

Big Thicket Reporter - #94 Jul-Aug 2008

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CONG. BRADY RESPONDS TO LANDOWNER CONCERNS

HR 5891 INVOLVES ONLY TIMBERLANDS FROM WILLING SELLERS

Cong. Kevin Brady and his staff are diligently correcting misinformation abroad, particularly in Tyler County, about HR 5891. A generalized map and over-zealous opponents led by a few public officials raised specters of land grabs, tax losses, and a host of assorted problems. Reminders that the bill targets timberlands for sale from WILLING SELLERS -- lands mostly unfit for agriculture, timber harvests and developments (a high percentage are floodplains) -- fell on either deaf ears or hard-core distrust of government. A tour of some proposed sites was conducted by Brady aides on July 7.

Public Forum



BTA scheduled a public forum on the proposed legislation July 12 at 1:15 at the Field Research Station, which was attended by about 30 persons. President Drury presented a powerpoint that addressed provisions of the legislation, elaborating on threats to the Preserve, availability of divested lands, tourism potential, etc. Pres. Bruce Drury and Todd Stephens, Brady's Director for Regional Issues, fielded numerous questions.

BTA welcomes requests for group programs. Contact the BTA office in Saratoga at 936-274-1181 to book programs.

Appropriations for Land Purchase

For FY 2009 \$4.75 million is pending for Addition Act land purchases in a Senate bill and \$1 million in the House subcommittee mark-up. Another \$18 million is designated for "agency priority acquisitions," and BTNP is an agency priority. BTNP requested for \$4.25 million of the \$18 million. Unfortunately, the Congress may not adopt an FY 2009 budget but will operate under a "continuing resolution" until January 2009.

STARK FOUNDATION GRANT

After the last Reporter was mailed, terrific news arrived: the Nelda C. and H.J. Lutchter Stark Foundation awarded a grant of \$75,000, half payable in 2008 and half in 2009. The grant provides funds to support the Thicket of Diversity species inventory (All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory), enabling BTA to match funds from the Centennial Challenge initiative.

This remarkable generosity comes from a private foundation established in 1961 that has an outstanding record for supporting and encouraging education and for improving and enriching the quality of life in Southeast Texas. BTA is honored by their gift.

One of the Stark Foundation projects that exemplifies their goals is Shangri La in Orange, directed by Mike Hoke. Their reopening was highlighted in the March-April issue. If you haven't visited there, you're missing an amazing experience.

Bio-Blitz, June 13-14: Seminars were held Friday evening, June 13 at the Field Research Station. Presenters were David Henderson (BEST) on "Butterflies of Southeast Texas," Mike Howlett (Jesse H. Jones Park & Nature Center) on "Frogs, Toads, Snakes, Oh My!" and Harry Meyer and Juliana Hinton (McNeese) on "Waterbears."

June 14 began with a general session keynoted by Hardin County Judge Billy Caraway. Field Inventory Trips followed -- conducted by Dale Kruse and Paul Roling, Mosses and Liverworts; David Lewis, Fungi; Michael Black, Nature Photography; Butterflies, Gillian Bowser. Seminar topics and presenters included Louisiana Black Bears (Paula Rivers subbed for Ricky Maxey), Aquatic Oligochaetes, Ellen Cover (Lamar U), Leaf Litter Organisms, Steven Lewis (Lamar U), and Amphibians (Paul Crump). Sponsors for the event included WalMart and H.E.B. (Lumberton), and CC Creations (College Station).

Picture: TWIG Slime Mold Inventory in Canyonlands

Executive Council Officers / Committees: Dr. Jerry Cook, former President of the Council (Sam Houston SU), asked to be relieved of duty, and Dr. Dale Kruse, Science Committee Chair, agreed to serve as interim president. Dr. Cook has agreed to chair the Science Committee. Committee reorganization may also be forthcoming. Kruse will reappoint committee chairs, who will solicit and report on committee members by Sept. 15.

The Council met July 11 to approve allocation of Centennial funds. The Council is also reviewing the Science Plan, revised RFP formats and time lines for reporting. The Data Management Committee will develop procedures for assembling and entering historical data and will investigate a proposal to house ATBI data at the Field Research Station.

Centennial Challenge: BTNP requested and received \$75,000 for the Thicket of Diversity matched by BTA grant funds. A high percentage of the funds will support species inventory TWIGS, equipment and database management. Additional funds may be available from NPS since some parks were unable to provide matches, so the Preserve will apply for additional funds.

PRESERVE OVERVIEW

by Ann Roberts

Core Operations: The Preserve has just completed its Core Operations Analysis. The introduction identifies management challenges and declares that land protection is the most immediate challenge. Threats identified include fragmentation and external pressures. The document covers funding, staffing, resource management and public support. For a copy contact Chris Peapenburg (Chris_Peapenburg@nps.gov or call 409-951-6802).

The details are daunting. Cost projections suggest a shortfall of \$276,360 (assumes no base increase -- unlikely with the Centennial Initiative). by 2012, and instead of the usual 80-20% distribution between personnel and operating, for Big Thicket, the split will have to be 90-10% - that's despite already implemented losses of four positions (duties reassigned), and anticipated elimination of two additional positions and downgrades in GS ratings for other positions. Anticipated staff losses include loss of two more positions, and conversion of grades for three more positions.

This park is about Resources management /protection -- a division chronically understaffed. The good news is that four new positions have been requested for Resource Management, including a Plant Ecologist, Aquatic Ecologist, and two Biological Science Technicians by 2010. Requests for 2011 would involve two park guides for Resource Education, three park rangers for Law Enforcement, and two maintenance workers.

Sooner or later, surely the Congress must find more funds to support our national parks. Let's remind them!

T-R-T: This summer the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program involved five teachers who will serve as National Park Rangers for eight weeks. They will take back to their classrooms and communicate to their students an awareness and appreciation for the ecological melting pot collectively known as the Big Thicket National Preserve. The teachers participating are; Will Watkins from Kountze Middle School; Susan Middlebrooks, Grangerland Intermediate School in Conroe; Keith Glazener, Klein Forest High School in Houston; John Melia, Landrum Middle School in Houston; and Gary Howarth, New Orleans Charter Science and Mathematics High School. The program has been funded by Entergy grants for the second year.

Chautauqua: Professor Jim Westgate (Lamar U) received National Science Foundation funding for a Chautauqua held May 29-30. Topics and presenters on May 29 included:

Biological Importance, Matt Fagan, BTNP Chief of Interpretation; Legislative History, Maxine Johnston, BTA; Boundaries, Haigler Pate, BTNP Resource Management Specialist; Biological Diversity, David Roemer, BTNP Chief of Resource Management; Fire Management, Fulton Jeansonne, BTNP Fire Management Officer; Ongoing Research/ATBI, Lisa Jameson, BTNP Biologist. Field trips were scheduled for May 30.

Teaching Environmental Sciences: Westgate also conducted his annual workshop for teachers at Lamar University. On July 15, the group canoed to the Beaumont Unit and performed water quality testing projects (DO, BOD, pH, ammonia, nitrates, etc.). At the lunch break, comments were invited from Maxine Johnston (BTA) and Jerry Rashall (Manager, Village Creek State Park).



Martinez Retirement: Ray Martinez, Maintenance Facility Manager, was "farewelled" June 2 with a dinner at the Golden Corral in Beaumont. Ray delivered a lot of high-quality service during his long tenure with BTNP, and his rapport with his staff was superb. He MUST have been good at recruiting, because the maintenance team all exhibit a cheerful "can-do" attitude. Ray was good at competing for pooled money to work on trails or whatever needed to be done. If he promised to show up at 7:32 AM -- he was there. And now our favorite stand-up jokester is gone -- somewhere with Nellie riding their Harleys to adventure!



CONSERVATION OUTLOOK

Each year the *Beaumont Enterprise* invites nominations for Jefferson Awards, a program of the American Institute for Public Service. Fifteen nominees were honored at a dinner on April 15, and later Maxine Johnston was selected to represent the area in Washington, June 16-17. She reports that the other folks attending (over 100 nominees and their families) were impressive and awesome in their achievements.

VISIT TO WASHINGTON

Janice Bezanson (Texas Conservation Alliance) and Maxine Johnston (BTA) visited a few Congressional offices between meetings and after the Awards Program. Among them were Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison and Congressmen John Culberson, Chet Edwards, Ciro Rodriguez, Nick Lampson and Ted Poe. Expecting to visit only with aides, they were fortunate to visit directly with Congressmen Kevin Brady, Lloyd Doggett, and Gene Green. Cong. Green asked if we had seen "Charlie's War" and traded stories about former Cong. Charles Wilson, who served with Green in the Texas Legislature and in the Congress.



Congressman Gene Green, Maxine Johnston, and Janice Bezanson

JUDGE RULES IN FAVOR OF NECHES RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE,

Judge Jorge A. Solis on June 30 denied motions by the City of Dallas and the Texas Water Development Board attempting to overturn the Neches River National Wildlife Refuge, ruling in favor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's creation of the Refuge. Judge Solis ruled on all counts that the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) had adequately considered all aspects of the issue before deciding to uphold the establishment the Refuge.

The creation of the Neches River National Wildlife Refuge blocks Fastrill Reservoir, which had been proposed by the Upper Neches River Municipal Water Authority to sell water to Dallas Water Utilities. This reservoir would have destroyed over 30,000 acres of prime hardwood bottomland wildlife habitat and take over 150,000 acres of private land by eminent domain from East Texas landowners.

TRINITY RIVER N.W.R..

Family Fishing Day: Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge along with the Friends of Trinity River Refuge hosted a "Free Family Fishing Day" on June 7th at the Champion Lake Public Use Area. Over 115 people fished that morning with the majority of young fishermen coming from

Scout Troop 64 out of Dayton. Everyone who fished caught dozens of perch with some bass; all were released. Eight volunteers from the Friends of Trinity River Refuge assisted the kids in casting and baiting hooks. The Scout Troop picked up five bags of trash before they started fishing.

Swifts: In mid-May, Margaret and Maureen O'Conner noticed some birds swirling around the rice dryer as they passed through the intersection of FM 1960 and HWY 321 just before dark. They alerted the Lower Trinity Valley Bird Club, and they conducted counts of the Chimney Swifts: 96 on May 29 and 224 on June 26.

The Lower Trinity Valley Bird Club welcomes participants; they meet on Thursday evenings at the Legend Bank parking lot, 501 N. Cleveland, Dayton, at 8:15 PM and begin counting around 8:30. TVBC extends an invitation to join the special "Swift Night Out" on Saturday August 9 at 7:45 PM in the Community Room of Legend Bank. "Swifts Over Dayton" is reported on the Houston Audubon Society's web site

Ivory-bills: John Arvin with volunteers continued the search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker June 5-7 in the Briarwood area of the Trinity River NWR . The activity involved off-trail searches combined with point counts and vegetative profiling of the canopy trees.

EAST TEXAS MISCELLANY

HARDIN COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Linda Hale reports that Sesquicentennial memorabilia are on sale at the genealogy Library (hats, buttons, T-shirts and tote bags). All items are under \$10 except the extra-large T-shirts. Income will help cover costs of "History Come Alive" event Oct. 25. The event will be held on the grounds at Kirby-Hill House and will feature crafts and vignettes from pioneer days. The Commission also is sponsoring a county-wide treasure hunt beginning in August and continuing for about five weeks.

If you have driven through Kountze lately, you've noted the progress of the old Courthouse "Dome" construction which will contain exhibits on Hardin County History. The dome will be opened for a special Sesquicentennial observance on Sept. 27.



The Sour Lake folks observed the Sesquicentennial on July 10 with a formal opening of their new City Hall, constructed to resemble a railroad depot. Cong. Kevin Brady provided a flag that flew over the Capitol, which now flies over City Hall.

Hardin County Sesquicentennial, History Conference, Oct. 10:

Robert Schaadt, Director, Sam Houston Regional Depository Library, is planning the program for the History Conference sponsored by the Hardin County Historical Commission and cosponsored by the SHRDL and BTA.

The meeting will be at the courthouse October 10, 9:30 A. M. to 4:00 P.M. Speakers have been invited and will include State Historian Frank de la Tejas. Mamma Jacks will cater, and the SCAT group (Senior Citizens All Together) will host the meal at their building. Hardin County authors may bring their books to autograph.

EVENTS

- **Aug. 9** "Swifts Night Out," Dayton
- Legend Bank, 7:45 PM
- **Oct. 10** Hardin County History Conference,
- Kountze Courthouse
- **Oct. 11** Big Thicket Day, Saratoga
- **Oct. 16-19** Native Plant Society of Texas,
- Conference in Beaumont

- **Oct. 25** Sesquicentennial Event: History Comes Alive,
Kirby-Hill House grounds, Kountze
- **Tentative Hikes and Workdays**
- **Sept. 20** Bear Thicket Trail Workday
- **Oct. 26** Battise Trail Workday
- **Nov. 16** Round Lake Hike