

Big Thicket Reporter - #97 Jan-Feb 2009

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FOREST LEGACY PROJECT PROTECTS 2,800 ACRES

Land will remain a privately-owned working forest and serve as an important buffer to the preserve

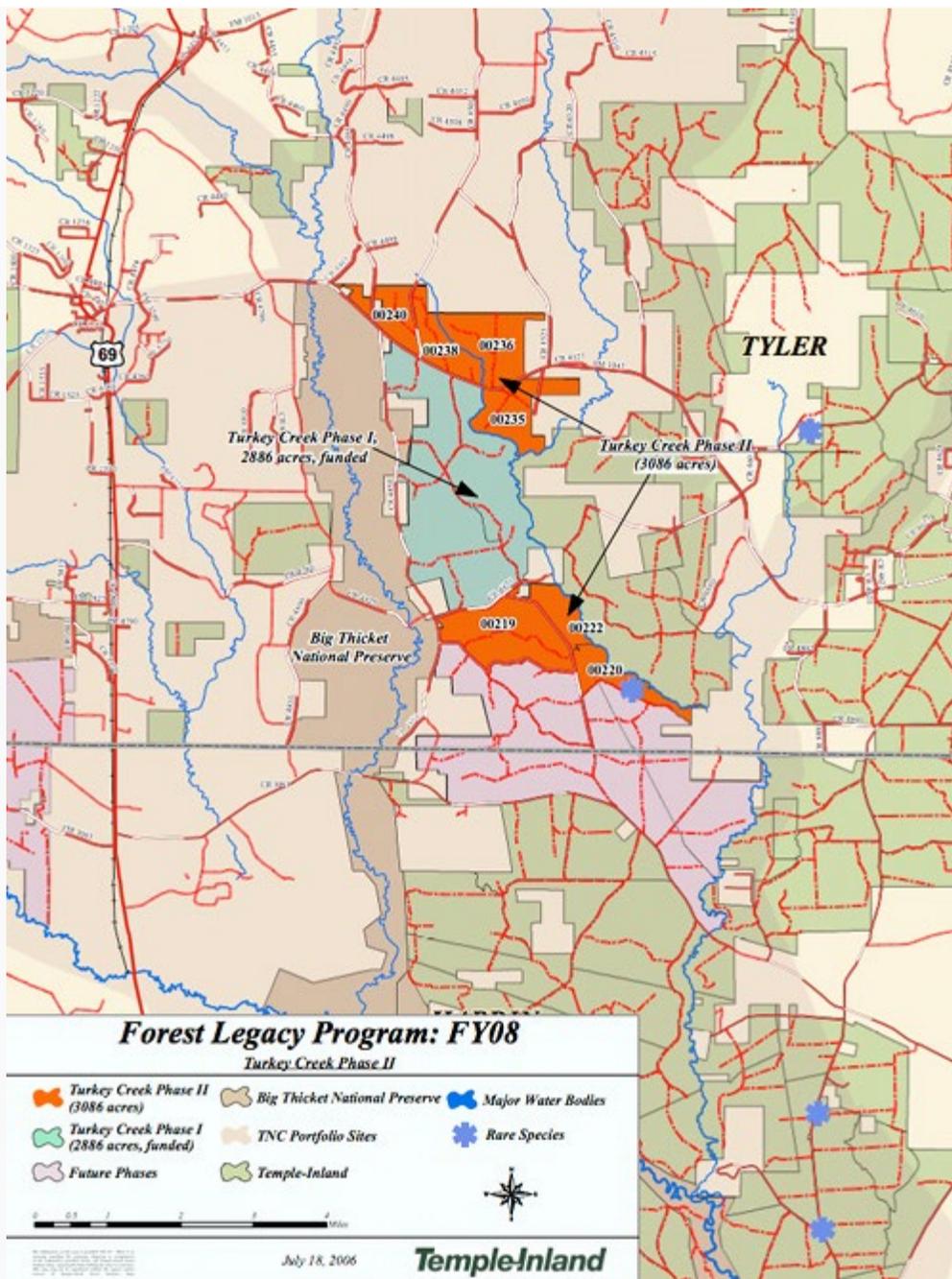
LUFKIN, Texas (Jan. 6, 2009) -- The Conservation Fund, Texas Forest Service and The Campbell Group, LLC, announced today a conservation milestone: the completion of Texas' first Forest Legacy project, the protection of more than 2,800 acres of forestland adjacent to the Turkey Creek Unit of Big Thicket National Preserve.

The Forest Legacy Program, funded by the USDA Forest Service, works with state agencies and local landowners to protect environmentally important forests that are threatened with conversion to non-forest uses. Texas competed nationally with 90 other projects and was one of 35 selected for 2008 Forest Legacy funding. The project received strong support from Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, Sen. John Cornyn and Rep. Kevin Brady, who helped secure the program in Texas. The Conservation Fund, through a grant from the Brown Foundation, provided

remaining funds needed to complete the transaction.

The state of Texas used the funds to purchase a working forest conservation easement on the property. Under the conservation easement, Crown Pine Timber, LP, a private forest managed by The Campbell Group, LLC, retains ownership of the land as well as the right to manage their land as a sustainable working forest. At the same time, the easement serves as an important buffer to Big Thicket National Preserve, provides open space and recreation opportunities and preserves habitat for a number of plant and animal species. Texas Forest Service will monitor and enforce the conditions of the easement.

"I was delighted to hear the announcement that the Turkey Creek Unit of Big Thicket National Preserve had been chosen by the Forest Service as one of the 35 projects selected for a 2008 Forest Legacy grant," said Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison. "I also applaud the work of The Conservation Fund, the Brown Foundation, and The Campbell Group in their help with this effort to add valuable forestland to the Big Thicket. The Big Thicket is an important natural resource to the state of Texas, and I am proud to lend my support to this important initiative."

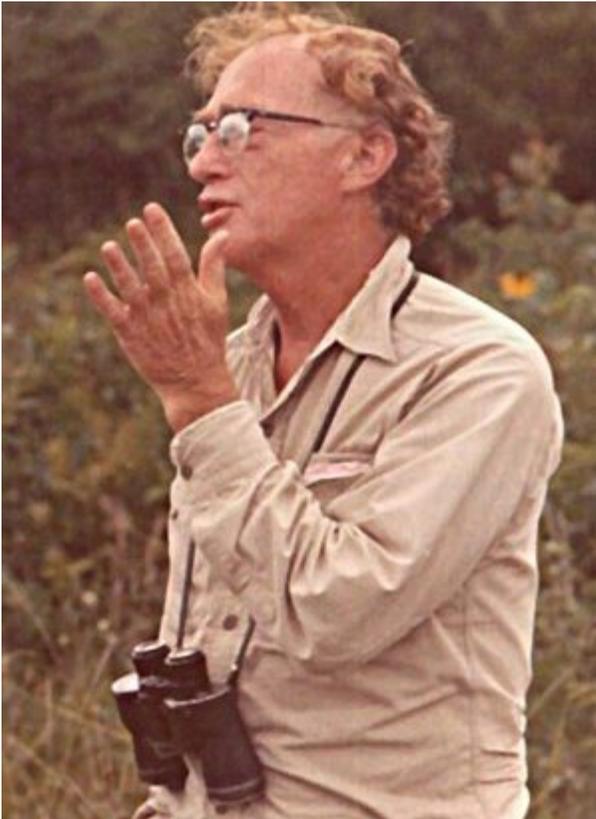


The Texas Forest Service hosted an event at the Texas Forestry Museum in Lufkin on Jan. 16 to celebrate the completion of Phase I of 2,887 acres, providing 5.5 miles of connectivity to Turkey Creek Unit's eastern boundary. Phase II for 7,789 acres needs continuing support. Among project supporters are BTA, the Black Bear Conservation Committee, USDI-BTNP, USDA-NF&G, Gulf Coast Rod, reel and Gun Club, Houston Wilderness, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and The Nature Conservancy.

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Creek Unit, the eastern boundary. Federal funding is available for Phase II, 7,789 acres, but TCF is committed to raise 25 percent (approximately \$700K) as a private match.

Edward C. "Ned" Fritz, 1916-2008



One can't label Ned Fritz! Words are inadequate to the task. We have lost a leader, an icon, a champion, a Goliath, a commanding officer, a "green pioneer"! Fritz confessed to being "confrontational."

Over forty years ago Ned founded the Texas Committee on Natural Resources (now Texas Conservation Alliance). One of the goals was establishment of a Big Thicket National Park. Ned logged more time in Big Thicket forests and in Washington offices than anyone, and he taught us not only about our biodiversity heritage but also about politics. After Big Thicket, he tackled wilderness areas in national forests with wide conservation support, resulting in preservation of 68,000 acres of wilderness areas. -- Maxine Johnston, Ed.

FIRE MANAGEMENT FACILITY IN WOODVILLE

After three years of planning and construction, Big Thicket National Preserve opened its new fire management facility in Tyler County on Dec. 15, 2008. Congressman Kevin Brady gave the keynote speech.



In January 2006, funds from the National Fire Management Program were made available for the construction of a permanent fire management facility for Big Thicket National Preserve. A Citizens' group formed in Tyler County, and then Lonnie and Jill Grissom of Woodville donated six acres of land just south of Woodville for the project. Construction began in January of 2008.

CONSERVATION OUTLOOK

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

Excerpts from Legislative Appropriations Request

Introduction: The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department presented the agency / Appropriations Request for the upcoming biennium. This request substantially advances the mission "to manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations."

Summary of the Legislative Appropriations Request

Funding Request (in millions): FY 2010 FY 2011 Biennial

Total Base Request	\$353.0	\$290.9	\$643.9
Total Exceptional Item Request	\$ 66.0	\$ 65.9	\$131.9
Grand Total Request	\$419.0	\$356.8	\$775.8

Method of Finance:

General Revenue Funds	\$150.7	\$141.4	\$292.1
General Revenue Dedicated	\$147.9	\$150.4	\$298.3
Federal Funds	\$ 43.4	\$ 41.8	\$ 85.2
Other Funds	\$ 77.0	\$ 23.2	\$ 100.2
Grand Total, Method of Finance	\$419.0	\$356.8	\$775.8

Progress in FY 2008

The 80th Legislature approved a substantial amount of funding, particularly for state parks, inland fisheries and law enforcement. These investments have had a positive impact on TPWD operations, as well as the level of services provided to our constituents. To date, most of the newly authorized state park positions have been filled, significant repairs to facilities have been initiated, much needed capital equipment such as ATVs, mowers, and vehicles has been acquired, and most importantly, hours/days of operation at key parks have been extended or restored... we have hired, trained, and placed 15 additional game wardens to serve in the border region.

TPWD has also implemented key areas of legislation passed in the 80th session. Following Senate Bill 1659, we completed the transfer of the Texas State Railroad to the Texas State Railroad Authority on September 1, 2008. With House Bill 12, we successfully transferred 18 state historic sites to the Historical Commission on January 1, 2008. House Bill 3249 changed TPWD's scheduled sunset date from September 1, 2013 to September 1, 2009...

Recommendation, December 18, 2008: Because the State Parks Advisory Committee in 2006 surveyed alternative sources of revenue, such as the Real Estate Transfer Fee (as have others), and reached the conclusion that the "Sporting Goods Tax" was, and is, the reliable revenue stream envisioned by the legislative leadership in 1993, we voted to recommend that the 2007 legislative session continue to support full funding for state and local parks.

In 2007, House Bill 12 passed unanimously in the House and Senate. HB 12 confirmed the original intent and set forth how the revenues would be divided between state and local parks, as well as the Texas Historic Commission: 94% to park accounts and 6% to the Texas Historic Commission...

NATURE CONSERVANCY NEWS

by Wendy Ledbetter, Southeast Texas Project Director

TNC welcomes **Shawn Benedict** to the Big Thicket/Sandylands Program as the new Southeast Texas Preserve Technician. Shawn graduated in May from Stephen F. Austin University with a Bachelor of Science degree with an emphasis on Wildlife Biology. Benedict discovered an unrecorded amphibian species for the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary--the marbled salamander. Boldly colored with black and white bands, this salamander occupies moist sandy areas to dry hillsides with Texas being the extent of its western range.

Planting of 69,000 containerized longleaf pine seedlings was completed on the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary and the Turkey Creek and Hickory Creek Units of the Big Thicket National Preserve. This cooperative project was funded by a Global ReLeaf grant and implemented by the Longleaf Pine Ecosystem Restoration Team, a local, cooperative partnership the Conservancy established with the National Park Service. Campbell Management and Texas Forest Service provided logistical assistance with transport and storage of seedlings.

Program and statewide staff, together with NPS staff, successfully completed three prescribed burns totaling 255 acres. This acreage was burned in preparation for improved conditions to plant longleaf seedlings.

Members of the **Texas Trailing Phlox Recovery Work Group** monitored the reintroduction population of 125 plants in Tyler County on private forest land. This site is scheduled for a winter prescribed burn to maintain open ground cover conditions. Spring surveys for additional occurrences of Texas trailing phlox are scheduled for April 2009.

On behalf of the Phlox Recovery Work Group, **Wendy J. Ledbetter** presented a program on the recovery efforts for the endangered Texas Trailing Phlox at the annual meeting of the Texas Chapter of the Native Plant Society. Bob Boensch led field trips for meeting participants at the Sandyland Preserve, which harbors the largest natural population of phlox. Ledbetter also served as a moderator for the Entergy and Environment Session of the Women's Global Leadership Conference in Houston. Approximately 400 women from around the world attended the event.

Bob Boensch, Preserve Manager, celebrated five years with TNC actively involved in longleaf restoration, fire management, rare species recovery, and feral hog management programs. Boensch and Benedict initiated a feral hog trapping program at the Sandyland Preserve because of increased damages.

Repairs to infrastructure at the Little Rocky Preserve, Wier Woods Preserve and the Sandyland

Preserve as a result of hurricanes Rita in 2005 and Ike in 2008 have been completed.

Amy Roemer, volunteer, and the TNC staff are working on a new booklet for the Longleaf Loop, a self-guiding interpretive trail at Sandylands.

DIVERSITY DISPATCH

Carl Knight Receives DLIA Award

by Mary Catherine Johnston



Dr. Carl Knight of Eastfield College has been named as "Outstanding Biodiversity Educator of the Year 2008" by Discover Life in America. The award was presented to Dr. Knight for his exceptional work with the Thicket of Diversity. Pres. Bruce Drury presented the plaque in behalf of DLIA at a meeting of the BTA, January 10. Dr. Knight is a BTA board member.

Discover Life in America is a US nonprofit organization for the conservation and enjoyment of biological diversity. It uses the knowledge gained through research to develop and disseminate information to encourage the discovery, understanding, preservation and enjoyment of natural resources. It has established a collaborative community of scientists, educators, business and public leaders, volunteers and students who access web-based tools to share information.

Ten years ago the Great Smoky Mountains National Park organized a project for All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory. They have since trained over 800 volunteers who have logged over 50,000 work hours to identify and catalog species. The results have been remarkable. 890 species new to science and 6,129 species previously unknown in the Park were identified. These were cataloged in a digital library with over 10,000 photos and a database with over 250,000 records.

Centennial Challenge: The Preserve received a Centennial Challenge Award of \$65,000 for FY 2008 matched by BTA for the Thicket of Diversity programs. The request for FY 2009 was not funded.

B.T.A. NEWS

Preserve Expansion: Cong. Kevin Brady will reintroduce legislation to expand the Preserve in the new Congress. The "opt in" provision will be replaced by an "opt out" provision supported by the Texas Forestry Association.

Programs Available: BTA has PowerPoint presentations that cover 1) the proposed expansion and 2) recommendations of a Strategic Plan for the Preserve. Other PowerPoints available include biodiversity, legislative history, and Thicket of Diversity.

Bylaws/Articles/ Charters: Pres. Bruce Drury presented revisions of basic documents to the board for approval. The changes will be submitted to BTA members for their approval.

Neches Scenic River: BTA joins other Texas organizations in supporting a feasibility study to establish a Neches Scenic River. Contact Brent Kartye (brentkartye1@yahoo.com), Neches Scenic River Initiative, for organization programs. You can access a Neches color brochure at www.tcatexas.org/documents/nechesbrochure042308.pdf For more details about the Scenic River proposal go to www.tcatexas.org/documents/protectingthewildneches.pdf

BIG THICKET NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST NEWS

By Mary Catherine Johnston, Treasurer

Since its founding in 2001, BTNHT has acquired approximately 65 acres through purchase, mitigation and donation. The organization mission is to protect and preserve the land, water, scenic beauty, plants and wildlife, natural, historic and cultural communities of the Big Thicket. Recently 27 lots near Beech Creek and Village Creek were donated by family members who were settling estate affairs. The Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust paid all the back taxes and the closing costs to acquire the property.

The Trust works cooperatively with the Big Thicket National Preserve and transfers all acquired lands to the Preserve.

A special friend of the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust is Dr. Pete Gunter of Denton, Texas, who has actively solicited funds for the group, including memberships, and sponsorship of a classical concert in Arlington.

The Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust is a member of the Texas Land Trust Council. The Council reports that over 300,000 acres in 95 counties in Texas have been conserved by land trusts. To obtain information about environmental work or membership regarding the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, call Mary C. Johnston, 409-287-3778 or find online at www.btatx.org/BTNHT.

PRESERVE OVERVIEW

by **Ann Roberts**

General Management Plan: Once again the Preserve has a new General Management Plan (GMP) on the agenda. A workshop is scheduled March 17-18 to develop a foundation statement, reconfirm purposes, review mandates and administrative commitments, review and refine fundamental resources and values, etc.

Revision of CFR 2.34 and 4.30: It's too late for comments. Effective Jan. 9, new regulations allow visitors to carry loaded concealed firearms in parks and refuges in compliance with laws of the state in which federal land is located. The intent is for self-defense only. Firearms may not be carried in federal buildings.

Comment period ends Feb. 17: CFR 4.30 would provide for greater access to parks by bicyclists and designation of bicycle trails. Provisions would be revised that requires special regulation to designate bicycle trails. Recommendations of the International Mountain Bike Association support access to remote or backcountry sites. The Park determines conditions where bicycle use is or is not appropriate. Use of bicycles on roads and in campgrounds continues without designation. Changes include possible use of bicycles on existing trails after a three-step process that involves planning documents, and EA or EIS, and public comments. As of December 2008, 152 comments were received with 85 percent approving changes and 15 percent supporting the present rule. [Contact Philip A. Selleck, Chief, Regulations and Special Park Uses 202-208-4206.

Golden Triangle Sierra Club canoed Village Creek and had a wonderful time.



Land Acquisition: The Conservation Fund recently acquired 3,741-acre from the Hancock Forest Management lands located along Village Creek and the Neches River near Village Creek State Park. TCF is working closely with NPS to transfer this land to NPS as soon as possible.

St. Michael's College Volunteers: For over ten years the Preserve has benefited from the volunteer work of students from St. Michael's College in Colchester, Vermont. They have planted trailing phlox and longleaf pine, worked on trails, participated in clearing and burning at Marysee Prairie, as well as volunteering at the Watson Preserve.



This year's group was led by Jacqueline Cote, and included Joan Colloton, Luke Xavier Cadrin, Christine O'Halloran, Alicia McDonald, Sarah Regan, Gregory White, Brittany Falote, Jody Kittle, and Ashley Kaminski. They were housed at the Field Research Station in Saratoga.

Volunteer orientation and site visits were planned as well as work schedules. These student "workaholics" planted longleaf near the new Fire Building, cleaned up hurricane debris at trailing phlox plots, did mortality surveys on longleaf pine seedlings, worked with Dr. Dale Kruse collecting bryophytes, and re-flagged Old Wagon Road trail. Thursday night they visited Ghost Road to look for spooks.

Big Thicket Christmas Counts, by Rose Ann Jordan

The Turkey Creek Christmas Bird Count, sponsored by the Big Thicket National Preserve, was held on December 15, 2008. Volunteers met at the Visitor Center and Preserve volunteer **John Whittle** made assignments for the count circle. A strong cold front passed through, but in spite of the weather, ten observers found 64 species of birds. This total is close to recent averages for this count.

On December 27, 2008 nine observers met at Town Bluff (6:30 a.m.) for the Beech Creek Count. John Whittle again assigned sections of the count circle to each group of birders. Once again the weather was uncooperative with light showers followed by heavy rain. Seventy-four species were seen, lower than normal for this count. Very few ducks were found.

Stephanie Burgess, Steve Mayes, Amy Roemer, and Ken Sztraky came for the Turkey Creek Count. Bill Bailey, Kathleen Brown and Jana Whittle were there for the Beech Creek Count. Bruce Bishop, Sherry Gibson, Rose Ann and Harrison Jordan, Dave Roemer, and John Whittle were present for both counts.

Little Pine Island Hurricane Debris

According to the *Hardin County News* (Jan. 14, 2009), at an emergency meeting January 5 the Hardin County Commissioners cancelled a contract to dispose of hurricane debris, but they are going ahead with plans to transport debris to disposal sites. The \$132,000 contract with a helicopter company lacked specific requirements for amount of debris to be removed. A separate contract with Columbia Helicopter is in force to remove and transfer debris to collection sites. Funding comes from a \$10 million federal disaster grant after the 2005 hurricane.

According to Judge Billy Caraway the project includes 17 sites in a five-mile area from Pinewood Estates to the US 69 bridge. The NPS-BTNP EA allows removal of trees than span the channel higher than the banks. Later an agreement was reached to remove trees lying at or near the top of the water. [Editor's comment: Fie on Mother Nature!]

Events 2009

- Feb. 28, 9:30-2:30, Field Trip - flagging proposed trail, Big Sandy Creek Unit with Houston Sierra Club Field Trip Leaders: Brandt Mannchen and Maxine Johnston
- April 17, 1:00, Thicket of Diversity Executive Council Meeting
- April 18, 9:00-2:00, BTA Board of Directors Meeting, Saratoga, FRS

- April 25, Wilderness Pow Wow, Ratcliff Lake Recreation Area, Davy Crockett National Forest
- Mar. 21, 9:30-3:00, Field Trip - Round Lake, Jack Gore Baygall. Trip Leader: D.W. Ivans (BTNP)
- May 16, 9:30-3:30, Field Trip - Pyramid Magnolia / Silky Camellia sites. Trip Leader Robert Wilson (Campbell Group). Register for trip; call 936-262-8522
- July 10, 1:00, Thicket of Diversity Executive Council Meeting
- July 11, 9:00-2:00, BTA Board of Directors Meeting, Saratoga, FRS
- 2:00-4:00 PM, Lance Rosier Unit Driving Tour. Trip leaders Lane Harrison & Maxine Johnston