



Hurricane Rita Debris in the Little Pine Island – Pine Island Bayou Corridor Unit

Project Scoping for the Environmental Assessment

November 15, 2007

Dear Friend of Big Thicket National Preserve:

The National Park Service (NPS) is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to address the potential for increased flooding in communities adjacent to the Little Pine Island – Pine Island Bayou Corridor Unit (LPI Corridor Unit) of Big Thicket National Preserve (Preserve) resulting from post-Hurricane Rita downed trees and woody debris.

In 2005, wind from Hurricane Rita caused a number of trees to fall within the Preserve, and Hardin County officials and private property owners have expressed concern that this debris has contributed to flooding in adjacent communities. In March 2007, NPS hydrologists performed an on-site study of timber blow-down from Hurricane Rita within the LPI Corridor Unit which determined that there were no post-Hurricane Rita woody debris collections that have increased flooding in the LPI Corridor Unit. However, NPS hydrologists did observe a few areas where downed trees could possibly collect further debris and create obstructions with the potential to increase flooding in the future.

Consistent with NPS management policies, laws, and regulations, the objectives for this project are to 1) Work cooperatively with the public and county government to protect preserve resources and values, avoid and resolve potential conflicts, and address mutual interests in the quality of life of community residents, 2) Considering the extent it is compatible with public safety, allow weather-related processes and associated disturbances to recover naturally, and 3) Prevent impairment of preserve resources and limit impacts on preserve operations and management.

The NPS is preparing an EA in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to provide the decision-making framework that 1) explores a reasonable range of alternatives to meet project 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 participation throughout the NEPA process during which the public has two opportunities to comment on this project; once during initial project scoping and again following release of the EA. We are currently in the scoping phase of this project, and I invite you to voice your ideas, comments, or concerns about this effort. These comments will be considered during preparation of the EA.

*Sincerely,
Todd Brindle
Superintendent*

Alternatives

Following is the preliminary range of alternatives to be evaluated in the EA:

Alternative 1 – No Action The NPS would continue to manage the Little Pine Island – Pine Island Bayou Corridor Unit for the preservation of floodplain values, allowing natural processes to evolve, with no removal of woody debris.

Alternative 2 – Remove Woody Debris from the Channel and Dispose of it Completely The NPS would hire a contractor to conduct a one-time removal of post-Hurricane Rita woody debris within the channel of the Little Pine Island – Pine Island Bayou Corridor Unit. Only debris identified as having the potential to create complete blockages of the active channel and result in increases in flooding of the adjacent communities would be removed, and disposed of outside the Preserve.

Alternative 3 – Eliminate the Structural Integrity of Woody Debris and Downed Trees in the Channel This alternative is the same as Alternative 2 except that the woody debris would be broken up and left within the Preserve instead of removed and disposed of outside the Preserve.

Overview of the Process

Project milestones include:

- **Public scoping (closes December 14, 2007)***
- Preparation of the EA
- Public review of the EA*
- Analysis of public comment
- Preparation of decision document
- Announcement of decision

Bold indicates where we are now; * indicates opportunities for public comment

Resources and Concerns

The EA will analyze potential impacts to:

Water Resources ● Floodplains and Wetlands ● Fish, Wildlife, and Species of Special Concern ● Geology and Soils ● Vegetation ● Cultural Resources ● Air Quality ● Soundscapes ● Socioeconomics ● Visitor Use and Experience ● Public Health and Safety ● Park Operations

Ideas to Consider

Following are a few ideas to keep in mind as you develop your comments on this proposal:

1. Do you have any ideas to share about issues/concerns, or are there any other issues/concerns about the project that you think we should consider?
2. Are there any other alternatives 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>

Please provide all comments by December 14, 2007. If you wish to be added to or removed from the Preserve's mailing list for future correspondence, please indicate that in your response.

If you are unable to submit comments electronically through this website, then you may also submit written comments to the address on the postmark, Attention: Chris Peapenburg. You may also hand-deliver written comments to the visitor center at Big Thicket National Preserve.

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

