

Big Thicket
National Preserve
(TX)

Fiscal Year:
2009

Acreage:
2,800

Estimated Price
to National Park
Service:
\$4,750,000

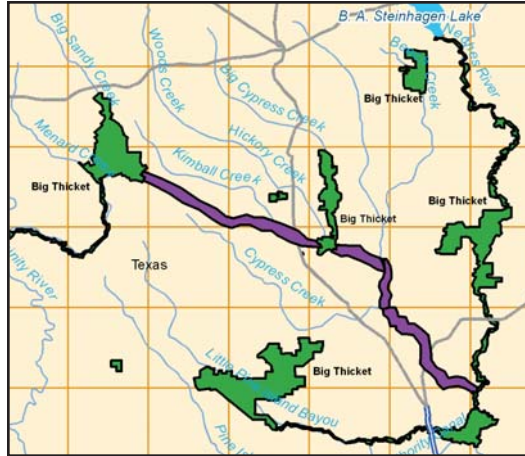
Natural
Resources:

Rare and
endangered
species, contiguous
greenways,
Pleistocene
terraces

Programmatic
Significance:

Wildland canoeing,
recreational
opportunities,
water quality
protection,
wildlife habitat
preservation

Big Thicket National Preserve (TX)



When most people think of Texas, they think of dusty, windblown plains, rodeos and cowboys, and the hustle and bustle of Dallas. Rarely do they envision towering pine trees, creeks winding through a maze of cypress sloughs, or bogs peppered with carnivorous plants. In other words, they rarely think about Big Thicket National Preserve.

The original Big Thicket of Texas covered between 1 million and 3 million acres. People have called the Big Thicket an American ark and the biological crossroads of North America. What is extraordinary is not the rarity or abundance of its life forms, but how many species co-exist here. This dense wilderness was so difficult to traverse that most people moving westward avoided the area. One exhausted traveler wrote in 1835, "This day passed through the thickest woods I ever saw. It...surpasses any country for brush." The few hardy souls who did settle here found an abundance of water and diverse plant life. Everything they needed for living was literally right out their front door. In the 1850s economic development began with the cutting of pines and cypress. Ancient forests were felled and replanted with non-native trees. Oil strikes around 1900 brought further forest encroachment as people flooded into the area looking to strike it rich. By the middle of the 20th century, the vast majority of virgin forest was gone.

Big Thicket National Preserve was established in 1974 "to assure the preservation, conservation, and protection of the natural, scenic, and recreational values of a significant portion of the Big Thicket area." This portion of Big Thicket consists of

nine land units and six water units, comprising approximately 100,000 acres that are not all connected to one another. At the time of the preserve's establishment, this fragmentation wasn't thought to be critical. The land between each unit was owned by timber companies, and with the preserve units, created a contiguous greenway. However, much of this land has or is being sold for development, and the greenways are in danger of being forever destroyed.

Fragmentation is arguably the biggest threat to Big Thicket National Preserve. Most of the 2,000 acres yet to be acquired within the 1993 authorized boundary addition are located in the Big Sandy Creek Corridor Unit. The acquisition of these lands would create a greenway connecting three units of the preserve: Big Sandy Creek Corridor Unit, Village Creek Corridor Unit, and Lower Neches River Corridor Unit. The entire Big Sandy/Village Creek waterway would be protected all the way to the Neches River.

The tracts offer significant biological diversity and one of the most outstanding wildland canoeing opportunities in the region. Not only would incredible recreational access be lost, but earthmoving activities would significantly impair the water quality and biological diversity of the preserve, including a number of rare or endangered species. Many of these species inhabit fragile Pleistocene terraces that could not be replaced or reconstructed if logging or development activities were to take place.