

Paddle the Thicket

Start any visit to the Big Thicket National Preserve with a stop at the Big Thicket Visitors Center seven miles north of Kountze on US 69. Dioramas, videos, and information panels explain the biodiversity found in the “Biological Crossroads of North America.” Ask about ranger-led hikes and floats available throughout the summer. The visitor center (free admission) is open daily from 9 to 5 (409/951-6700; <http://www.nps.gov/bith>).

Find the coolest summer view of Big Thicket beauty from a canoe or kayak along Village Creek, southeast Texas’ premier inland paddling destination. It winds 70 miles from the Alabama-Coushatta Indian Reservation near Woodville to its Neches River junction at Beaumont. The designated Village Creek Paddling Trail winds 21 miles from FM 418 through Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary to Village Creek State Park at Lumberton. Several take-out points allow short to overnight floats, with camping allowed on wide white sandbars. Local outfitters provide boats, shuttle service, and guided trips. Try Eastex Canoes (409/385-4700; www.eastexcanoes.com) or Piney Woods Outfitters (409/751-0911; www.canoetexas.com). For details check the Texas Parks & Wildlife paddling trails website (www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fishboat/boat/paddlingtrails).

--Randy Mallory