

Big Woods Nature Trail Tour



Jacob Spivey



Conor McInnerney

The Saturday, September 19, 2020 Fall Meeting of the Tyler County Forest Landowner Association was held under the open-air Pole Barn at Heritage Village in Woodville, Texas. Jacob Spivey, Tyler County Extension Agent, and Conor McInnerney, Texas A&M Forest Service Forester, guided the forty-five attendees - divided into four small groups - on a tour of the Big Woods Nature Trail at Heritage Village.

Jacob and Conor paused at trees along the trails, pointing out unique, identifying features of each species. They answered numerous questions relative to edibility of fruit and relationships of various species.

If you missed this unique experience, you can enjoy a self-guided tour of the of five trails which vary from a little over half a mile to less than a tenth of a mile. There are 26 species of native Texas trees and 3 species of native Texas vines that have signs identifying their names, picturing their leaves and, if applicable, their fruit and flowers.

The Big Woods forest has evolved naturally over many decades. The signed trees include a magnificent post oak tree that is over seven feet around, a sweet gum tree that is joined at the base with the water oak with which it is competing for space, a devil's walking stick that no human would want to hold, and a farkleberry that produces a small, seedy, edible black berry. Area pawpaw trees, which also produce an edible fruit, were transplanted to the forest by volunteers. Pawpaw trees are required for the lifecycle of the beautiful zebra swallowtail butterfly; evidence suggests that pawpaws and zebra swallowtails have been co-evolving here since this region had a tropical environment millions of years ago.

The 30 plant identification signs identify the devil's walking stick, dogwood, loblolly and shortleaf pines, black cherry, farkleberry, American and blue beech, ironwood, green ash, American elm, hickory, American and yaupon holly, sweet gum, black gum, Florida maple (yes, it is native to Texas but the Floridians named it first), pawpaw, seven varieties of oak trees (white, red, water, willow, chestnut, post and Shumard), and three vines (muscadine, Virginia creeper and poison ivy). Stay on the trail and do not touch the vines to avoid the poison ivy!

The Big Woods Nature Trail is free of charge and is open when the Heritage Village is open. As you exit the Pickett House at Heritage Village, you will be facing the new Big Woods Nature Trail kiosk. Wayfinding signs with maps have been installed at every intersection so that you will always be able to find your way.