



Provide Administrative Campsites and Recreational Vehicle (RV) Sites at the Field Research Station, Big Thicket National Preserve, Hardin County, Texas

Project Scoping for an Environmental Assessment

March 23, 2009

Dear Friend of Big Thicket National Preserve,

The National Park Service (NPS) is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to provide a camping area and Recreational Vehicle (RV) sites for volunteer and administrative use at the Big Thicket National Preserve (Preserve) Field Research Station in Saratoga, Hardin County, Texas.

The Field Research Station (FRS) was established in 2000 to encourage study of the Big Thicket by visiting scientists. The FRS sleeps 20, and has space for cooking, showers, meeting rooms, and a research lab. However, volunteer interest at the Preserve has grown, and on some occasions the NPS has turned away student groups and volunteers because the FRS is booked. The Preserve does not maintain any public campgrounds, and there are limited private campgrounds in the area. This project would provide researchers, student groups, and general volunteers with 1) a designated camping area, and 2) RV sites with electrical and water hook-ups while they are doing work for the Preserve. The project would also increase the attractiveness of the Preserve to potential volunteers interested in seasonal internships.

The FRS occupies a former school cafeteria building and grounds that were sold to the Big Thicket Association in 1966, and donated to the NPS in 1993. Foundations, debris, and other remnants of the brick schoolhouse, gymnasium (a Works Progress Administration building), and other minor structures are still present on the 6.4 acre property. These remnants of demolished structures, plus RV sites from the 1970s that are non-functional, would be removed in this project.

An Environmental Assessment will be prepared 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 issues and impacts to park resources and values, and 3) identifies mitigation measures to lessen the degree or extent 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. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Todd W. Brindle

Superintendent, Big Thicket National Preserve



Alternatives

The preliminary range of alternatives, including the proposed action, to be evaluated in the environmental assessment are:

Alternative 1 – No Action This alternative represents the continuation of existing conditions. In this case, “No-Action” means the project would not take place; and

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action Under the proposed action, the NPS would designate an administrative use group camping area, develop and build 2-4 administrative use RV sites (pads and roads) with electrical and water hook-ups and a septic holding tank, install 2 waterless vault toilets, and demolish existing structural remnants of the former RV sites, concrete platforms, sidewalks, and foundations at the Field Research Station.

Overview of the Process

Project milestones include:

- **Public scoping period (closes April 30, 2009)***
- Preparation of environmental assessment
- Public review of environmental assessment*
- 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 Environmental Assessment will analyze potential impacts to a number of resources including:

- Geology, soils, and vegetation
- Wildlife and species of special concern
- Water resources, floodplains, and wetlands
- Cultural resources
- Air quality
- Lightscares and soundscapes
- Socioeconomics
- Visitor use and experience
- 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 the alternatives or resources and 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?

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 April 30, 2009. 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 below, Attention: David Roemer. You may also hand-deliver written comments to the Visitor Center at Big Thicket National Preserve.

