

# THE BIG NEWS

Happenings in the World of Texas Champion Trees

Fall 2008

## The Bigger They Are...

It's "snow joke," as fall ended with a flurry of big tree activity – and actual snow flurries across much of East and Central Texas! Several field trips over the past month yielded new champions, and up-to-date measurements for many others.

One tree I've wanted to visit for some time is our state champ **loblolly pine** (*Pinus taeda*), since it was once listed at 146 feet tall. Could this be the mythical "tallest tree in Texas?" In November, I packed up my trusty Suunto clinometer and my new laser rangefinder to find out. Tucked into a streamside buffer beside a young pine plantation in Rusk County is this ancient specimen, whose bark looks positively prehistoric! After careful scrutiny, we determined the new measurements to be: circumference, 165 inches; average crown spread, 49 feet; and total height (drum roll, please)... 130 feet! What's even more amazing than seeing this 307-point giant is the fact that the owner also has the #2 loblolly pine on a different tract nearby! So, is it the tallest tree in Texas? Until someone shows me a taller one, I'll have to say it is!



TFS forester Clint Hays and the state champion Loblolly Pine

2008 was also a record year for another species: **rusty blackhaw** (*Viburnum rufidulum*). I reported last summer that our champion on the National Forest had gone to that big woodpile in the sky, which meant a nominee at the Houston Arboretum was the new champ. But hold everything.... The end of June brought another contender from Cass County and after proving it was, indeed, a rusty blackhaw and not its cousin the **blackhaw** (*Viburnum prunifolium*), it became the state champ. Then on a chance visit with the nominator of the national co-champion **bluejack oak** (*Quercus incana*), he showed me what he was sure was the biggest rusty blackhaw in the state. One glance told me he was correct, and the measurements verify the fact: its 65-inch circumference and 102-point index dwarfs all other contenders and make this the fourth state champ for the species this year!



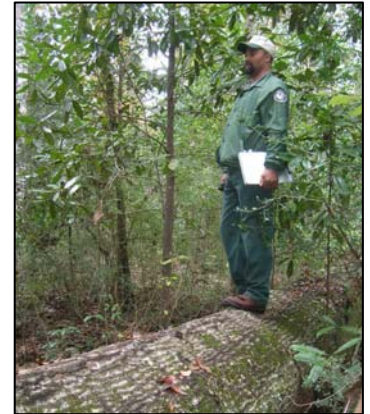
Nominator Greg Stockton and the latest state champ Rusty Blackhaw

Below is the list of the trees remeasured this fall in an effort to update our records or to confirm champion status in response to a new nomination:

Species	Cir.	Height	Spread	Tree Index	County	Owner
Blackgum	233	92	92	348	Wood	William, Mark & Billie Godwin
Desert-willow	96	39	38	145	El Paso	Fort Bliss Military Reservation
Hawthorn, blueberry	85	30	30	123	Nacogdoches	John Pounds
Hawthorn, littlehip	22	22	17	48	Sabine	Sabine National Forest
Hercules-club	57	63	18	124	Wood	William, Mark & Billie Godwin
Magnolia, southern	231	66	87	319	Smith	Hopewell Cemetery Association
Oak, black	208	87	91	318	Wood	Paul Barnett Farm
Pine, loblolly	165	130	49	307	Rusk	Fred Spivey
Pine, longleaf	122	118	38	250	Sabine	TxDOT - Lufkin District
Plum, Mexican	71	18	19	94	Hood	Frank Saffarrans
Sugarberry	162	75	68	254	Nacogdoches	Duane & Sandra Stephens

...The Harder They Fall

Our visit to San Augustine and Sabine Counties in November was depressing. We went 1-for-7 on that trip, and if we found a tree at all it was laying on the ground. No less than four long-standing state or national champs were downed by Hurricane Rita in 2005, including **chinaberry** (*Melia azederach*), **American beech** (*Fagus grandifolia*), **devil's-walkingstick** (*Aralia spinosa*), and **black hickory** (*Carya texana*). This brings to nine the number of champs killed by Hurricane Rita, which really took its toll on the old-growth forests near Toledo Bend Reservoir. In addition, one of the state co-champion **longleaf pines** (*Pinus palustris*) was struck by lightning during Hurricane Ike's siege and may not survive. Our state champ **sassafras** (*Sassafras albidum*) appears to have been toppled by the high wind event of 1998. And finally, both national co-champion **bluejack oaks** (*Quercus incana*) died at some point over the past few years from hypoxylon canker disease, probably brought on by droughts in the early 2000's.



TFS Resource Specialist Ronnie Jones surveys Rita's

The Once and Future King

They say "what goes around, comes around." Back in 1962, TFS crowned a state champion **sassafras** (*Sassafras albidum*) in Wood County, which remained champ for 30 years, until a larger tree in San Augustine County was discovered. But that champ was destroyed by one of the many storms to visit East Texas over the past decade, which we discovered on a recent trip there this fall. A return trip to Wood County found the old champ in somewhat poorer condition, but slightly bigger around (211 inches), returning it to the throne as the new (and old) state champion.



Texas state champion Sassafras in 1962 (left) and leaning against TFS District Forester Ken Conaway in 2008

Quarterly List Published

TFS publishes the latest Texas Big Tree Registry quarterly, at <http://texasforests.tamu.edu/>. Here's a snapshot of the new champs or co-champs crowned since June 2008:

Species	Cir.	Height	Spread	Tree Index	County	Owner
Blackhaw, rusty	65	27	39	102	Cherokee	Louis E. Stockton
Boxelder	129	70	35	208	Collin	City of Richardson
Chinaberry	165	47	80	232	Bee	Stevens Farm
Cottonwood, eastern	319	101	106	447	Falls	Bob Carroll
Cyrilla, swamp (titi)	31	34	28	72	Hardin	Campbell Group
Sassafras	211	51	45	273	Wood	Marian Coker
Yaupon	30	20	24	56	Tarrant	City of North Richland Hills
Yaupon	22	27	21	54	Dallas	Briggs-Freeman Real Estate

'Tis the Season – for Photo Albums!

To see photo journals from many of our big tree hunting trips, check out the photo galleries at <http://texaschampiontrees.snapfish.com>. Just type in the user name "**bigtrees@tfs.tamu.edu**" and the password "**champion**" to gain access to the site, or create your own account to get automatic updates when new photos are added.