

East Texas “Impenetrable” Forests

East Texas forests reflect Texas’ legacy of resilience and individuality. The forests are often described as impenetrable because of their seemingly unbroken landscapes, which is why the area has earned the name the “Big Thicket.” East Texas has a vast system of forest communities that are continually changing and shifting in response to climatic and human pressures. Modern forestry, along with a strong conservation ethic in the region, and a culture still rooted in the land, has given East Texas forests a chance to carry on their long-standing existence.

The dense pine forests have covered the East Texas land throughout history. Today, the region encompasses four national forests, covering over 600,000 acres. No matter what time of year you are visiting the area, the forests evoke awe with each season’s changing leaves and brilliant green limbs. As you pass through East Texas forests on a sunny day you will observe speckled sunlight filtering through a mixed forest of rich hardwood and softwood trees. Throughout the year, green ferns, large acorns, and Muscadine grape vines are a common occurrence above the pine-needle covered forest floor. As you observe the beautiful forests landscape, keep your eyes open in anticipation for White-tail deer because they are a frequent sighting. In the fall, trees such as the Sweet gum and Southern Red Oak provide a brilliant flash of color that contrasts well with the dark evergreen pines. The spring brings forth the white flowers of the Dogwood Tree that are described as bright beacons in the immense forest. Accompanying the beautiful blooms is the Tyler County Dogwood Festival held every year in April, which is the oldest outdoor historical pageant in the South. For nearly the past 70 years, the festival has drawn the community together to celebrate the beautiful spring blooms of the area through story, pageant, a 5k race and several other events.

Over the past couple of centuries, East Texas Cypress trees were an important resource in the logging trade because the wood was used to make lumber as well as roofing shingles. Presently, all or portions of 44 Texas counties included in the Piney Woods region continue to produce timber commercially. Unfortunately, every year large tracts of East Texas forests disappear due to many reasons, such as the loss of private ownership, poor care, wildfires, and most of all, timber extraction. As these areas become fragmented and disappear, so do the many benefits and natural splendor they have provided for so long. Although thousands of acres of timber have been harvested, replanting and conservation practices are being actively implemented to restore the forests. You can be a part of the continued existence of the beautiful and cherished East Texas Forests by supporting forest conservation efforts.

Source(s):

Chappell, H. (2009). “Saving a Piney Paradise.” Texas Parks and Wildlife. Retrieved 28 October 2010, from: http://www.tpwmagazine.com/archive/2009/june/ed_1/

Texas Forest Service. (2010). Retrieved 28 October 2010, from: <http://texasforests.tamu.edu/main/default.aspx>

“The Forests of East Texas.” (2004). Texas Beyond History. Retrieved 28 October 2010, from: <http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/aldridge/forest.html>

Tyler County Dogwood Festival. (2011). Retrieved February 2, 2011 from <http://www.tylercountydogwoodfestival.org/>

Various artists. (2010). East Texas Rag. On Treasury of Library of Congress Field Recordings [mp3]. RPTS G Drive. 20 November 2010.

Author(s):

Written by Maggie Pottkotter, Intern with the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University, as part of a National Park Service Trails and Rails project funded by Amtrak, 2011.