Atchafalaya Trace Commission/
Atchafalaya National Heritage Area

Minutes: January 7, 2015 Regular Meeting

A regular meeting of the Atchafalaya Trace Commission (Commission), managing entity of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area (ANHA), was held Wednesday, Jan. 7, 2015, at 10 a.m. at the Capitol Park Welcome Center in Baton Rouge.

Commissioners present:
- Ascension: Charles Caillouet
- Assumption: Phillip Daigle, Sr.
- E. Baton Rouge: Gerren Sias, Treasurer
- Iberville: Gene Seneca
- Lafayette: Jennifer Guidry, Chair
- Pointe Coupée: J. A. Rummler, Vice-chair
- St. Martin Parish: Aaron Flegeance
- Terrebonne: Patrick Thomas Gordon, Secretary
- West Baton Rouge: Julie Rose

Commissioners absent:
- Avoyelles: Wilbert Carmouche
- Concordia: Glenn McGlothlin
- Iberia: Chris Burton
- St. Landry: No commissioner
- St. Mary: Carrie Stansbury

Others present:
- Debra Credeur, ANHA Executive Director
- Ashley Herrick, ANHA Assistant Director
- Christopher Kersey, Baton Rouge Astronomical Society
- Woody Martin, Sierra Club Delta Chapter
- Harold Schoeffler, Sierra Club Delta Chapter
- Zach Broussard
- April Newman
- Atchafalaya Basin Program
- Sara Krupa
- Laissez Faire Inc.
- Tracy Browning, Ascension Parish Tourism Commission
- Jessica Dixon, Louisiana State Parks
- Gerard Overhultz
- Debra Credeur
- Ashley Herrick
- Christopher Kersey
- Woody Martin
- Zach Broussard
- April Newman
- Sara Krupa
- Tracy Browning
- Jessica Dixon
- Gerard Overhultz
- Debra Credeur
- Ashley Herrick
- Christopher Kersey
- Woody Martin
- Zach Broussard
- April Newman
- Sara Krupa
- Tracy Browning
- Jessica Dixon
- Gerard Overhultz

After the Pledge of Allegiance, Commission Chair Guidry called the meeting to order at 10:14 a.m.

Agenda Approval
Gene Seneca made a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. J.A. Rummler seconded the motion and the agenda was accepted as presented.

Approval of Nov. 5, 2014 Meeting Minutes
Patrick Thomas Gordon made a motion to approve the Nov. 5, 2014 regular meeting minutes. J.A. Rummler seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

Grant Program: Preliminary Research
Debra noted that the grant program the Atchafalaya Trace Commission develops will be bound by National Park Service rules and also by State of Louisiana guidelines. The ATC goals and implementation process in our Management Plan will guide what could be funded through grants, but the commission will still need to advise on criteria and a framework for the program including: an application acceptance timeline (annual, semi-annual or rolling basis); whether the evaluation team will be a committee, the entire commission or a combination of both such as the example cited by Charles Caillouet in which a grant passes a certain monetary threshold, it could be voted upon by everyone; and how recusals will be handled (ex. One statewide Louisiana commission that also receives federal funds requires a commissioner to recuse him/herself only if he/she is from an organization submitting an application but not if the only connection is that the commissioner is from the same parish as the applicant organization.).

Debra mentioned that Ashley put together a spreadsheet of grant information gathered from other national heritage areas to use as examples and noted that the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area’s grant program is a good model for us because it also encompasses several areas of interest and is well-respected by the National Park Service. Jennifer Guidry mentioned that she researched Champlain NHA, Niagara Falls NHA, Rivers of Steel
NHA and Sangre Cristo NHA, looking specifically at match and submission criteria and types of grants offered. Her favorites included a quality standard grant for attractions, partnership grants, stakeholder grants to organize meetings throughout the area, water trail development and front-of-house training programs. Julie Rose liked the idea of offering a grant for a visitor readiness program and knows of one organization that offers a grant to bring in two people to the applicant facility to assess safety/access/management processes, etc. Debra said that we might begin to work out visitor-readiness standards in our own trail project and that this could help parishes that lack a lot of attractions for visitors. Julie will provide sample language from the examples she mentioned and also mentioned the STEPS program that is already available for history institutions. The ATC could recommend it to institutions who want to assess their facility instead of coming up with our own assessment criteria. Jennifer suggested we see what LTPA offers. Debra added that, since that the Louisiana Office of Tourism already offers marketing grants, the ATC should focus on other types grants.

Patrick Thomas Gordon said he is interested in applying for trail grants for state and federal dollars. Debra added that federal dollars can’t be matched with federal dollars, but a parish or other entity could receive a federal grant from more than one source. Willie Fontenot from Friends of the Atchafalaya suggested the ATC focus on a process that is easy enough for staff to handle (ex. Accept major grants during a specific quarter but allow for other grant applications on a rolling basis. Debra mentioned that all NHA grant programs are contingent upon Congress, which has, in recent years, gone into continuing resolution for approving the federal budget. This results in NHAs not receiving confirmation of funding until well into the fiscal year (ex. The current fiscal year began on Oct. 1 and funding is still not confirmed). As a result, NHAs have begun basing their grant program for the current year on last year’s funding. The ATC could do this also once the trail project is underway.

J.A. Rummler asked how the national funding timeline would fit into a future grant approval process. Debra said once funding is confirmed for all the NHAs, NHAs that have grant programs allocate a pool of funds for their grant programs (similar to what the ATC does with the Educational Speaker Series). Grant program allocations possibly could not be determined before March of each year.

Education Committee – Educational Speaker Series
The current balance remaining from the amount allocated by the Commission for the Educational Speaker Series is $1,450. Debra said that if the ATC is getting close to establishing a grant program, the commission should consider whether it wants to merge the educational speaker series with the grant program or keep it separate.

Natural & Outdoor Resources Committee
Trail
The entire cycle of the process of our Trail Request for Proposals is nearing completion. We expect to have a signed contract approved by the Division of Administration in the next few weeks. The contract period is expected to be Jan. 15, 2015, to Jan. 14, 2016, though we do have the ability to extend the contract period if needed. Charles Caillouet asked what should be done with the proposal copies held by the Evaluation Committee. Debra replied that the copies can be used for various references and should be returned to her.

BTNEP Calendar
The ANHA has partnered with BTNEP to produce a 2015 BTNEP birding calendar focused on Louisiana ducks. Debra gave each commissioner a printed calendar, which will be distributed to state welcome centers and convention and visitors bureaus throughout the ANHA, especially in the southern parishes. She also mentioned that the 2016 theme will most likely be a natural, historic theme that would dovetail into ANHA themes and projects. Debra will mail a calendar to those commissioners not present at the meeting.

Atchafalaya Basin News
Charles Caillouet updated the commission on Atchafalaya Basin news. Firstly, the Friends of the Atchafalaya organization is running a crowdfunding campaign to raise money to purchase a kayak for the SwampBase Boy Scouts program. FOA contributed $500 to the campaign and has reached its goal of raising another $700 via
Indiegogo. The campaign started in mid-December and will continue through mid-February so all extra funds will also go to the SwampBase program. Indiegogo costs are about 7% of the money raised. Charles thanked the Wildlife Federation, the ANHA and the Basin Program for their promotional assistance.

Secondly, Woody Martin explained that the Sierra Club and FOA are working together to draft a proposal following Harold Schoeffler’s 2014 suggestion that the area around Lake Fausse Pointe, Lake Dauterive and Grand Avoile Cove become a national preserve. These areas outside the levee system are historically significant and form a buffer around Lake Fausse Point State Park. Woody mentioned Big Thicket Preserve in Texas and Cypress Preserve in Florida as similar examples nearby. FOA is considering hosting a public meeting on Feb. 24 in Henderson, but the group first wants to identify a federal agency that could support this project. Charles encouraged commissioners to share this information in their parishes and said the next goal is to create a proposal that can be circulated (anyone who would like to see the FOA Board Meeting minutes can contact Charles). Jennifer thanked them for the extensive research and asked that they keep us informed.

Finally, Charles mentioned that the Department of Environmental Quality has created the Louisiana Aquatic Litter Alliance to address litter issues, with Gwendolyn Berthelot as the point person there. He also pointed out the map that Harold passed out to commissioners detailing the new basin bike trail.

History & Culture Committee – Atchafalaya Welcome Center
Debra showed a visual sneak peak of the new Atchafalaya sign at the Atchafalaya Welcome Center. She is very pleased with the result as the sign is a much bigger than she originally expected and includes the ANHA shield. Debra will let everyone know the unveiling date once it is decided. Expenses of the Welcome Center have helped with the ANHA required match to federal funds due to the numerous joint projects with the Center including interpretive exhibit repairs, materials distribution, visitor information delivery and more.

Sustainability
Debra reminded the commission that the ATC’s sunset date is Oct. 12, 2021, and that she has been exploring how other NHAs operate with the managing entity a nonprofit organization. Some NHAs are reauthorized after their sunset date, but this is a route on which we cannot be certain. Debra encouraged commissioners to let her know of anyone who has an interest in exploring sustainability options.

Director’s Report
1. Administrative
   • 2015 Meeting Dates: March 4, May 6, July 8, Sept. 2, Nov. 4
   • St. Landry Parish still has a commissioner vacancy. The Iberville Parish seat term renewal is his month.
   • Signs: Debra thanked J.A. for submitting such a detailed report of signage wear and tear in his parish and told all commissioners to contact us if they need a list of where the signs in their area are located. Debra also explained that Bayou Teche Brewing Company called in December to ask that a fallen ANHA sign near their facility be put back up. A photo of this same sign posted to their Facebook page several months ago has received the most likes of any of their posts, so they were very keen to see the sign reinstalled. Gene Seneca was able to fix the sign and tour the brewery.
2. **Other Promotions and Outreach**

- Ashley Herrick was interviewed in November by a French journalist from Radio France International about the state of the French language in Louisiana. She played short interview clip for the commission and explained that this radio station airs worldwide. The entire interview focused francophone areas and was tied with the Summit de la Francophonie, which took place in Africa in November.

- Ashley has continued daily weekday updates of the ANHA Facebook account. The number of page likes have increased by 78.7% from July 2014 (476 likes then and 852 likes as of 1/6/15). From Dec. 11—24 Ashley conducted a small promotional campaign called the Christmas Countdown (a play-off of the 12 Days of Christmas), which highlighted each parish in the ANHA leading up to Christmas. The parishes whose posts that received the most views (more than 500) included Ascension, Pointe Coupée, St. Martin and East Baton Rouge. Ashley is also updating the ANHA Instagram account, atchafalaya_nha, on a more relaxed basis. The ANHA has 60 followers on Instagram.

- Ashley also showed an issue of 225 Magazine in which one of her photos was featured. The caption mentions that she works for the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area.

**Commissioner Announcements**

Commissioner announcements included updates about French tables and the Cecelia Immersion School program in St. Martin Parish; Dark Sky national efforts and cut-off lighting projects around Baton Rouge; the Great Southern Boat and RV Show this weekend in Houma; National History Day March 7 at the West Baton Rouge Museum and a call for project judges for the event; a call for nominations for the Louisiana Wildlife Federation’s Conservation awards; the USACE High Water Boat Trip Public Hearing in Baton Rouge on March 27; Christmas Eve bonfires on the levee in St. James Parish; the New Acadia Project to find the three original campsites of Beausoleil Broussard; updates on the efforts to install bilingual signage; and the Atchafalaya Basin Program’s geocaching trail plans.

Mr. Schoeffler distributed maps of the recently developed Atchafalaya Basin Wilderness Trail, a 55-mile, levee-top bike trail that runs from Bayou Amy Boat Landing in Henderson/St. Martin Parish to Wax Lake Outlet/St. Mary Parish.

**There being no further announcements or business, Julie Rose made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Patrick Thomas Gordon seconded the motion and, passing unanimously, the meeting was adjourned.**