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Alliance to Receive Forest Conservationist of the Year Award

The Bayou Bartholomew Alliance (BBA) recently received notification from the Arkansas Wildlife Federation (AWF) that the Alliance has been selected to receive the 2000 Forest Conservationist of the Year award. This will occur on August 19, 2000, at the AWF meeting in Little Rock.

The BBA has worked diligently to acquire funds to restore bottomland hardwood forests along the Bartholomew and its tributaries. This year alone the BBA has ordered 390,200 hardwood seedlings to plant along the Bartholomew banks and adjacent wetlands. The primary goal is to improve water quality, although reforestation also provides terrestrial wildlife habitat and improves the habitat available to the 110 species of fish that reside in the bayou. Funds for reforestation have come from private donors, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, American Forests, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and others.

Many grants require that the BBA raise matching funds to receive grant monies. To date, we are about \$7,000 short of receiving the full matching dollars for this year's grant sources. If you would like to help us secure funds, you may contribute as a private donor or as a business or corporate sponsor. The Alliance would be pleased to recognize you as a sponsor in assisting the restoration of the world's longest bayou. Your help is greatly appreciated.

No-Till Drill Available

In May the Jefferson and Lincoln County Conservation Districts purchased a no-till drill for rental to interested farmers. The drill is a 15 ft. pull behind with yetter markers. Money from a grant received last year from the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission was used to purchase the new drill. Interested farmers in Jefferson or Lincoln Counties should contact their local NRCS office at (870) 534-3200 or (870) 628-4542. The drill rents for \$6 per acre and is stored at Jones Equipment in Grady.



New Book to Chronicle the History of Bayou Bartholomew

A book on the history of the entire length of Bayou Bartholomew will be published soon. Rebecca DeArmond-Huskey of Drew County has been researching and writing for over two years in an effort to collect and preserve the history of the 359-mile long bayou. The reader will learn how this stream contributed significantly to the economic development and cultural life of the interior Delta.

The study begins 2,500 years ago with an explanation of how the Arkansas River once flowed through the bayou channel. It then goes back 10,000 years to the first Native Americans and details their various sites along the bayou through time to the last Quapaws. The chapter on the Colonial period documents the importance of the bayou to the French and Spanish explorers and settlers. Two chapters on thirty-six early bayou settlements begin in the late 1700s in Morehouse Parish and in the 1810s in southeast Arkansas. The steamboat chapter reveals how the bayou as a transportation route helped the area to develop economically as well as to improve the quality of life. Extensive research documents 91 bayou boats, specific imports and exports, and numerous wrecks.

“A Watery Land” follows to offer narratives of arduous overland travel from 1810 to 1867, descriptions of fords and ferries, and accounts of ravaging floods. The chapter on slavery, Civil War, and Reconstruction documents events along the bayou during these times as well as bayou steamboats used in the Civil War. “From Forest to Plantations” divulges the importance of the bayou as a log rafting avenue beginning as early as 1836, the early timber industry, and the development of large bayou plantations. Within the timber segment is a subsection on Choctaw logs, which may be the first comprehensive information ever to be published on these wonders of nature.

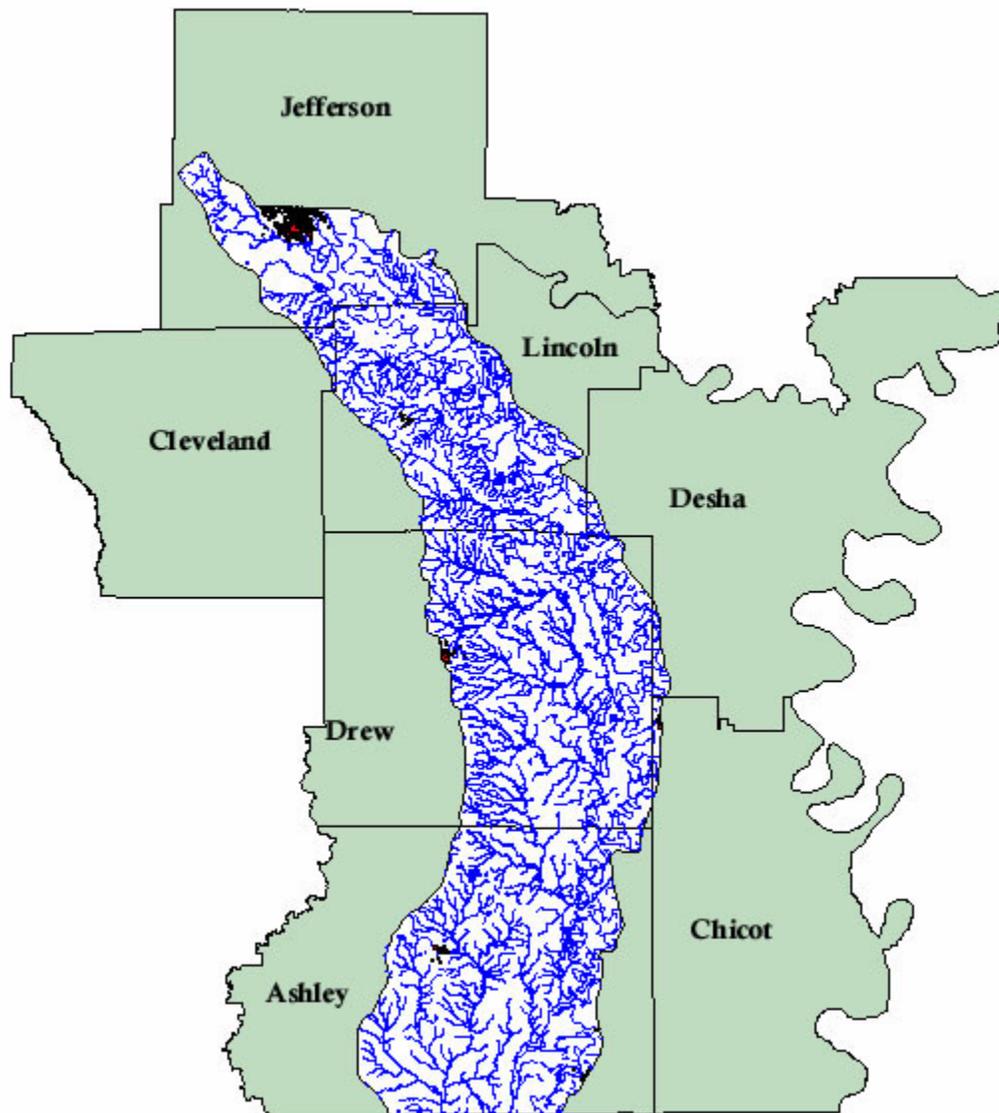
The bayou was not always a peaceful place, and this is confirmed in “Living on the Edge”. John Murrell, Jesse James, and Cole Younger rode its banks, and lesser-known folks played out darker roles. Almost every community had a hanging tree “down by the bayou”, and what may be the only lynching of a man by women took place in Parkdale. Moonshine stills lined the bayou from source to mouth, and saloons were prevalent. The activities of the 1920s Ku Klux Klan are exposed from their actual minutes as well as newspaper and oral history accounts.

The bayou and its adjoining wilderness was a sanctuary for fish, reptiles, and wild animals. Chapter Ten relates the history of these creatures and the hunter’s pursuit of them. Included are tales of panthers, wolves, bear, deer, wild hogs, alligators, bullfrogs, giant turtles, ducks, and fish. The last chapter tells of the bayou as the center for recreational and cultural activities such as swimming, picnicking, courting, and baptizing. It tells of searching for buried treasure and the lore of strange events. An afterword laments the ecological ruin of this historic and once beautiful stream and ends with hope for its restoration through the efforts of the Bayou Bartholomew Alliance.

Rebecca is the author of *Old Times Not Forgotten: A History of Drew County and Beyond Bartholomew: The Portland Area History*. A former college instructor of English, she is a member of the board of the Arkansas Genealogical Society. She has also served as a member of the Arkansas History Commission and as a board member for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program and the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas.

Future Clean-ups Scheduled

The Bayou Bartholomew Alliance will sponsor several clean-up events along or at specific sites on the Bayou. We anticipate having a clean-up day in August in Ashley County; in September in Lincoln County; and in October in Jefferson County. We usually need vehicles with winches and a lot of good strong backs. If you would like to help or know of sites in need of attention due to careless dumping, give us a call at (870) 879-4808. We will post specific dates in local newspapers as soon as we get the days finalized.



A map of the Bayou Bartholomew watershed (in white) detailing the location of streams (blue lines) and urban areas (darkened areas within the watershed).



This area lies off the beaten path just upstream of the community of Pinebergen. The bayou here is only a few yards wide and has substantial current. It is but one of the many places in need of restoration and preservation along the bayou. Will you help?

Send to: Bayou Bartholomew Alliance, 7233 Camden Cutoff Rd, Pine Bluff, AR, 71603

To Restore Bayou Bartholomew I Would Like

to donate _____ **(a tax deductible donation) to be used for**
(circle one)
tree planting
educational programs
general funds to be used wherever needed most
a memorial gift in memory of _____

to donate time as a volunteer
(circle one)
to plant trees
to clean up Bayou Bartholomew
wherever I am needed

Name _____ **Phone** _____

Address _____

Comments:

Creature Close-up

The creature in the spotlight in this issue, *Agkistrodon piscivorous*, is one with a nasty, and often well-deserved, reputation. Part of its scientific name, *piscivorous*, hints that it has been known to dine on fish. It goes by the common names of cottonmouth or water moccasin. Cottonmouths are one of six species of poisonous snakes in Arkansas. It is quite similar to other snakes in the pit viper family, including copperheads and rattlesnakes.

Like their close cousins, cottonmouths are armed with two hollow retractable fangs in the roof of the mouth. They also possess what appear to be an extra set of nostrils. These are known as the pits, which gives the family its name. The pits are heat sensitive and aid in the location of warm-blooded prey. Cottonmouths tend to be a solid olive or black color, although light bands are sometimes present. Adult individuals are often very heavy bodied and can reach a length of 55 inches. Females mature at age 3 and give live birth to 2-15 young every other year during the summer.

Unlike the other pit vipers in Arkansas, cottonmouths have adapted to live an almost totally aquatic lifestyle. This is reflected in their food menu. They often prey on frogs, salamanders, fish, birds, and small mammals. They are also known to eat younger cottonmouths and other snakes. At first glance cottonmouths can resemble other aquatic snakes, all of which are non-venomous. Many banded and diamondback water snakes have died in the effort to kill a “cottonmouth”. There are several ways to differentiate between the venomous cottonmouth and harmless water snakes. An easy way to tell the difference from a distance is the way the snake swims in the water. A cottonmouth tends to float high on the water with its head held high. Other water snakes usually have most of their body submerged with only their head out of the water. If you happen to end up in a close encounter with an aquatic snake, there are a couple of ways to discriminate between venomous and non-venomous. Cottonmouths have short, broad bodies with very large heads. Most other water snakes have a slimmer body with a head not much wider than the body. If you have a very close encounter, you’ll notice that cottonmouths have the pits mentioned before as well as slit-shaped pupils while harmless water snakes lack the pits and have round pupils.

Cottonmouths have the reputation of being very aggressive. This is one creature whose reputation is not much of an exaggeration. If cornered, they will often open their mouth wide, revealing the namesake white coloring inside. If this doesn’t scare off the intruder, they often will not hesitate to chase the offending animal, be it a predator or an unfortunate person. Cottonmouth bites can be fatal if not treated. It is best to give them as wide a berth as possible. The name of the game is “respect” when it comes to cottonmouths.



You can contact the Bayou Bartholomew Alliance by writing, calling, or e-mailing:

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Fish Sampling Initiated on Upper Reaches of Bayou Bartholomew

A portion of the grant monies received last year from the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission funded fish sampling throughout the month of June at seven sites on Bayou Bartholomew. Sites ranged from the city of Pine Bluff downstream to Garrett Bridge in Lincoln County. The fish were collected using boat and backpack mounted electrofishing units. The purpose of the work is to evaluate the effects of the BBA's efforts to improve water quality in the watershed. Fish population densities and species diversity will be calculated for each site. Additional samples will be taken in the summer of 2001. The results will be compared to similar studies at the same sites in 1992-1994 to determine if improved water quality has led to an improved fishery. This summer's work has yielded 53 species from the seven sites. The work was carried out by Layher Biologics RTEC, Inc. of Pine Bluff. Donations of time and equipment were made by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission, and the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality.



Employees of Layher BioLogics and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission use an electrofishing boat to sample fish in Bayou Bartholomew.



This colorful longear sunfish is but one of the many species collected from Bayou Bartholomew this summer.

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