



## Featured Site:

### Big Thicket National Preserve

On October 11, 1974, U.S. Congress passed legislation that created the Big Thicket National Preserve establishing it as the first National Preserve in the National Park System. Today, the Preserve consists of nine land units and six water corridors encompassing more than 97,000 acres.

#### HURRICANE RITA STORMS BIG THICKET!

Late September, 2006: A killer hurricane spins menacingly out in the Gulf of Mexico. Forecasters predict that it will make landfall somewhere on the coast of Texas, just south of Houston. Having seen what devastation Hurricane Katrina caused just one month ago, rangers at Big Thicket National Preserve began preparations for a worst-case scenario of a direct hit. It was a good thing they did – the monster storm made a last minute turn and hit the preserve head-on.

In the National Preserve, all of the trails were impassable, blocked by huge trees that had blown over. The Preserve headquarters building had its roof ripped off. The few Big Thicket employees who had hunkered down in the maintenance building further inland during the storm now had to begin the process of cleaning up and getting the Preserve running. It would take months to open all the trails and return to "normal."



A view of the devastation after Hurricane Rita.



The three TRT's from Summer 2005 stop for a moment to pose with day campers!

Storms capable of this much destruction have rarely hit Big Thicket National Preserve, but even with all the loss of what we humans cherish, hurricanes are a fact of life, and are a part of the ecosystem. Catastrophic changes damage some plants and animals, but they also allow other plants and animals the chance to flourish. Native grasses and shrubs take advantage of the open spaces caused by a tree's fall to sprout and reproduce.

Injured trees also provide food and homes for animals. In fact, the ivory-billed woodpecker, thought to be extinct but recently re-discovered in Arkansas, *prefers* injured and stressed trees. For the complete article and more pictures visit [www.handsontheland.org](http://www.handsontheland.org).

Looking towards the future, Big Thicket National Preserve is excited about the upcoming summer and their Teacher to Ranger to Teacher (TRT) Program. They hosted three teachers during the summer of 2005. Leslie Dubey, Resource Education Specialist at the Preserve, states, "The teachers brought an abundance of knowledge to the job and were a delight to have on staff. They led hikes, canoe trips, night hikes, kid's camp, off-site programs, and roving interpretation. We were able to contact many more visitors and provide more activities than we could with our small staff."

For more information, please contact [Leslie\\_Dubey@nps.gov](mailto:Leslie_Dubey@nps.gov) or visit the Hands on the Land website, [www.handsontheland.org](http://www.handsontheland.org).

## Member News

### West Eugene Wetlands Education Center

This school year the West Eugene Wetlands Education Center has expanded its offering of outreach programs. These programs are taken into the classroom to educate students about the unique habitat of the West Eugene Wetlands, located in Eugene, Oregon. New topics for outreach programs include reptiles and amphibians of the wetlands, and pollination. All outreach programs focus on hands-on, interactive activities, designed specifically for certain age groups, and allow children to learn about topics outside of the standard school curriculum. In addition to classroom programs, field trips continue to be led for elementary school children throughout the spring months, giving students an opportunity to experience the wetlands first-hand.



Students examine unique plants and wildflowers on a spring field trip to the West Eugene Wetlands.

## Web Corner

### Creating a Quiz or Questionnaire

Quizzes and questionnaires are helpful tools for evaluating your programs. The Hands on the Land webpage makes them easy to create! Follow these easy steps:

1. On the Hands on the Land home page click on 'Admin Hub'.
2. Log on using your email address and assigned password. If you do not have a password, please contact the webmaster, Dave Zelenka at [davez@interactive-earth.com](mailto:davez@interactive-earth.com).
3. Under 'Public Site Information' click 'Manage' quizzes or questionnaires.
4. Click 'post' a quiz or questionnaire. Create your quiz or questionnaire by completing the boxes!

### Craters of the Moon National Monument

Like a silvery full moon on a clear winter evening, you can see Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve but it can be difficult to access. However, no rocket ship is required to explore these earth-bound craters in winter; all that is needed is a pair of snowshoes!



Snowshoers trek across the wintry landscape of Craters of the Moon.

For almost a decade park staff have offered Winter Ecology Workshops that provide the public with an opportunity to explore this volcanic landscape in winter. These popular excursions allow visitors to learn about how plants and animals have adapted to winter's snows and also how the snow provides essential moisture for plants, animals and people throughout the region. Cooperative assistance by staff from the Bureau of Land Management has allowed the park to expand the number of programs offered each winter.

Thanks to a generous donation of kid's Atlas snowshoes from the Winter Wildlands Alliance, park staff began offering snowshoe programs for educational groups during the school week this winter. Almost 200 kids from eight different schools throughout southern Idaho participated in SnowSchool.

## Upcoming Events

### NSTA National Convention, April 6-9 2006 Anaheim, California

Partners in Resource Education (PRE) will sponsor three workshops at the National Science Teachers Association convention. Check the NSTA website, [www.nsta.org](http://www.nsta.org) or contact Ellen Reid for more information. We hope to see you there!