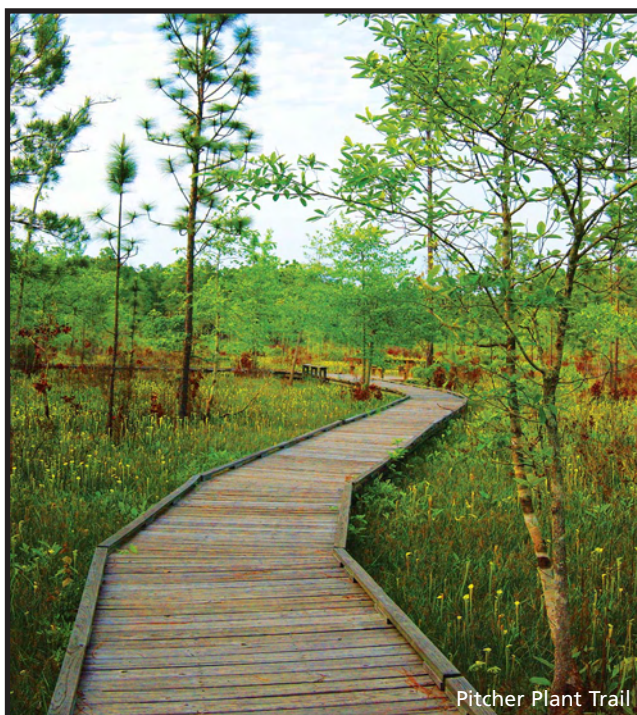




Big Thicket National Preserve • Texas



YOU'RE INVITED TO AN OPEN HOUSE

- To help launch the project to create a new general management plan
- To learn more about the preserve
- To discuss your ideas, thoughts, and concerns

Wheat Elementary School

505 N. Charlton, Woodville, TX 75979

July 20th, 2009, Monday

6:00 - 8:00 pm*

Silsbee Community Center

835 Highway 96 South, Silsbee, TX 77656

July 21st, 2009, Tuesday

6:00 - 8:00 pm*

Rogers Park Community Center

6540 Gladys, Beaumont, TX 77706

July 22nd, 2009, Wednesday

4:00 - 7:00 pm**

Forestry Building, Sowden Conference Room

12025 Sowden, Houston, TX 77055

July 23rd, 2009, Thursday

4:00 - 7:00 pm**

*A brief presentation will be given at 6:15 pm.

**A brief presentation will be given at 4:15 pm.

A Message from the Superintendent



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I am inviting you to help us develop a new general management plan for Big Thicket National Preserve (the preserve). With your help, we will create a realistic long-term vision for the future management of the preserve. Your participation and input are the most important part of the planning process, and I hope you will join us throughout.

Big Thicket, this country's first national preserve, was established in 1974, and the first general management plan (GMP) was completed in 1980. Since that time, the preserve and the surrounding area have changed: new lands have been added and there have been significant changes in the way visitors use the preserve and the way the land around the preserve is used. The 1980 plan no longer adequately addresses today's challenges. Now it is time to look forward. We must explore how to best conserve the unique recreational opportunities, natural resources, and cultural history of the preserve and continue to make it an educational and inspirational place for all of us to visit and enjoy. This is a unique opportunity that comes around only every 20 years or so. I need your help to create the framework that will guide Big Thicket National Preserve's management for the next 20 years.

This summer, we will host a number of open houses in the southeast Texas area. I hope you will join us at one of these open houses to learn more about the general management plan process, meet the planning team, and share your ideas, thoughts, and concerns about Big Thicket National Preserve.

Aside from talking with you at an open house, the most efficient way for us to receive and review your comments is through the National Park Service planning website at <http://www.nps.gov/bith/parkmgmt/planning.htm>.

Alternatively, you may fill out the enclosed comment card. Be sure to select the appropriate box on the backside of the card if you would like to add your name to the GMP mailing list. Your input, coupled with National Park Service (NPS) expertise, will be a powerful combination for maximizing the potential of Big Thicket National Preserve. I look forward to creating our collective vision for this special place.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Todd W. Brindle". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Todd W. Brindle
Superintendent
Big Thicket National Preserve

What Is a General Management Plan?

A general management plan is the broadest level of planning in the National Park Service (NPS); it lays the groundwork for more detailed planning and day-to-day decision making that will follow. A general management plan begins with the preserve's "purpose," which is why the preserve was established, and its "significance," which identifies the characteristics of the preserve that make it an important part of our national heritage.

The planning process will identify the conditions that best fulfill the preserve's purpose and maintain its significant characteristics. These "desired conditions" help to define what NPS managers will be working to achieve.

Because it is developed through an interactive planning process, a general management plan also represents an agreement with the American public about how the preserve will be managed in the future—including resource conditions in the preserve, appropriate opportunities for visitor experiences, and types and locations for visitor access and facilities.



Why Do We Need a New General Management Plan?

The primary role of the general management plan is to define the kind of place we want Big Thicket National Preserve to be in the future. What are the resource conditions we want to maintain and the visitor experiences we want to have? Several possible visions for the preserve's future will be developed during the planning process. These visions, also called management alternatives, will present different approaches to manage the preserve while achieving its purposes and maintaining its significance. Evaluating a range of alternatives enables the National Park Service, communities, visitors, and other local, state, and federal agencies to compare the advantages and disadvantages of the various courses of action. Public participation is important throughout the planning process.

The general management plan will be our blueprint to move into the future. It has been nearly 30 years since this level of planning was conducted for the preserve. Since that time we have gained a better understanding of the natural and cultural resources and recreational uses within the various units of the preserve. The preserve has increased in size and there are new forms of recreation that have become popular. A changing population and the sale of adjacent timber lands have placed new and different demands on the lands and waters within the preserve. These interests must be balanced with other regional and national interests.

The general management plan considers each unit of the preserve as part of larger ecological, cultural, and socioeconomic systems. This comprehensive approach includes coordination with the preserve's neighbors to ensure that decisions made through this process are widely supported and sustainable over time.

Left photo: Kayak on Little Pine Island Bayou

Bottom photo: Great Egret along 10-Mile Creek, Credit: Dr. Richard Bothel



Next Steps and How to Get Involved

The general management plan process will take approximately 4 years to complete. During this time, we will be looking for your assistance at several key points. We will look to you to:

- Share your concerns, expectations, values and information *now* – at the beginning of the process
- Review and comment on the preliminary planning alternatives
- Review and comment on the *Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (GMP/EIS)*
- Regularly visit the National Park Service planning website at:
<http://www.nps.gov/bith/parkmgmt/planning.htm>

| | Estimated Timeframe | Planning Activity | Public Involvement Opportunities |
|-------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| WE ARE HERE | Summer 2009 | Scoping — Identify concerns, expectations, and values related to Big Thicket with input from the public, preserve partners, government agencies, and other stakeholders. | Review newsletter #1 and send us your ideas and concerns using the response form. Attend public meetings and voice your ideas and concerns. |
| | Spring 2010 | Develop Preliminary Alternatives — Outline different possible futures for Big Thicket and provide opportunities for review and comment by the public, preserve partners, government agencies, and other stakeholders. | Review newsletter #2 and send us your ideas and concerns using the response form. Attend public meetings and comment on the preliminary alternatives. |
| | Fall 2011 | Prepare and Distribute a Draft GMPIES — Explain the various alternatives and the possible environmental impacts of the alternatives. Review and comment by the public, preserve partners, government agencies, and other stakeholders. | Review the <i>Draft GMPIES</i> and provide written comments. Attend public meetings and share your ideas and concerns or submit written comments. |
| | Fall 2012 | Prepare a Final GMPIES — Identify the long-term management plan that was selected after considering public comments on the Draft GMP/EIS. | Review the <i>Final GMPIES</i> . |
| | Spring 2013 | Implement the Approved Plan — Prepare and issue a "Record of Decision" and implement the general management plan. | Work with the preserve to implement the plan and provide feedback on plan success and effectiveness. |

Getting to Know Big Thicket National Preserve

Profile

- Dedicated in 1974 to preserve a portion of the Big Thicket of southeast Texas
- 105,684 acres composed of 15 units connected by waterways such as the Neches River, Village Creek, and Pine Island Bayou
- Popular recreation activities include boating, paddling, fishing, hunting, hiking, and bird watching
- The Big Thicket once spread over 3.5 million acres, now less than 300,000 acres of the natural forest remains.

Fun Facts About Big Thicket National Preserve

Recreation and Visitor Experience

- There are 26 day use areas located in 9 units of the preserve and 9 hiking trails located in 5 units.
- The preserve has some of the best canoeing in Texas.
- There are 8 birding hotspots in the preserve, and the preserve includes part of the Texas Coastal Birding Trail.
- Hunting is allowed in 6 units of the preserve.
- The preserve provides educational experiences for more than 4,000 children each school year, both in the preserve and in classrooms.

Natural Resources and Special Designations

- The region's first biological survey took place in 1936.
- The preserve provides habitat for plant and animal species of the southeast swamps, pineywood forest, post-oak belt, Great Plains, southwest deserts, and coastal prairie.
- The following are either documented in, migrate through, or are believed to inhabit the preserve:
 - 60 of the 181 mammals in Texas
 - more than 200 species of birds
 - about 85 species of reptiles and amphibians, 98 species of fish, and 34 species of mussels
 - more than 1,800 species of butterflies, skippers, and moths
 - 85 tree species, more than 60 shrubs, and nearly 1,000 other flowering plants, including 26 ferns and associated organisms, 20 orchids, and 4 types of insect-eating plants

- Mastodons, saber-toothed tigers, camels, giant sloths, and other now extinct prehistoric animals roamed the Big Thicket around 10,000 years ago.

Historic and Cultural Resources

- Evidence of human occupation in the Big Thicket region dates back at least 8,000 years, including the Atakapa, Caddo, Creek, Alabama, and Coushatta American Indian tribes, and Euro-American settlers.
- Texas' oldest and longest-surviving cattle trail, the Opelousas Trail, passed through the Beaumont Unit of the preserve and crossed the Neches River at Tevis' Ferry.
- During the Civil War many Big Thicket citizens went deeper into the woods to avoid conscription (they were called "Jay Hawkers").
- Conservationist R. E. Jackson founded the East Texas Big Thicket Association in 1927 to protect the area from lumber and oil industry development — 47 years before the preserve was established.



Canoeing on the Neches River

Preserve Purpose and Significance

The **purpose** is a clear statement of why Congress established the preserve as a unit of the national park system. Statements of **significance** define what is **most important** about the preserve's resources and values; they are based on the preserve's purpose.

The purpose and significance statements help guide planning and management decisions made about the preserve. Big Thicket National Preserve's purpose and significance statements are described in the following sections.

Purpose

Big Thicket National Preserve represents a portion of "the Big Thicket" in southeast Texas, known for its extensive biological diversity, and is dedicated to preserving, conserving, protecting, and enhancing the natural and ecological integrity [thereof]. The preserve contains scientific and recreational values and provides for public enjoyment.



Significance

Extraordinary Combination of Habitats and Species and their Scientific Value

Big Thicket National Preserve—the first national preserve—was set aside for its biodiversity. The preserve contains remnants of the Big Thicket of Texas and its diverse units are representative of the larger biogeographic region. The preserve serves as a refuge for a combination of plants, animals, and natural communities that include elements from the southeast swamps, eastern forests, central plains, and southwest deserts. The preserve is the only NPS unit with this combination of resources. The opportunities for scientific research at the preserve include the study of biodiversity and disturbance resulting from land uses and natural phenomena (e.g., hurricanes and fires).



Top left photo: Neches River
Bottom left photo: Kirby Nature Trail
Top right photo: Sundew Trail

Flowing Water and Dependent Systems

Big Thicket National Preserve has an extensive, dynamic system of hydrologic processes and associated dependent systems important to maintain the diverse yet specific ecological make-up of the Big Thicket. These include contiguous riverine and wetland systems. The preserve provides examples of blackwater systems, which are not typically found outside of the Amazon Basin and Southeastern United States, and of rare baygall wetlands that exemplify the original and seemingly impenetrable Big Thicket.

National and International Designations

The preserve was designated an International Biosphere Reserve in 1981 by the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to promote cooperation with neighboring communities, individuals, agencies, and institutions to “ensure the preservation of the biological diversity, provide for research, and promote the use of Big Thicket National Preserve for environmental education, training, and solutions to common problems.”* The preserve

was also designated a Globally Important Bird Area in 2001 by the American Bird Conservancy because it provides critical cover and forage to migrant neo-tropical birds using the Central and Mississippi Flyways.

Visitor Experience

In a state where public lands are not widely available, Big Thicket National Preserve offers the visitor a wide array of recreational and educational opportunities in a natural setting in close proximity to large urban areas.

Cultural Resources

Big Thicket National Preserve has a rich cultural history spanning centuries and cultures – Prehistoric to modern American Indians, Spanish explorers, and early settlers to today’s modern users. Resources include remnants of historic land use activities and structures, traces of travel corridors, and archeological sites.

*Statement for Management: Man and the Biosphere, 1991



Top left photo: Leather flower. Bottom left photo: Wild azalea.
Top right photo: Village Creek. Bottom right photo: Village Creek sandbar.

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How to participate in the general management plan process...

Send us your comments and sign up for the GMP mailing list

- Post your comments directly on our website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bith> (only project team members will be able to view your comments on this website), or
- Return the enclosed response card with your comments and contact information, or
- Send a letter: National Park Service General Management Planning, Attn: Erin Flanagan, DSC-P, Denver Service Center, National Park Service, P.O. Box 25287, Denver, CO 80225-0287.

Visit Our Website

- For regular updates on the process, public meeting announcements, copies of newsletters, and planning documents, please visit <http://www.nps.gov/bith/parkmgmt/planning.htm>

Attend an Open House

- The National Park Service will kick off the planning process with open houses this summer.

BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE

Address:
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6044 FM420
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Telephone:
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Planning Website:
<http://www.nps.gov/bith/parkmgmt/planning.htm>