, Buddy Temple, and Peyton Walters unveiled the statue to the accompaniment of "My Way" (a Sinatra classic). David Adickes sculpted the bronzed figure with characteristic suspenders and crossed arms.

From two VERY partisan friends (your editors) — we know Charlie performed many fine services for his constituents, but his biggest legacy for posterity is legislation to establish the Big Thicket National Preserve.

Pelt Boyhood Memories

Hardin County Commissioner and BTA Board Member the Honorable Kenneth Pelt has written a book of Boyhood Memories that he has

illustrated. Did you know our commissioner is a writer and an artist? Come to the autograph party and art show being held by the Friends of Kountze Public Library, Feb. 22, 4:00-6:00 PM at the Library.

Lamar Library

Penny Clark, Special Collections Archivist, reports a gift of Lance Rosier papers by the Collier family of Votaw. The papers were stored in an antique trunk and also included some of Robert Evans' papers on an oil field union.

Southeast Texas Area Recreation and Tourism

START held a meeting January 13 in Orangefield, Texas, hosted by the Orangefield Cormier Museum and the Orange CVB. The Museum is a step into the days of old, in an Oil Boomtown, with collectables and also displays of old gas stations, barbershops, a general store, post office, and the old skating rink called the "Alamo." Participants in the group shared information

about events for the New Year. The next meeting is April 7, 2011, at the Burns Antik Haus in Beaumont on Calder Avenue, 9:30-11:30 AM.

In memoriam

JAMES ELMO ROSIER of Thicket, a nephew of Lance (Mr. Big Thicket) Rosier, died at the age of 84. Services were held at the New Life Assembly of God Church Sept 21, 2010. His final years were plagued by ill health. BTA learned about his death recently, and memorials have been given to honor our friend.

James Elmo led many field trips for the BTA and was always ready to volunteer. He was instrumental in gifts to the former Big Thicket Museum of Lance Rosier and Aunt Matt Evans memorabilia, which are now in the collections of the Big Thicket National Preserve. He asked for recommendations on placing the Larry Jene Fisher negative collection, selecting as a repository the Lamar University, Gray Library, Special Collections.



Big Thicket Association
P.O. Box 198
Saratoga, TX 77585-0198

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

Big Thicket Reporter
published bimonthly by
Big Thicket Association
(www.bigthicket.org)

Editors
Maxine Johnston | Ann Roberts
(maxine@mxjohnston.com)

Layout
Connie Blakley
(connie@cblakley.com)

**Send address changes to address
noted above**

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

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

B.T.A. NEEDS YOU!

ENROLL FRIENDS AS MEMBERS OF B.T.A.

Active member \$15
Supporting \$25
Business/Group \$25
Life \$500

GET INVOLVED IN PROGRAMS / PROJECTS / FIELD TRIPS

- ✦ Conservation to support / oppose critical issues
- ✦ Volunteer for Thicket of Diversity's all taxa inventory
- ✦ Contribute to special funds for Land acquisition (including Partners for Pyramid Magnolias), Legacy endowment, Thicket of Diversity (ATBI)
- ✦ Participate in field trips in the Big Thicket Region
- ✦ Give memorials for friends

LINKS:

www.bigthicket.org
www.bigthicket.org/science-conference-2011
<http://www.facebook.com/BigThicketAssociation>
http://www.twitter.com/Big_Thicket