

Big Thicket Reporter - #93 May-June 2008

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CONG. BRADY INTRODUCES HR 5891 TO EXPAND

BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE

Congressman Kevin Brady announced April 26 the introduction of a bill to expand the Big Thicket National Preserve by as much as 100,000 acres from willing sellers – a move that has wildlife conservation groups applauding enthusiastically. H.R. 5891 would double the area of the preserve, allowing more public recreational use and additional protection to the Big Thicket Preserve. The bill especially targets land that will connect the nine land units and six water corridors of the current preserve.



Congressman Brady (right) and Bruce Drury

The bill also proposes to boost the economy of southeast Texas by allowing for creation of family-friendly eco-tourism opportunities. Cong. Brady set a goal of bringing a million visitors to Texas each year to enjoy the Big Thicket's unique mix of natural landscapes,, southeastern swamps, eastern forests, central plains, pine savannas, and dry sandhills.

“I don't want the Big Thicket to be one of the country's best kept secrets any longer,” Brady told an enthusiastic crowd gathered at Village Creek State Park for the 29th Annual Texas Wilderness Pow Wow, a weekend of outdoor activities. “With the right vision and support, the Big Thicket can become a premiere attraction for eco-tourism. In order to make this happen, I've put three primary goals in H.R. 5891: connect, expand, and preserve the Big Thicket.”

Potential willing sellers include timber investment organizations that recently acquired large tracts of forest land in east Texas, including land along the Neches River and Village Creek which are popular recreation destinations.

Dr. Bruce Drury, president of BTA, praised Brady's bold vision for the Big Thicket's future, “I've long believed that we need to think more comprehensively about protecting the natural resources of east Texas.” The vision includes plans for a canopy walk through the treetops, water-based trails with GPS waypoints, and an interactive visitor center, all of which will help open the Big Thicket's wonders to a much wider audience.

Mack Turner, chairman of Texas Conservation Alliance, pledged vigorous support from the Alliance. The scenic beauty of the Big Thicket Preserve draws conventions to Beaumont and tourists to southeast Texas, but it is not as well known as many of its fellow elements of the

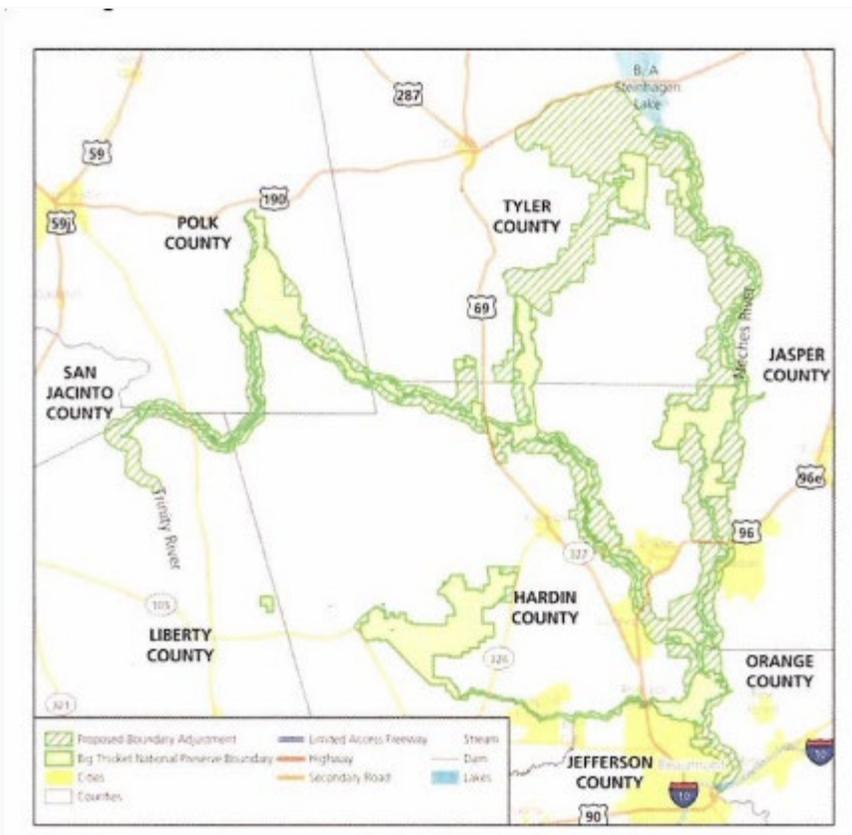
National Park System. “Increasing the size and visibility of this natural treasure, increases its value as a tourist designation,” Turner said. “Protecting these additional acres would consolidate the scattered units, safeguarding its fragile habitat as the population of the region continues to expand.”

“This legislation will be a high priority for us,” David Bezanson, east Texas program director for The Nature Conservancy, told the audience. “It has the potential to be the biggest step forward for public land conservation in Texas in 25 years.”

"Congressman Brady is a true believer in east Texas and the Big Thicket," said Andy Jones, director of the Conservation Fund's Texas Office. We are proud to be working with him. The Fund looks forward to working closely with NPS and the administration to implement the bill once passed by Congress."

"Big Thicket is a treasure of East Texas, and the nation," said Suzanne Dixon, senior program manager of the National Parks Conservation Association's Texas Field Office, which recently released a report highlighting the potential threat of development to national parks, including Big Thicket. "Congressman Brady's leadership will help to protect the Big Thicket from potential development, and ensure its preservation for generations to come."

Brady concluded by saying, “By expanding the Big Thicket National Preserve, we can protect the Preserve’s unique attributes against the challenges of increased development while tapping its enormous potential to attract tourists from around the state and nation.”



Generalized map of proposed additions

POW WOW

The 29th Wilderness Pow Wow convened April 25-27 at Village Creek State Park in Lumberton.

The Texas-size bonus was Cong. Brady's introduction of HR 5891 to increase the size of the National Preserve. The glitches in planning for the Pow Wow became inconsequential in comparison to that news.



Fun at the Pow Wow

Janice Bezanson (TCA Executive Director), Cheryl Roy (TCA Outreach), and Bruce Drury (BTA Prez) were invaluable, fielding questions, making quick decisions, and troubleshooting.

Among the "heroes" were these amazing Golden Triangle Sierrans who put up exhibits/signs, led field trips, and directed traffic. Among them were Jeff Haven, Lowell & Pat Wade, Bill Tetley, Joe Murphy, Gerald Langham, Linda Gober, and GT ExCom Chair Bruce Walker. And, of course, BTA's Ann Roberts., Mona Halvorsen, and Rose Ann Jordan staffed the registration desk for LONG hours.

Bill Oliver, our Terrific Troubadour, generated the usual enthusiasm with his troops joining in "Habitat, Habitat!" Then Pete Gunter (author / professor / philosopher) unveiled a new song on the Trans-Texas Corridor. ("Nothing could be horridier!")

Among the special guests were Marya Fowler (NWF), Suzanne Dixon (NPCA), Gina Donovan (Houston Audubon), David Bezanson and Wendy Ledbetter (TNC).

Field trip leaders included David Baker, Dr. Jeff Pittman, Dr. Randall Terry, Dr. Richard Bothel, Brandt Mannchen, Larry Shelton, Lisa Jameson, D.W. Ivans, Deanna Boensch, Paula Rivers, Leslie DuBey, David Bezanson, Wendy Ledbetter, Bob Boensch, David Lewis, Dr. Heinz Gaylord, Dr. Neil Ford, and Jerry Rashall

Jerry Rashall, Village Creek State Park Manager, and his fantastic staff delivered all kinds of services with huge smiles. Great representatives for TP&W!

FRITZ AWARD: The Pow Wow was the occasion to confer the Ned and Genie Fritz Award to

that over-achieving team of Richard and Bonnie Donovan -- dedicated and committed to protecting our beloved Neches River. Richard is author of *Paddling the Wild Neches*.

BIG THICKET NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST

BTNHT met May 4 at the Field Research Station in Saratoga with President Ellen Buchanan presiding. Items on the agenda included discussion of the status of three properties being considered for purchase.

The following officers were elected: Ellen Buchanan, President.; Catherine Koenig, Vice-President; Sharon Odegar, Secretary; Mary Catherine Johnston, Treasurer; and Tom Maddux, Fifth Officer. Directors elected for two year terms are: Paul Harcombe, Wendy Ledbetter, Ellen Cover, and Robert Corbett. Two vacancies were filled by Susan Schinke (formerly secretary) and Pete Gunter.

REPORTS FROM BTA MEMBERS

Red Maple Roundup: BTA member Rebecca Hill reports that another of our members, Dr. Sylvia Taylor (Univ. of Michigan), brought Dr. Burton V. Barnes, Professor Emeritus of Forestry (also Univ. of Michigan) and Dr. Ikuyo Saeki, JSPS Research Fellow at Tokyo Metropolitan University to Hardin County April 3-6 to collect leaves from red maple trees (*acer rubrum var. drummondii*) as a part of their research into the genetic makeup of various red maple trees. In addition to their efforts here, they also collected maple leaves in Florida, Louisiana, and Georgia this spring.

Dr. Barnes began working on the Japanese red maple (*acer pycnanthum*) in 1998. It is an endangered species and very rare in Japan. Barnes is helping Dr. Saeki on a study of the genetics (DNA), evolution, and landscape ecology of the group of "soft" maples that include Japanese red maple, American red maple, and silver maple.

The three varieties recognized for the American red maple are the northern red maple (*acer rubrum var. rubrum*), the southern or swamp maple (*acer rubrum var. tridens*), and the Drummond's maple (*acer rubrum var. drummondii*).

They collected in three areas: Little Pine Island Bayou, Village Creek, and at "Hill's Thicket" (a.k.a., home of BTA member Rebecca O. Hill). They found good populations of our Drummond's maple, and Dr. Saeki is eager to analyze the DNA. Perhaps she will discover genetic similarities to the Japanese red maple!

Individual Preservation: Lane Harrison, BTA Life member, has become a "preservationist

extraordinaire." He recently purchased a 115-acre tract that adjoins the Lance Rosier Unit. He would welcome BTA members to visit this property.

In 2005 Harrison purchased 66 acres of old woods in Jasper county. He also owns a small chunk of territory near the Ghost Road. Way to go, Lane!

Centennial Challenge: There's good news about the Centennial Initiative launched by NPS. The Preserve will receive for the Thicket of Diversity \$75,000 to be matched by BTA. All the necessary paperwork is in progress.

Ento-Blitz: April 18-20, 2008: Over 50 entomologists from all over Texas convened at the Big Thicket to inventory insects! A temporary website has been set up by Robert Puckett at Texas A&M to facilitate bringing together all of the results for the purpose of transferring data to the ATBI database.

Bio-Blitz, June 13-14, 2008: The second Bio-Blitz will be held during the week of **June 7-14** focusing inventory work on the Hickory Creek and Turkey Creek units of the Preserve. Seminars are planned for Friday, June 13 from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. On Saturday, **June 14th** from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., the week's inventory work will culminate in a public arena.

Through a National Science Foundation grant, Eastfield College, a community college in Dallas, Texas will participate with students working in the field with TWiG leaders. Dr. Carl Knight is the lead on Eastfield's successful 1.4 million dollar technology grant from NSF. In addition, this grant has enabled the use of two portable scanning electron microscopes, along with a technical representative from Hitachi Corporation during the

CONSERVATION OUTLOOK

HERITAGE FOR SALE: The National Parks Conservation Association has just published "America's Heritage for Sale," and the sub-title says it all: "A Lack of Federal Funds Threaten Loss of Significant National Parklands."

Did you know that 4.3 million acres authorized for NPS purchase is still privately owned within park boundaries? Did you know that Land and Water Conservation Fund appropriations descended from \$147 million in FY 1999 to \$44 million in FY 2008. LWCF actually generates around \$900 million per year (primarily from offshore oil leases) intended for NPS land

acquisition, but usually diverted to other federal programs. In its 43-year history, the Congress usually approves only a fraction of that sum.

Ten parks were identified for special coverage, and alphabetically, Big Thicket comes first. NPCA requests \$4,750,000 to purchase 2800 acres to complete the 1993 Addition Act. Big Thicket is on the list of America's Ten Most Threatened Parks and the biggest problem is fragmentation. Boundaries formerly buffered by timber lands are now changing ownerships, increasing pressures on the Preserve.

ENTERGY AWARDS \$350,000 IN GRANTS: Entergy Corporation (NYSE: ETR) HAS announced the winners of its 2008 Environmental Stewardship Grant program, a grand total of \$350,000 to 38 organizations that conveyed a meaningful commitment to fostering environmental efforts in their communities.

In Texas, five organizations were awarded a total of \$54,300. They include: **Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary**, The Nature Conservancy; **Big Thicket Association**, Saratoga, Teacher to Ranger to Teacher, Big Thicket National Preserve; **Environmental Learning & Research Center, Inc., Lamar**, Beaumont; **Houston Advanced Research Center**, The Woodlands,; and **Ice House Museum & Cultural Center**, Silsbee.

Now in its ninth year, Entergy's Environmental Stewardship Grant program is another example of Entergy's environmental commitment to give back to the communities it serves and to fund projects that help preserve the earth's environment for future generations.