

Big Thicket National Preserve

Kountze, Texas

National Park Service
U.S. Department of Interior



NEPA Process for Big Thicket National Preserve Fire Management Plan

Project Scoping for an Environmental Assessment

January 10, 2012

Dear Friend of Big Thicket National Preserve:

The National Park Service (NPS) is initiating the process to update the Fire Management Plan for Big Thicket National Preserve (BITH). Before this update occurs, the NPS plans to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) as part of the process to address changes in vegetative fuels that have occurred as a result of recent hurricanes, drought, and the need to continue ecological restoration activities in BITH.

BITH proposes to continue most of the activities included in the present Fire Management Plan, (2004, with updates), although the public is welcome to suggest changes for consideration. Fire terminology will be updated in line with national fire policy and interagency coordination. BITH plans to utilize the following goals to drive the Fire Management Plan: **1) Protection of life and safety related values, for both firefighters and the public, 2) Protection of private property, improvements, and facilities, 3) Preservation of NPS resources – natural, cultural, and NPS improvements, and 4) Continued ecological restoration and maintenance of NPS lands.**

Even though BITH is a treasure trove of wildlife habitats and ecological diversity, many of the lands that compose BITH were significantly altered by human activities before BITH was established in 1974. Ecological restoration of these altered lands remains a core goal of Preserve management. Restored vegetation communities, many of which are fire dependent, are important to numerous species and are extremely resilient to disruptions such as drought, hurricanes, and climate change. A well-managed and focused fire management program is vital for restoration of BITH vegetation and habitats.

Internal scoping by NPS specialists and staff occurred on November 16th, 2011. They developed the following elements that should be considered when analyzing alternatives that will be developed in this EA process:

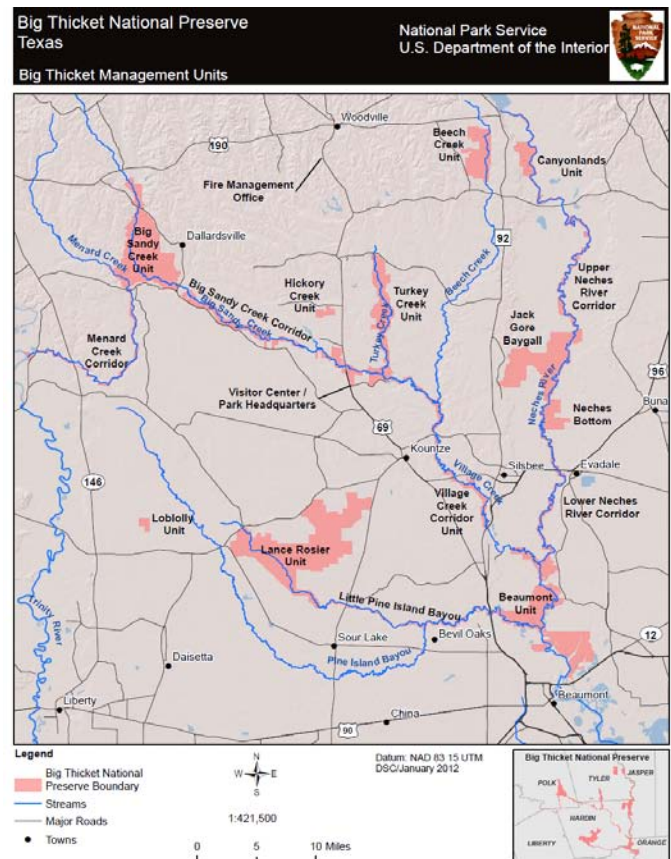
- Full suppression of wildfires,
- Ecological restoration of altered BITH lands,
- Prescribed burning and mechanical use as tools of ecological restoration and hazardous fuel reduction,
- Limited herbicide application to assist ecological restoration,
- Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) of wildfire areas, and
- Consider biomass utilization only as an aid to

ecological restoration or hazardous fuel reduction.

The NPS is preparing this EA in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to provide the decision-making framework that 1) explores management alternatives to meet Preserve objectives, 2) evaluates potential impacts to park resources and values, and 3) identifies mitigation measures to minimize the degree of these impacts.

The NPS encourages public/neighbor comments and participation during this NEPA process. There are two formal opportunities to comment: during this initial project scoping and again following release of the EA. I invite you to influence this process by voicing your ideas, suggestions, comments, or concerns related to BITH fire management activities. These comments will be considered during preparation of the EA.

Sincerely,
Doug Neighbor
Superintendent, Big Thicket National Preserve



Overview of the Process

The basic steps of the NEPA process for this project include:

- **Initial public scoping (closes February 14, 2012)***
- Preparation of the EA
- **Public review of the EA***
- Analysis of public comment on the EA
- Preparation of decision document
- Announcement of decision
- Implementation

*** indicates opportunities for public comment**

Resources and Concerns

The Environmental Assessment will analyze potential impacts to a number of resources including:

Soils, Water Resources (including Floodplains and Wetlands), Air Quality, Vegetation, Wildlife, Species of Special Concern, Cultural Resources, Soundscapes, Socioeconomics, Public Health and Safety, Preserve Operations, and Visitor Use and Experience.

Ideas to Consider

Following are a few ideas to consider as you develop comments on this project:

1. Are there any missing issues or concerns that should be addressed in the EA?
2. Are there other alternatives or options that you think should be considered?
3. Do you have other comments and suggestions for us to consider in the EA?

How Do I Comment on This Project?

Please submit your comments online at the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bith/>

If you are unable to submit comments electronically, then you may submit written comments to:

Attention: Deanna Boensch
Big Thicket National Preserve
860 CR 1040,
Woodville, TX 75979

You may also hand-deliver written comments to the visitor center at Big Thicket National Preserve.

**Please provide all initial comments by
February 14, 2012.**

If you wish to be added to or removed from the Preserve's mailing list for future correspondence, please indicate that in your response.

Thanks for your time and consideration!