

Dr. Matt Pyne- Alligators- Summary

In 2015 the Big Thicket National Preserve Chief of Resource Management Ken Hyde conferred with Dr. Matt Pyne of Lamar University to collaborate and submit “An Inventory, Population Estimate, and Field Investigation of American Alligators Inhabiting Big Thicket National Preserve in Southeast Texas.”

It was a large scale alligator inventory project for \$97,091 covering the Neches River, oxbow and off-channel lakes, Pine Island Bayou and Village Creek. It would combine funds from several National Park Service sources- new Centennial Challenge monies and a Park Partnership grant and would additionally facilitate funding for the ToD Director’s salary, an issue that repeatedly caused concerns. TCEQ funds for 4 projects at \$13,000 each would provide a match.

Unfortunately, the proposal was not accepted. The critique stemmed from issues with the quality of the science collection and analysis proposed. The Science Committee did not understand that for this proposal scientific research requirements were not that stringent. TCEQ only required inventory data, location, species lists, photographs, maps, transportation receipts and justification for personnel hours. Water quality, chemicals present etc. data could be collected but were not needed by TCEQ. It was recommended ToD Science Committee members receive better training on TCEQ guidelines, as the ToD lost the benefit to magnify monies available and add \$48,545 by using TCEQ funds as a match! Furthermore, as of 2020, the BITH has not partnered with ToD on another research project.

It was recommended that Dr. Pyne begin with a small project, an inventory of a single unit. If it turned on well, he could resubmit the same project in another area after its conclusion. In 2016 he submitted “Population Survey of American Alligators within the Big Thicket National Preserve”. It was approved for \$12,480. In 2017 and in 2018 addendums were submitted and approved to delegate research to be conducted by a graduate student. Jamie Brown and Dr. Pyne presented a Science Café for the public; Jamie shared alligator inventory work with Kountze High School for students on field trip. A quality final report was submitted. All documents are in order. Funds on transportation were not fully expended or needed. Lamar had resources available that allowed some economization. The project is now closed. It is hoped that continued research on alligators will be conducted and another proposal will be submitted in the future.

Submitted by Mary C. Johnston, July 18, 2020