

THE BIG THICKET

NATIONAL PRESERVE



As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, park and recreation areas, and for the wise use of all those resources. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U. S. administration.

National Park Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Big Thicket National Preserve is made up of disjunct representative units, and river corridors of the Big Thicket country of East Texas and is the first of the almost 300 units administered by Interior's National Park Service to be designated as a "National Preserve." This new concept affords a multiplicity of uses while retaining the traditional concept of National Park Service administration.

Big Thicket is best known for its biological diversity and often has been referred to as a biological crossroads, exhibiting such a complexity of floral and faunal entities as to be of significant national interest.

BIG SANDY CREEK

The second largest unit in the Preserve, Big Sandy Creek Unit, contains the major elements of a northern profile of the Big Thicket Country. Changes in elevation and soil, from the red, sandy hills to the creek bottom and eventually to the broad alluvial floodplain of the lower portion of the unit, afford a diversity of plant and animal life for which Big Thicket is famous. Hiking, bird-watching, the relative abundance of wild flowers, and the close proximity of the Alabama-Coushatta Indian Reservation will make the Big Sandy Creek Unit a very popular area.

HICKORY CREEK SAVANNAH

This unit is representative of the long-leaf pine uplands and pine savannah wetlands. The dry, sandy soil of the uplands and the wetter soils of the savannah give rise to a kaleidoscope of wild flowers and grasses interspersed by various shrubs among the tall, long-leaf pines. Under natural conditions, the long-leaf pine uplands and savannah wetlands resemble a glade-like park when exposed to natural grassland wildfires. In the absence or suppression of fire, the shrubs rapidly disperse and may become dense, impenetrable thickets.

TURKEY CREEK

This unit contains the greatest concentrated plant diversification in the Preserve. The northern portion of the unit contains a 1¼ square mile block where five of the seven major plant associations

occurring in the Preserve may be observed in an hour's walk. Within this area occur orchids, four of the five species of carnivorous plants found in North America, ferns and a greater variety of wild flowers than are found anywhere else in the Preserve. Turkey Creek is a representative small, free flowing creek, exemplifying the clear, spring-fed tannin-colored stream type which flows down from the "Upper Thicket." The southern portion of the unit contains a mature streamside bluff forest of unusual beauty.

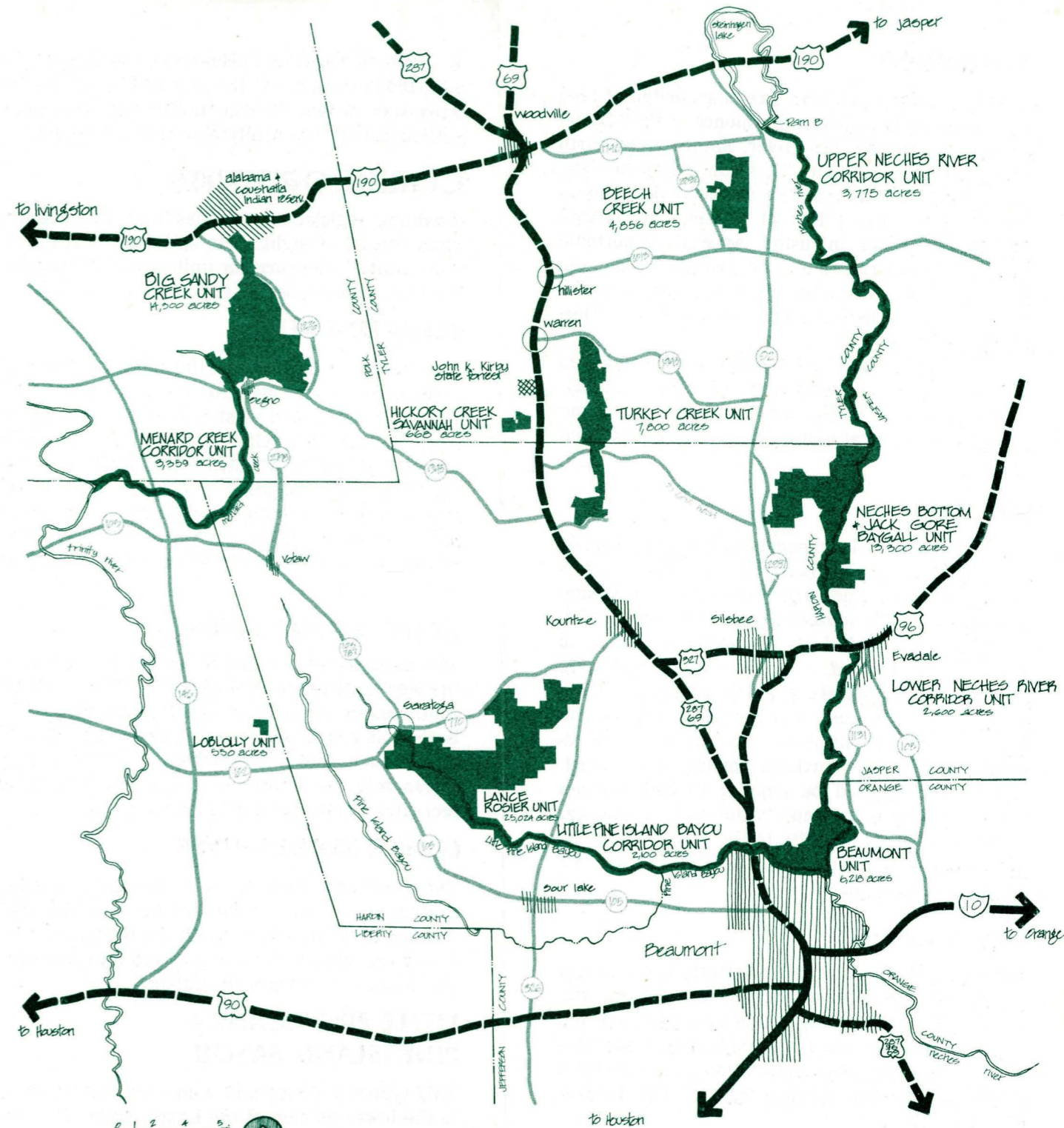
BEECH CREEK

Beech Creek contains a remarkable well-preserved remnant of the beech-magnolia-loblolly plant association. This association of Northeast and Southeast tree species occurs almost exclusively in the Southeast Texas. A small five acre block occurs in this unit and represents perhaps the finest example of this plant association in the Preserve. Hiking, backpacking, and nature study, along with the close proximity of camping facilities, the Neches River and Sam Rayburn Reservoir will no doubt enhance visitation of this unit.

NECHES BOTTOM - JACK GORE BAYGALL

This unit offers wide diversity from beech-magnolia bluffs and hummocks, acidbog baygalls (acidic areas—containing white bay and gallberry holly as the characteristic plant species), cypress-tupelo sloughs, floodplain hardwood forests, abandoned channel lakes and the Neches River.

The eastern and western boundaries of this unit contain bluffs of the ancient Neches River floodplain or "alluvium." The ancient Neches River, during a period of high sea level, filled this valley. In various stages, the meandering river left abandoned channels which filled with organic debris. Those channels receiving water from springs become baygalls, while others become "pin oak flat" woods. With periods of decreasing rainfall, the size of this river and floodplain diminished until now the Neches River meanders over the smaller floodplain which floods periodically and flushes the abandoned channels which are known as "sloughs." Canoeing, hiking, nature study and fishing will be major activities associated with this unit. At present, the easiest access to the unit is by canoe or small boat.



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Big Thicket • National Preserve • Texas

VICINITY MAP

175 | 20,000
APRIL 75 | DEC

United States Department of the Interior • National Park Service

NOTE: All lands within the units of Big Thicket National Preserve are at this time in private ownership. A minimum of five years will be required before enough land is in Federal ownership to allow public access & use of selected units.

BEAUMONT

The Beaumont Unit is an irregular wedge of land and water containing the confluence of Pine Island Bayou and the Neches River, immediately north of the city of Beaumont. This unit, being the lowest and wettest in the Preserve with hummocks averaging between 5-10 feet in elevation, is subject to salt water intrusion, as well as periodic flooding, giving rise to a great diversity of aquatic associated life, reminiscent of the Okefenokee Swamp of Georgia and portions of the Lower Florida Everglades.

Its isolation and inaccessibility has endowed the Beaumont Unit with high wilderness quality, an abundance of varied bird and animal life and a refuge for several endangered species of animal life.

LOBLOLLY

The Loblolly Unit is an excellent remnant example of a mature pine-hardwood forest. This tract is significant as it demonstrates ecological succession quite readily. The southern portion is almost totally loblolly pine, relatively even-aged at around 80 years. Broad crowns, large, low limbs and wide growth range indicate that these parent trees matured in open land, and represent a transition from the Marysee prairie to the south, and hardwood forest to the northern portion of the tract.

This unit should be popular to both visitors and the scientific community due to its ecological significance and proximity to the Marysee prairie, the Lance Rosier Unit, and the Big Thicket Association's Museum.

LANCE ROSIER

The Lance Rosier Unit is a relatively large, closed canopy wilderness exemplifying a typical profile of lower Big Thicket vegetation associations. From east to west, the roughly triangular unit contains five of the seven plant associations, thus giving a biological diversity characteristic of Big Thicket National Preserve.

From north to south, the unit represents a transition of an older geological formation to a younger, exemplifying the influence of geological history on topography, soils, drainage and vegetation.

The unit is steeped in history. One of the first

oil wells in Texas was driven near Saratoga in the mid-1860's period. At the turn of the century, the area was known for the traditional bear hunts, although bear are rarely observed at present.

CORRIDOR UNITS

Enabling legislation specifies that the Preserve shall consist of eight units and four "stream corridor units." The corridor units are of significance for their natural, scenic and recreational value.

MENARD CREEK

The lower portion of the Big Sandy Creek Unit gives access to the Menard Creek Corridor, which meanders south and west eventually meeting the Trinity River. This relatively small creek traverses a portion of dense forested area, locally known as the "Tight-eye region." The term, "Tight-eye" refers to the exceptional density of the forest cover which contains an abundance of swamp cyrilla or "Ti-ti bushes" which form an impenetrable thicket.

UPPER NECHES RIVER

The northernmost corridor begins at Dam B on the Neches River near Martin Dies State Park and continues southward into and through the Neches Bottom and Jack Gore Baygall Unit. Canoeists and boaters will find the Northern Corridor a good access into the lower units and will have many recreational alternatives to contemplate.

LOWER NECHES RIVER

The Southern Neches River Corridor meanders southerly from the Neches Bottom and Jack Gore Baygall Unit into and through the Beaumont Unit, giving canoeists and boaters access into the estuarine-like lower Neches floodplain.

LITTLE PINE ISLAND – PINE ISLAND BAYOU

This typically dense and wild area has its origin in the lower portion of the Lance Rosier Unit and meanders southeasterly, entering the lower portion of the Beaumont Unit and eventually meeting the Lower Neches River Corridor. The southern shore is partially developed into farms and residential areas, whereas the northern bank is mostly undeveloped.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Don't expect very much, very soon. There is no such thing as an instant park. The process of land acquisition, planning and development is very time-consuming.

Do not assume the land within any of the units described in this folder are Federally owned. Treat all property in the Big Thicket area as PRIVATE PROPERTY. Respect land owners' rights.

While an accurate time table of development cannot be laid out at the time of printing, some factors are known:

1974, Oct. 11—Public Law 93-439 signed by President Gerald S. Ford, established Big Thicket National Preserve.

1975, March 17—Publication of boundaries, completed prior to the required date of April 11, 1975.

1975, April—Planning team held workshop sessions with local interested people.

1975, June—Ownership mapping for land acquisition commenced, based on boundary descriptions published in the Federal Register. Corps of Engineers begin soliciting bids to provide title and escrow services and appraisals.

1975, July—(Start of 1976 Fiscal Year) Corps of Engineers will staff its land acquisition office. On or about this date, the project staff will move into enlarged temporary quarters.

1975, August—(Estimated) Working draft of the proposed Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Preserve presented to the public for review and comment through a series of public meetings.

1975, October 11—(or earlier) The Secretary of the Interior will present written report on total lands and areas needed, those acquired to this date, and a five-year acquisition plan.

1975, December 1—(estimated) Draft Management Plan adjusted to reflect public input and approved for implementation.

1977, April 1—(Estimated) First operational units of Big Thicket National Preserve (hopefully) open for public use.

1980, October 11—Land acquisition essentially completed. (Required by Congress).

BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE
P. O. BOX 7408
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