

# Protecting the Wild Neches



Flowing through the heart and history of East Texas, the beautiful Neches River is one of our last wild rivers. Home to many kinds of wildlife, the Neches and its bottomland forests draw tourists from across the state and around the world.

**Please join us in protecting  
this rare natural jewel.**

## The Neches River

For hundreds of years the Neches River Valley has nourished a succession of peoples -- Caddo and Atakapa Indians, then Spanish, French, and Mexican explorers, next early "Texian" settlers, finally the Anglo-Americans who came in droves to the new state of Texas.

One of Texas' last wild rivers, the Neches and its bottomland forests are home to a variety of wildlife -- bald eagles, deer, squirrels, otters, wood ducks, mallards, wild turkeys, and colorful songbirds.

The Neches meanders over 400 miles, from northwest of Tyler to the Gulf of Mexico near Beaumont. The Neches sustains half a million people, meeting the needs of municipalities and industries. Along the way, the river nourishes the forests of the Neches River National Wildlife Refuge, the Davy Crockett National Forest with its Big Slough Wilderness and Neches Overlook, the Angelina National Forest with its Upland Island Wilderness, the popular Martin Dies Jr. State Park, the famed Big Thicket National Preserve, and thousands of acres of private land.

Modernization during the 20th and 21st centuries brought changes to the Neches River Valley -- the comfort of electricity and paved highways, and lakes for water supply and recreation. With these changes come trade-offs -- clearing the river bottom of hardwood trees, excessive damming for reservoirs, litter and pollution. The Neches' bottomland forests provide a last refuge for the plant and animal diversity East Texans enjoy. If the Neches isn't protected, its critical bottomland hardwood forest habitat will be lost, as has been the fate of other Texas rivers.

## Protecting the Wild Neches — What We Can Do for the Future

A growing number of Texans are discovering the value of protecting natural areas, to enhance quality of life and promote economic development. The Big Thicket National Preserve draws tourists and conventions to Beaumont and nearby cities. Approval of the Neches River National Wildlife Refuge on the Upper Neches brought praise from newspaper editorials, legislators, and citizens across East Texas. Three hundred paddlers are annually drawn to the Neches River Rendezvous.

Texas Conservation Alliance and numerous other citizen groups propose that the Neches River be designated a Wild and Scenic River – to protect the river and highlight its value as a tourist draw.



## Designating the Neches A Wild and Scenic River

Texas Conservation Alliance and other citizen groups support designating the Neches River a Wild and Scenic River – to protect it and highlight its value for nature tourism.

Before the Neches can be named a Wild and Scenic River, the National Park Service or other federal agency must conduct a study to determine whether the Neches qualifies ecologically as a Wild and Scenic River. The study would also determine the benefits to the community and identify any impacts of the designation.



As part of the study, there would be a local advisory group of hunters, landowners, and representatives of the timber and tourism industries, paddlers, and others with a stake in the designation.

If the agency recommends the Neches as a Wild and Scenic River, and the U.S. Congress approves it, the river would be protected from damming or channelization. Other activities would continue as before.

## SPECIFICS OF A WILD AND SCENIC RIVER DESIGNATION

- ◆ Designation as a Wild and Scenic River would forbid spending federal money and granting a federal permit for any project harmful to the river within the segments that are designated. In short, it would prohibit major reservoir projects and projects such as channelization of the river.
- ◆ Other activities typical of the river would continue. Adjacent landowners would retain full use of their land. Current land use would continue to be subject to existing ownership, current laws, and local law enforcement.
- ◆ A management plan would be developed for the river to encourage people not to build structures at the river's edge or impact the naturalness along the river and the view from the river. However, the government would have no increased authority to regulate these activities.
- ◆ A major component of the study would be for the federal agency managing the Wild and Scenic River to establish relationships with adjacent landowners and to determine any impacts on them. It is usual for the agency to seek the local counties as partners in managing the river.
- ◆ The Congressional bill establishing the Wild and Scenic River would set up criteria under which the federal government *might* acquire land along the river. However, land acquisition rarely has occurred under this Act and probably would not along the Neches.
- ◆ The only responsibility added to the landowners adjacent to the river corridor is that *if* they are conducting an activity that requires a federal permit, such as a Clean Water Act 404 wetland permit, then the agency granting the permit must take the close proximity of the Wild and Scenic River into account -- a consideration that would be very minor compared to laws (such the Clean Water Act itself) with which the landowner must already comply.
- ◆ Allegations that establishing a Wild and Scenic River would obstruct construction of new bridges are unfounded. Once in the 32-year history of the Wild and Scenic River program a federal agency asked builders to redesign a bridge, to lessen its impacts, but no bridge has ever been blocked.



**To learn how you can help safeguard the  
Neches River, contact**

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*Photographs courtesy of Mark Bush, Adrian Van Dellen, and Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept.*