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## DEFINING THE BIG THICKET: PRELUDE TO PRESERVATION

by James Cozine

President Gerald Ford signed Public Law 93-439 on October 11, 1974, establishing an 84,550-acre Big Thicket National Preserve scattered over a seven-county area of Southeast Texas. The president's signature ended a forty-seven year dispute between timber firms and preservationists over the future use of that East Texas wilderness.<sup>1</sup>

Part of the reason for the length of the dispute was the difficulty of defining the Big Thicket. What is the Big Thicket, and where is it located are questions which people have tried to answer for years. Indeed, without a consensus definition the timber firms, who owned much of the land slated for preservation, could argue that their land was not part of the Big Thicket and should not be included in any proposed preserve.

Because of its very nature it was extremely difficult to assign any definition to the Big Thicket. Some critics of the preservation movement have attributed the difficulty in arriving at a consensus definition to the fact that the Big Thicket is non-existent. It is, according to these unbelievers, nothing more than "... a gullible and romantic state of mind."<sup>2</sup> These skeptics maintain that at best the area is simply the western extension of the South-eastern Evergreen Forest which begins in Virginia and extends across the entire South. These critics believe there is nothing within the East Texas pine forest to distinguish one area from another.<sup>3</sup>

Even those who recognized the existence of a Big Thicket differed widely on its location. John Henry Kirby, an early Texas timber baron, claimed that the Big Thicket was located only in Hardin County. *The Handbook of Texas*, however, states that the name originally applied to the entire area encompassed by the Old San Antonio Road on the north and the coastal prairies on the south. The eastern boundary was the Sabine River, and the western extreme touched the Brazos River.<sup>4</sup>

According to Frederick W. Simmonds, Professor of Geology at the University of Texas early in the twentieth century and one of the pioneer geographers of the state, the Big Thicket covered between 100 to 225 square miles in the lower part of Hardin County.<sup>5</sup> Vernon Bailey, in his United States Department of Agriculture bulletin entitled *Biological Survey of Texas*, stated that the Big Thicket was "... a continuation of the Southern Louisiana swamp country, extending into Texas from the lower Sabine west to the San Jacinto..."<sup>6</sup> Finally, Elmer H. Johnson, a noted industrial geographer at the University of Texas, published a study in 1931 entitled *The Natural Regions of Texas*. In this work, Johnson did not list any firm boundaries; however, he did stipulate that the Big Thicket was centered in

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northern Hardin County. It is important to note that none of these men had made a careful survey of the Big Thicket area. Their references to the region were nothing more than tangential remarks within their larger works.<sup>7</sup>

This lack of a firm definition of the thicket did not become crucial until 1927, when R.E. Jackson, a railroad conductor living in Hardin County, formed the East Texas Big Thicket Association which was dedicated to saving a portion of the Big Thicket wilderness for posterity. Jackson and his colleagues in the Association had witnessed the partial destruction of the thicket by timber firms. Consequently, Jackson's group began agitating for either state or federal action to set aside at least 435,000 acres of the Big Thicket as a wildlife preserve. The preservation movement soon attracted the support of the Texas Academy of Science, which viewed the Big Thicket as an outdoor botanical laboratory.<sup>8</sup>

Jackson and his followers were able to generate the widespread popular interest in the Big Thicket needed to gain the political support necessary to preserve the thicket region. Consequently, Jackson and Dr. Don Baird, president of the Texas Academy of Science and a biology professor at Sam Houston State Teachers College, became convinced that a biological and botanical survey establishing both the boundaries and the biological uniqueness of the Big Thicket was needed to generate popular support for the preservation movement.<sup>9</sup>

The two men who eventually conducted the survey were Hal B. Parks and Victor L. Cory. At the time, Cory and Parks were the two leading botanists in the state. Both men worked for the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station. Parks was the State Apiculturalist working out of the State Apicultural Laboratory in San Antonio. Cory served as the Range Botanist for the Sonora branch of the Experiment Station. Parks and Cory first became involved with the East Texas Big Thicket Association while attending a field meeting of the Texas Academy of Science at the dedication of the Palmetto State Park in Gonzales County in March 1936. The two botanists were visiting the park to obtain plant specimens and to act as lecture guides for those attending the dedication.<sup>10</sup>

At the field meet, supporters of the East Texas Big Thicket Association asked Parks and Cory to conduct a botanical survey of the thicket. Both were non-committal because they were busy preparing a manuscript entitled *Catalogue of the Flora of Texas* for publication as Experiment Station Bulletin Number 550. Nevertheless, the members of the Association and Baird continued to badger the two botanists to conduct the survey. Gradually Parks began to relent. He informed Baird that he would make the survey if Dr. Arthur B. Conner, director of the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, consented to the project.<sup>11</sup>

In July 1936, Baird and Parks met at a farmer's short course on the campus of Texas A&M College. Baird once again renewed his pleas, and

Parks again referred him to Conner. The two parted company after Baird agreed to present the proposal to Conner. Parks remained on the campus for a few days following the completion of the short course, and he talked with Dr. Walter F. Taylor, an employee of the United States Biological Survey stationed on the A&M campus and a strong Big Thicket advocate.<sup>12</sup> In their conversation, Taylor remarked that he was happy to hear that Parks and Cory were going to make a survey of the Big Thicket. Parks pleaded ignorance, claiming that the director had not informed him of any such project. Taylor answered Parks' protestation "with a smile from ear to ear."<sup>13</sup> Taylor indicated that he also would accompany the survey party. Returning to San Antonio, Parks could only surmise that the trip had been approved.

Official confirmation soon came. In early August 1936, Conner wrote Parks and Cory asking them to co-operate in the project. In addition, Conner sent the botanists a copy of a telegram he had received from R.E. Jackson. In the telegram Jackson indicated that U.S. Senator Morris Sheppard of Texarkana strongly urged that a biological survey of the Big Thicket should be completed immediately. At the time, Sheppard was supporting the East Texas Big Thicket Association's plans to create a national park in the region. With Sheppard's backing, Jackson officially requested that Parks and Cory be assigned to the survey. Cory, however, was not enthusiastic about the project. He informed Conner that he wished to discuss the matter with Parks before consenting to participate.<sup>14</sup>

Eventually, Parks persuaded Cory to assist him, and the trip was scheduled for September 1936. At the appointed date, Cory and Parks met on the A&M campus, deposited their manuscript on Texas flora at the Experiment Station, and proceeded to Huntsville, where they were joined by Baird and by Dr. Samuel R. Warner, a botany professor at Sam Houston State Teachers College. On September 12, this little group reached Camp Jackson, a hunter's camp in the Big Thicket west of Kountze in Hardin County.<sup>15</sup>

The first day in the thicket Jackson and John Knight, a hunter for the U.S. Biological Survey, piloted Cory and Parks through a portion of an 18,000-acre lease slated for preservation. The party spent the morning of the second day exploring different localities within the thicket. That afternoon about 100 people from Beaumont and the surrounding area gathered at Camp Jackson for a barbecue to celebrate the survey. Cory and Parks gave talks relating to the plant life of the thicket. A thunderstorm prematurely ended the proceedings, and the botanists drove into Beaumont to spend the night.<sup>16</sup>

On Monday morning, September 14, Parks and Cory addressed the Beaumont Chamber of Commerce on the plant life of the region. They spent the remainder of the day attending a meeting on the promotion of resources in Southeast Texas, and viewing a pasture demonstration in the southern part of Jefferson County.<sup>17</sup>

On Tuesday, the survey party again returned to the Big Thicket region just north of Silsbee. This time, P.A. Winkler, a landscape gardener and amateur botanist working on a study of the Trinity and Neches River bottoms, served as guide. On this second sojourn into the thicket, Cory seemed more impressed with the spectacle of a burning well near Silsbee than with the flora of the thicket. He remarked that the burning well was a magnificent sight, shooting a mass of flame, smoke, and mud over 100 feet into the air. After viewing the well, the party spent the rest of the day at Pine Knot, a private preserve of one of the Big Thicket backers. The next day Cory and Parks left the Big Thicket for a plant-collecting expedition along the Gulf Coast. The botanists had spent only two and one-half days of actual exploration in the thicket. The remainder of their time had been devoted to speech-making and other public relations activities.<sup>18</sup>

By the beginning of November 1936, Parks, who assumed total responsibility for the final report, was hard at work preparing a manuscript which described the findings of the expedition. In a letter to Cory he outlined his general plan for the report. For some unknown reason he chose to define the Big Thicket based on its physio-geological factors rather than its botanical contents.

Pursuing this approach, Parks claimed that the Big Thicket was a natural life zone whose northern border was the last shore line of the Pliocene Age. Its southern boundary was set as the shore line of the Gulf of Mexico during its transgression in the previous interglacial period. Parks set the western border as the bluff line of the "Ancestral Brazos River." Since the study dealt only with Texas, he established the eastern boundary of the thicket at the Sabine River – the dividing line between Texas and Louisiana. Under this "physio-geology" definition the Big Thicket encompassed 3,350,000 acres, including much of the loblolly pine region of East Texas. Parks pointed out that there were regions of similar vegetation scattered throughout the southern United States. However, he maintained that the Big Thicket differed by being more extensive and by being less affected by lumbering operations. Later day preservationists were to cling to the notion that the region stretched over 3,000,000 acres, yet they rejected the idea that the Big Thicket was unique simply because of its size.<sup>19</sup>

After completing this portion of his report, Parks compiled a series of six lists which enumerated the mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, fish, Mollusca, and plants which were supposed to exist in the Big Thicket. All of these lists were based on excerpts from pre-existing check lists which had been published prior to the Big Thicket survey. Parks merely took these check lists and selected those organisms which he believed best described the flora and fauna within the Big Thicket region. After compiling these lists, he distributed them to people he considered to be biological experts. These experts were to make corrections and additions to the list.<sup>20</sup>

The largest list in the report dealt with the plant life of the thicket. In compiling this list Parks simply took his publication *Catalogue of the*

*Flora of Texas* and extracted the names of those plants which grew in the timbered portion of southeast Texas. Next, he sent the list to Dr. S.R. Warner at Sam Houston State Teachers College for revision. Finally, in November 1936, Parks sent the plant list to Cory, soliciting his comments and corrections.<sup>21</sup> After omitting several plants, Cory returned the list to Parks complaining, "I suppose there are various others that should be omitted but my present knowledge of the vegetation of that area is too limited to know this as a fact."<sup>22</sup> Cory's remark merely served to underscore the superficiality of the entire report. It was at best nothing more than a speculative check list of living organisms within an ill-defined region.

Over the next several weeks Parks continued to polish the manuscript. Finally, in late December 1936, he completed the report. Parks sent one copy to Dr. Walter Taylor. He retained only one copy for his personal file.<sup>23</sup> By this time Parks was enthusiastic about the report. In a letter to Cory he exclaimed, "One thing is sure it is quite a complete and correct list of those organisms which occur within the limits of the original Big Thicket."<sup>24</sup> But he confided to a rather skeptical Cory that the report was, "... sufficiently flexible as to cover any demand made upon it."<sup>25</sup>

The report was published under the title *The Fauna and Flora of the Big Thicket Area*. The Beaumont Chamber of Commerce and the Texas Academy of Science provided the funds to print the manuscript. The first edition of 2,000 copies was distributed in November 1937, and a revised edition of 2,000 copies was published in 1938. From the date of its publication, the Parks and Cory survey became the "Bible" of those wishing to preserve the region. Over the years it became the most referred to work about the Big Thicket.<sup>26</sup>

Although Parks and Cory's report was superficial, it served as a rallying point for the East Texas Big Thicket Association. As a result of the survey, articles describing the scenic beauty of the Big Thicket began to appear in various Texas newspapers. If nothing else, the report secured some much needed publicity for the preservation movement. After the publication of the report, the Association continued to gain the support of the scientific community. At a meeting of the Texas Academy of Science in June 1937, R.E. Jackson addressed the group on the importance of preserving the thicket for scientific experimentation and study. Others, such as Dr. Don Baird, president of the Academy, echoed Jackson's sentiment. Virtually every speaker who addressed the session commented that the Big Thicket should be preserved because of its value to the botanist and biologist.<sup>27</sup> Armed with the Cory and Parks' survey, and the growing support of the scientific community, the East Texas Big Thicket Association began to agitate for the federal government to consider the Big Thicket as a potential site for a national park.

However, a series of unforeseen events frustrated the early preservationist movement. The discovery of large deposits of oil in Polk County in

1936, and again in 1942, upset the plans of the Association to set aside the entire county as a wilderness preserve. Suddenly, people were more interested in drilling for oil than in saving wildlife.<sup>28</sup>

Additionally, just a few years prior to the Cory and Parks survey, the federal government had expended nearly \$3 million to establish over 1,700,000 acres of national forest in Texas. The national forest land was divided into four separate units. Sam Houston National Forest, Davy Crockett National Forest, Angelina National Forest, and Sabine National Forest. The four units formed an arc over the northern and northwestern boundaries of the Big Thicket. As a result of this large acquisition, it was doubtful if the federal government would have been willing to assume an additional 435,000 acres so close to the newly established national parks.<sup>29</sup>

Also, the outbreak of World War II produced an unprecedented demand for lumber products. Timber production began increasing in 1940. By 1942, total wood production in Texas, stimulated by heavy war orders, increased by twenty per cent over the previous year. Washington authorities placed twenty-two items made from wood on the war's critical list. Wood was used in building battleships, training aircraft, and barracks. Nearly every new cargo ship required half-a-million board feet of timber. As a consequence of the wartime need for wood products, the drive to remove the Big Ticket from timber production faded into the background. The East Texas Big Thicket Association continued to exist as a paper organization until it expired in the late 1950s.<sup>30</sup>

Plans to save a portion of the Big Thicket were renewed in 1962 when Governor Price Daniel appointed a study commission of thirty-one citizens to formulate plans for a Big Thicket State Park. Daniel hoped that such a park would attract a larger number of tourists and give the Big Thicket region an economic shot-in-the-arm. Heading the study commission was Dempsie Henley, a real-estate broker and mayor of Daniel's hometown of Liberty. Because of his occupation, Henley enjoyed a business relationship with the timber firms in the region. Daniel reasoned that Henley would be able to use his contacts to gain timber industry approval of the project. Indeed, most of the land in the proposed park belonged to the large timber firms, and they were less than enthusiastic about removing their profitable land from timber production in order to form a park.<sup>31</sup>

Before Daniel could persuade the timber firms not to oppose his plans, he was defeated in the Democratic gubernatorial primary in 1962. John Connally, a rancher from Floresville eventually was elected governor. Connally was really luke-warm about establishing a Big Thicket Park. Nevertheless, he met with Henley in March 1965, to listen to the Big Thicket Study Commission's report.<sup>31</sup>

The report called for six separate park sites totaling 52,300 acres in Liberty, Polk, and Hardin Counties. By utilizing this technique, which came to be called the "String of Pearls" concept, Henley believed that

representative ecological samples of the entire Big Thicket region would be included in the park. The governor thanked Henley and the commission members for their efforts and promised to study the report. Connally, however, was aware that Henley had been unable to secure the support of the large timber firms for the establishment of the park.<sup>33</sup>

Actually, the timber firms were themselves divided over the idea of a Big Thicket Park. None of the major firms favored Henley's proposed 52,200-acre park. They believed that this plan removed far too much of their land from production. Also, the timber firms could not agree on the location of the Big Thicket. O.R. "Ollie" Crawford, vice-president of Eastex Incorporated, a company with sizable holdings in the thicket region, claimed that the Big Thicket was an undefinable area; but that any remnant of the Big Thicket existed only along the Pine Island Bayou watershed in Hardin County. Crawford's views were extremely important for he had the ear of Governor Connally on the Big Thicket issue. Other timber firm officials felt that the Big Thicket was a definable area but they could not offer any real definition for the region. However, none of the timber firms believed that the dated Cory and Parks definition of 1936 was accurate.<sup>34</sup>

Faced with the lackadaisical attitude of the governor and the opposition of the timber firms, Henley decided to enlist the aid of U.S. Senator Ralph Yarborough in preserving the Big Thicket. At the time Yarborough and Connally were political enemies fighting for control of the state Democratic Party. Henley hoped to make the Big Thicket an issue between the two men, and thus force either state or federal action to save a part of the thicket. Consequently, Henley invited Yarborough on a tour of the Big Thicket. Yarborough accepted the invitation, and on October 8, 1965, the senator began a much publicized trip through the area. At a press conference following the tour, Yarborough announced that he planned to initiate federal action to establish a Big Thicket National Park.<sup>35</sup>

Yarborough's announcement shocked the timber firms. Less than a month later representatives of the Kirby Lumber Company, Carter Brothers Lumber Company, and Eastex Incorporated met in Houston to discuss possible alternatives to federal action on the Big Thicket. Partially as a result of this meeting, "Ollie" Crawford journeyed to Austin to confer with Governor Connally and Weldon Watson, the executive director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

After this meeting Crawford wrote the other timber firms and claimed that both Connally and Watson desired that the state act in the Big Thicket before the federal government became too deeply involved. Also, Crawford informed his colleagues that Watson planned to tour the Big Thicket in January and wanted to meet with the large landowners to discuss a course of action.<sup>36</sup>

On January 11, 1966, Watson met with the timber firms at the Eastex Incorporated guest home in Silsbee. Nearly every major timber firm in East

Texas was represented at this meeting. Lud King of Champion International, Ottis Lock of Southland, Tom Carter of Carter Brothers, "Ollie" Crawford of Eastex Incorporated, and John Wood of Kirby Lumber Corporation attended the conference. As host, Crawford opened the meeting by proclaiming that the Big Thicket had evolved into a controversy between Connally and Yarborough, and he expected the controversy to widen.<sup>37</sup>

Watson then addressed the gathering. He admitted that the Parks and Wildlife Department had not yet formulated a master plan for the thicket, but he presented a skeletal outline of a program to the timber representatives. He suggested a park of approximately 20,000 acres. Within this acreage Watson proposed the establishment of a wildlife region and three smaller areas to be developed for nature observations.<sup>38</sup>

After listening to this report, the timber officials caucused and agreed on a course of action. They informed Watson that the state should develop a specific plan indicating the exact location of the park. During the development of the plan, representatives of the timber firms would be invited to Austin to review the findings and offer criticism. After reviewing the state's plan, the firms would meet to accept or reject any portion or all of the plan.<sup>39</sup>

The timber representatives, however, were not in total accord. Once again they disagreed among themselves over the location of the Big Thicket. "Ollie" Crawford was the most adamant. He reiterated his belief that the Big Thicket was located solely along the Pine Island Bayou watershed in western and southern Hardin County. Other representatives disagreed with Crawford's concept and argued that the Big Thicket covered a much larger area. They could not, however, offer any specific alternative definition. Since Crawford believed that the Big Thicket was located in one central area, he favored a single unit park. However, in order to present a united front, Crawford agreed to support the other timber firms contention that a Big Thicket park should be composed of several small dispersed units.<sup>40</sup>

After the meeting Watson returned to Austin to begin working on a master plan. On February 9, 1966, he summoned the timber representatives to Austin and presented his proposal. The state's program called for a single unit park of 20,000 acres located in Hardin County.<sup>41</sup>

The timber firms refused to endorse the plan. They disliked the one-unit concept. Most favored the "String of Pearls" idea because it distributed the proposed land loss among several firms. Additionally, the firms voiced doubt that this plan would satisfy the demands of the public. They believed that city-dwelling nature lovers would prefer a number of smaller parks located near their residences. They concluded that the state plan was less appealing than that feared from the federal government.<sup>42</sup>

Also, the timber firms were offended by Watson's manner. He intimidated that the Parks and Wildlife Department would not consider alternative

plans for a state park. Watson also insinuated that Governor Connally approved of the Parks and Wildlife Department's proposal. Some members of the timber firms secretly believed that Ollie Crawford had persuaded the governor to pursue the one-unit concept in order to protect valuable Eastex Incorporated holdings in other parts of the thicket. Discouraged by the whole situation, the timber representatives left Austin after agreeing to reconvene in Houston on March 22 to continue discussing their problem.<sup>43</sup>

Prior to that meeting, timber officials had an opportunity to speak with Governor Connally while he was on a good-will visit to the Alabama-Coushatta Indian Reservation, located near Woodville in Polk County. Dempsie Henley also attended this gathering, and he convinced the Governor to support a "String of Pearls" concept for the proposed park instead of the single-unit approach. However, Connally did not commit himself to any particular acreage figures or specific sites for the park. Connally also was informed about the proposed meeting in Houston on March 22, and he asked Ollie Crawford to keep him informed of the timber firms ideas on the Big Thicket.<sup>44</sup>

At the meeting in Houston, representatives of the timber firms once again argued about the definition of the Big Thicket. Ollie Crawford insisted that the Big Thicket was an undefinable region. He proposed that any and all sites for the park should be in Hardin County or attached to the Alabama-Coushatta Reservation in neighboring Polk County. By supporting a park in these two areas, Crawford maintained that the timber industry could stop the park from spreading beyond these sites because no one had defined the boundaries of the thicket adequately. As before, others disagreed with Crawford but could not offer any convincing evidence concerning the thicket's location.<sup>45</sup>

Eventually, the timber men decided to back a series of small parks scattered over East Texas. By utilizing this concept, they hoped to limit the amount of land lost by any particular firm. They also agreed that representatives from the various timber firms should explore the thicket and pick out sites for the park and report their findings to the governor and to the Parks and Wildlife Department. At last it seemed that the timber firms were in agreement about a plan to save a portion of the thicket.

However, it was not to be. The timber firms never generated specific recommendations on park sites. Part of the inaction probably was due to personnel changes in Austin. On June 21, 1966, Weldon Watson resigned as executive director of the Parks and Wildlife Department. He was replaced by Joseph R. Singleton on September 14, 1966. Governor Connally's attitude was another possible reason for a lack of action. Former Governor Price Daniel speculated that Connally simply never caught the spirit for saving the Big Thicket. Also, Connally was aware that the timber firms had not yet reached a consensus on the thicket issue. Additionally, since Senator Yarborough had expressed his intention of

sponsoring federal action on the thicket, the Texas legislature adopted a wait-and-see attitude before committing state funds for the project.<sup>46</sup>

The state did not have long to wait. On October 20, 1966, in the waning months of the 89th Congress, Senator Ralph Yarborough introduced Senate Bill number S-3929 to establish a 75,000-acre national park to be located within Hardin, Liberty, San Jacinto, Polk, and Tyler counties. Yarborough purposely refrained from enumerating the exact location of the park because he knew that the Big Thicket was an ill-defined region.<sup>47</sup>

Shortly after Yarborough introduced the bill, a National Park Service team journeyed to the Big Thicket to gather the information needed to develop specific recommendations on the size and locations of the proposed park. The survey team was just as confused as everyone else about the composition and location of the Big Thicket. But unfortunately for them, a university professor was about to solve their dilemma.<sup>48</sup>

Dr. Claude McLeod was a biology professor at Sam Houston State College in Huntsville. He had been studying the Big Thicket for years with his investigations concentrated on discovering the exact contents and location of the thicket. By the time the National Park survey team arrived in November 1966, McLeod had completed his research and had prepared a manuscript for publication. The survey team quickly borrowed McLeod's definition and description of the Big Thicket and used them as the basis of their entire report.<sup>49</sup>

McLeod maintained that the Big Thicket could be delineated from adjacent woodlands by the specific composition of the vegetational structure of the region. According to McLeod, the Big Thicket was "...

"... an edaphicmesophytic climax forest type predominately a loblolly pine-hardwood association, abounding in a rich understory of both evergreen and deciduous shrubs, a variety of climbing vines, and both annual and perennial herbs."<sup>50</sup> The term "edaphic" means that the plants are more influenced by soil factors than climatic factors while "mesophytic" refers to a medium moisture level. Thus a particular combination of soil and moisture level has created a loblolly pine-hardwood association that possesses a definable type of undergrowth.<sup>51</sup>

In attempting to give further definition to the region, McLeod divided the area into two sections designated simply as the upper thicket and the lower thicket. The northern, more elevated portion, called the "upper thicket," is characterized in its climax form by a mixture of loblolly pine, white oak, beech, and magnolia. In the "lower thicket," which is flat land, beech is almost totally absent. In its place is a new co-dominant for the loblolly pine - the chestnut oak.<sup>52</sup>

Further complicating this ecological description is McLeod's insistence that certain subordinate trees and lower understory plants must also be present if an area is to be classified as part of the Big Thicket region. Only a few of the many varieties of subordinate trees or understory plants

need be present in any one location to qualify an area for inclusion into the Big Thicket region. Using this definition, McLeod mapped the region of Southeast Texas which fell into this category (See Figure 1). McLeod's Big Thicket covered over 1,500,000 acres and spilled across nine counties.<sup>53</sup>



Fig. 1. Location of Dr. Claude McLeod's Big Thicket Area

Utilizing McLeod's manuscript, the National Park Service team surveyed the region for several days searching for possible park sites. They decided to use the "String of Pearls" concept instead of selecting one large site. Like the preservationists, the park team believed that this would be the best way to preserve the representative samples of the wide variety of flora in the region.<sup>54</sup>

After concluding the survey, the National Park Service recommended the establishment of nine units totaling 35,500 acres. Due to man's inroads, the thicket did not contain a large enough block of wilderness area to meet the standard for a national park. However, the thicket did qualify for inclusion in the park system as the Big Thicket National Monument.<sup>55</sup> When the report was made public in May 1967, Senator Yarborough was dismayed at the recommendations. "Monuments are for dead things"<sup>56</sup> he declared, and he vowed to push for an increase in acreage.

The Park Service's proposal also dismayed the timber industry. It was suddenly apparent that the timber firms had made a tactical blunder by failing to support the earlier state efforts to establish a park. Because of their own inability to reach a compromise among themselves, they were faced with the prospects of losing a minimum of 35,500 acres to federal control. The state, however, offered the timber firms one final plan which might have forestalled federal action on the Big Thicket.<sup>57</sup>

On August 21, 1967, Joe R. Singleton, executive director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, met with representatives of Eastex Incorporated, Champion International, Temple Industries, International Paper Company, and the Kirby Lumber Company in Jasper, Texas. Singleton announced that he had the funds to purchase 1,000 acres and to lease another 100,000 to 150,000 acres for a Big Thicket State Park. But he stipulated that he had to commit the money by September 1. The timber firms were not enthusiastic, for they did not believe that the state's proposal would block federal action. Consequently, the plan died.<sup>58</sup>

At this meeting the representatives discussed Professor McLeod's Big Thicket manuscript, and all representatives except the obstinate "Ollie" Crawford agreed that McLeod's definition could not be refuted. The firms were now resigned to accepting federal action based on McLeod's definition. They hoped, however, to keep the federal park as small as possible.<sup>59</sup>

Final resolution of the issue was not reached for another seven years when congress finally established the Big Thicket National Preserve in 1974. During this time another twenty-seven Big Thicket bills were introduced in Congress, and both timber firms and preservationists presented their respective cases to the Texas public and the Congress in a spirited public relations campaign. The final bill was, as are most controversial bills, the result of compromise between the competing factions. But the fact that any of the Big Thicket was saved was due in large measure to the years of research by Professor McLeod and his ability to answer the questions of what is the Big Thicket, and where is it located?

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Public Law 93-439, 93 Congress, H.R. 11546, October 11, 1974, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>*Texas Observer* (Austin), LXX (November 27, 1970), p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>*Texas Observer* (Austin), LXX (November 27, 1970), p. 18.

<sup>4</sup>Elias A. Davis and Edwin H. Grabe, eds., *The New Encyclopedia of Texas* (2 vols., Dallas, n.d.), I, p. 32; Walter Prescott Webb, ed., *The Handbook of Texas* (2 vols., Austin, 1952), I, pp. 160-161.

<sup>5</sup>Frederick W. Simonds, *The Geography of Texas, Physical and Political* (Boston, 1914), p. 52.

<sup>6</sup>U.S. Department of Agriculture, Division of Biological Survey, *Biological Survey of Texas*, by Vernon Bailey. Bulletin Number 25 (Washington, 1905), p. 107.

<sup>7</sup>Texas, University of Texas, *The Natural Regions of Texas* by Elmer H. Johnson. University of Texas Bulletin. Number 3113 (Austin, 1931), p. 62.

<sup>8</sup>Pete Gunter, *The Big Thicket: A Challenge for Conservation* (Austin and New York, 1971), pp. 69-71; Hal B. Parks and Victor L. Cory and others, *The Fauna and Flora of the Big Thicket Area* (n.p., 1936), pp. 4-6.

<sup>9</sup>Parks and Cory, *The Fauna and Flora of the Big Thicket Area*, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>Parks and Cory, *The Fauna and Flora of the Big Thicket Area*, p. 8; Weekly/Monthly Reports for Texas Agricultural Experiment Stations, Field Stations and Laboratory, Box 12, file 12-36, Texas A&M University Archives and Manuscript Collection, Texas A&M University Library, College Station, Texas. (Hereinafter cited as TAMU Archives and Manuscripts); Annual Reports Texas Apicultural Experiment Station, 1936 Annual Report of the State Agricultural Laboratory, Box 21, file 21-2, p. 9 TAMU Archives and Manuscripts.

<sup>11</sup>Annual Reports Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, 1936 Annual Report of the State Apicultural Laboratory, Box 21, file 21-2, pp. 3, 9, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts; Victor L. Cory and Hal B. Parks, *Catalogue of the Flora of Texas* Texas Agricultural Experiment Extension Bulletin Number 550 (July, 1937), n.p.; H.B. Parks to V.L. Cory and H.B. Parks, July 3, 1936, The Correspondence of V.L. Cory and H.B. Parks (11 vols., n.p.), VI, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts. (Hereinafter cited as Correspondence of Cory and Parks.) The Cory and Parks letters are in hand bound volumes. The volumes are numbered by calendar year. For example, volume VI is 1936, volume VII is 1937, etc.; Parks and Cory, *The Fauna and Flora of the Big Thicket Area*, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup>Parks to Cory, July 28, 1936, Correspondence of Cory and Parks, VI, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts.

<sup>13</sup>Parks to Cory, July 28, 1936, Correspondence of Cory and Parks, VI, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts.

<sup>14</sup>Parks to Cory, August 6, 1936; R.E. Jackson to A.B. Conner, August 5, 1936; Cory to Parks, August 11, 1936, Correspondence of Cory and Parks, VI, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts.

<sup>15</sup>Weekly/Monthly Reports for Texas Agricultural Experiment Stations, Field Stations and Laboratories, 1936, San Antonio, State Apicultural Laboratory, Box 12, file 12-36; Box 12, file 12-13, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts.

<sup>16</sup>Weekly/Monthly Reports for Texas Agricultural Experiment Stations, Field Stations and Laboratories, 1936, San Antonio State Agricultural Laboratory; Box 12, file 12-36, Box 12, file 12-13; Box 12, file 12-37, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts.

<sup>17</sup>Weekly/Monthly Reports for Texas Agricultural Experiment Stations, Field Stations and Laboratories, 1936, San Antonio State Apicultural Laboratory, Box 12, file 12-36; Box 12, file 12-13; Box 12, file 12-37, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts.

<sup>18</sup>Weekly/Monthly Reports for Texas Agricultural Experiment Stations, Field Stations and Laboratories, 1936, San Antonio State Apicultural Laboratory, Box 12, file 12-36, Box 12, file 12-13; Box 12, file 12-37; Annual Reports, Texas Agricultural Experiment Stations, 1936; Annual Report of Substation #1, Sonora, Texas, Box 22, file 22-8, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts.

<sup>19</sup>Parks to Cory, November 1, 1936, Correspondence of Cory and Parks, VI, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts; Parks and Cory, *The Fauna and Flora of the Big Thicket Area*, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup>Parks to Cory, November 1, 1936, Correspondence of Cory and Parks, VI TAMU Archives and Manuscripts. Parks used the following works in compiling his list: Vernon Bailey's *The Biological Survey of Texas*, published as a bulletin by the U.S.D.A.; *A Checklist of the Mammals of Texas, Exclusive of the Sirenia and Cetacea* by J.K. Strecker; *The Birds of Texas* by J.K. Strecker; *The Fish of Texas and the Rio Grande Basin* by Evermann and Kensall; *The Land and Freshwater Snails and the Naeudes or Pearly Freshwater Mussels of Texas* by J.K. Strecker. For the plant list Parks used his own publication *The Catalogue of the Flora of Texas*.

<sup>21</sup>Parks to Cory, November 1, 1936; Parks to Cory, November 16, 1936, Correspondence of Cory and Parks, VI, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts.

<sup>22</sup>Cory to Parks, December 3, 1936, Correspondence of Cory and Parks, VI, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts.

<sup>23</sup>Parks to Cory, December 14, 1936, Correspondence of Cory and Parks, VI, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts.

<sup>24</sup>Parks to Cory, January 5, 1937, Correspondence of Cory and Parks, VII, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts.

<sup>25</sup>Parks to Cory, December 14, 1936, Correspondence of Cory and Parks, VI, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts.

<sup>26</sup>Lois Parker, *Big Thicket Bibliography* (Saratoga, 1970), p. 14; Annual Reports, Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, p. 137; Annual Report of the State Apicultural Laboratory, Box 21, file 21-3, TAMU Archives and Manuscripts; *Proceeding of the Texas Academy of Science 1937-38*, XX (Austin, 1938), p. 7.

<sup>27</sup>Gunter, *The Big Thicket: A Challenge for Conservation*, p. 69; *Beaumont Journal*, June 25, 1937, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup>Texas, Texas Railroad Commission, *The Railroad Commission of Texas: Annual Production by Active Fields Oil and Gas Division 1974* (Austin, 1974), pp. 30-34; Item from *Beaumont Journal*, February 17, 1942 in Larry Fisher collection, Lamar State University Library, Beaumont, Texas.

<sup>29</sup>Carolyn F. Hyman, "A History of Texas National Forest" (master's thesis, University of Texas, 1948), pp. 18, 25-26, 28.

<sup>30</sup>"War Stipulates 20 Percent Rise in Timber Cut," *Texas Forest News*, XXII (January-February, 1942), p. 1; Gunter, *The Big Thicket: A Challenge for Conservation*, p. 72.

<sup>31</sup>Interview with Price Daniel, Sr., Austin, Texas, March 11, 1976; Price Daniel to Dempsie Henley and others, October 31, 1962, The Price Daniel Papers, Box 97, file entitled Big Thicket Study Commission, Texas State Archives, Austin, Texas.

<sup>32</sup>Interview with Price Daniel, Sr., Austin, Texas, March 11, 1976; Dempsie Henley, *The Murder of Silence: The Big Thicket Story* (Waco, 1970), pp. 89-100.

<sup>33</sup>Henley, *The Murder of Silence*, pp. 100-110.

<sup>34</sup>Ollie Crawford to George Stanley, October 20, 1965; Ollie Crawford to Thomas Carter, Hugh Patterson, and George Stanley, December 20, 1965; memo to File by John Wood, January 12, 1966, Big Thicket File, Kirby Lumber Corporation, Houston, Texas.

<sup>35</sup>Henley, *The Murder of Silence*, pp. 138-140; *Houston Post*, October 10, 1965, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup>Memorandum to File by George Stanley, November 2, 1965; Ollie Crawford to Thomas Carter, Hugh Patterson, and George Stanley, December 20, 1965, Big Thicket File, Kirby Corporation, Houston, Texas.

<sup>37</sup>Memo to File by John Wood, January 12, 1966, Big Thicket File, Kirby Lumber Corporation, Houston, Texas.

<sup>38</sup>Memo to File by John Wood, January 12, 1966, Big Thicket File, Kirby Lumber Corporation, Houston, Texas.

<sup>39</sup>Memo to File by John Wood, January 12, 1966, Big Thicket File, Kirby Lumber Corporation, Houston, Texas.

<sup>40</sup>Memo to File by John Wood, January 12, 1966; Memorandum from John Herndon to George Stanley, March 7, 1966, Big Thicket File, Kirby Lumber Corporation, Houston, Texas.

<sup>41</sup>Hugh Patterson to Ollie Crawford, Tom Carter, Lud King and George Stanley, undated, Kirby Lumber Corporation, Houston, Texas.

<sup>42</sup>Hugh Patterson to Ollie Crawford, Tom Carter, Lud King, and George Stanley, undated, Kirby Lumber Corporation, Houston, Texas.

<sup>43</sup>Memorandum from George Stanley to James Herndon, February 14, 1966; Memorandum to File by George Stanley, March 21, 1966, Big Thicket File, Kirby Lumber Corporation, Houston, Texas.

<sup>44</sup>Memorandum from George Stanley to James Herndon, February 14, 1966; Memorandum to File by George Stanley, March 21, 1966, Big Thicket File, Kirby Lumber Corporation, Houston, Texas.

<sup>45</sup>Ollie Crawford to John Connally, March 23, 1966; Memo from George Stanley to J.K. Herndon, May 17, 1966; Memo to File by George Stanley, June 11, 1966, Big Thicket File, Kirby Lumber Corporation, Houston, Texas.

<sup>46</sup>Ollie Crawford to John Connally, March 23, 1966; Memo from George Stanley to J.K. Herndon, May 17, 1966; Memo to File by George Stanley, June 11, 1966; Memorandum to File by W.R. McDonald, January 25, 1967, Big Thicket File, Kirby Lumber Corporation, Houston, Texas; *Houston Post*, June 21, 1966, p. 6; Interview with Price Daniel, Sr., Austin, Texas, March 11, 1976.

<sup>47</sup>*Congressional Record*, 89 Cong., 2 Sess., 27887 (Oct., 30, 1966).

<sup>48</sup>U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Proposed Big Thicket National Monument Texas, A Study of Alternatives* (Washington, 1967), pp. 1-2.

<sup>49</sup>National Park Service, *Proposed Big Thicket National Monument Texas*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>50</sup>Claude A. McLeod, *The Big Thicket of East Texas: Its History, Location and Description* (Huntsville, 1967), p. 8.

<sup>51</sup>McLeod, *The Big Thicket of East Texas*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>52</sup>McLeod, *The Big Thicket of East Texas*, p. 9.

<sup>53</sup>McLeod, *The Big Thicket of East Texas*, pp. 10, 23; In 1972, McLeod revised his research with the publication of *The Big Thicket of Eastern Texas, a Brief Historical, Botanical and Ecological Report* (Huntsville, 1972). In this revised work, McLeod maintained that he had found new areas that should be included as part of the Big Thicket. He now maintained that the original Big Thicket was slightly over 2,000,000 acres and spilled over into two additional counties – Newton and Sabine.

<sup>54</sup>U.S., Department of Interior, National Park Service, *Proposed Big Thicket National Monument Texas, A Study of Alternatives* (Washington, 1967), pp. 3-4.

<sup>55</sup>National Park Service, *Proposed Big Thicket National Monument*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>56</sup>Interview with Ralph Yarborough, Austin, Texas, February 26, 1976.

<sup>57</sup>Ollie Crawford to J.R. Singleton, August 7, 1967, Big Thicket File, Kirby Lumber Corporation, Houston, Texas.

<sup>58</sup>Memo to File by George Stanley, August 22, 1967, Big Thicket File, Kirby Lumber Corporation, Houston, Texas.

<sup>59</sup>Memo to File by George Stanley, August 22, 1967, Big Thicket File, Kirby Lumber Corporation, Houston, Texas.