Atchafalaya Trace Commission/
Atchafalaya National Heritage Area

Minutes: May 6, 2015 Regular Meeting

A regular meeting of the Atchafalaya Trace Commission (Commission), managing entity of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area (ANHA), was held Wednesday, May 6, 2015, at 10 a.m. at the Capitol Park Welcome Center in Baton Rouge.

Commissioners present:
Ascension: Charles Caillouet
Concordia: Glenn McGlothin
Pointe Coupée: J. A. Rummler, Vice-chair
West Baton Rouge: Julie Rose
Assumption: Phillip Daigle, Sr
E. Baton Rouge: Gerren Sias, Treasurer
St. Martin: Aaron Flegeance

Commissioners absent:
Iberia: Chris Burton
Lafayette: Jennifer Guidry, Chair
Terrebonne: Patrick Thomas Gordon, Secretary
Assumption: Phillip Daigle, Sr
St. Mary: Carrie Stansbury

Others present:
Debra Credeur, Executive Director; Ashley Herrick, Assistant Director; Shannon Blakeman, JCLA; Christopher Kersey, Baton Rouge Astronomical Society; April Newman, Atchafalaya Basin Program; Tim Basilica, Center for Planning Excellence; Gerard Overhultz, Laissez Faire Inc.; Ann Westmoreland, City of Vidalia; Don Haydel, LDNR; Willie Fontenot, Friends of Atchafalaya

Commission Vice-chair J.A. Rummler called the meeting to order at 10:35 a.m. Debra Credeur made the following announcements: This week is National Travel and Tourism Week. The Lt. Governor, the Assistant Secretary of Tourism and others are traveling the state and making stops in cities throughout the heritage area. Additionally, May 30 is the deadline for projects to be submitted for the Atchafalaya Basin Program’s 2016 Annual Plan.

WELCOME NEW COMMISSIONER
J.A. Rummler welcomed Clifford LeGrange as the new commissioner for Iberville Parish. Clifford is the publisher and a co-author of the book Spirit of the Atchafalaya, which he presented after the March 2015 commission meeting.

AGENDA APPROVAL
Julie Rose made a motion to adopt the meeting agenda as presented. Glenn McGlothin seconded the motion and the agenda was accepted.

APPROVAL OF MARCH 4 MINUTES
Gerren Sias made a motion to approve the March 4, 2015, regular meeting minutes. Carrie Stansbury seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY REPORTS
NATURAL & OUTDOOR RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Trail Project Update
Sites on the trail will have to undergo Section 106 clearance and the timeline for project completion is in March 2016, though this date can be extended if needed. Debra introduced consultants Shannon Blakeman and Tim Basilica who are working on the ANHA trail project. Shannon explained that the team is currently working on determining site selection criteria and creating a brand that would extend to a web/mobile app, signage and an e-newsletter for the trail. Tim introduced the concept logo, explaining that the idea was to develop a logo that was
an extension of the current brand. The proposed logo uses the name Atchafalaya Water Heritage Trail, with the word ‘Atchafalaya’ written in the same font as in the current ANHA logo. It also samples the traditional ANHA color palette but includes more blue and green options, and the modular design can be tailored the various activities with a slight change in image set into the ‘A’ in ‘WATER.’ To be cost effective and allow for automatic updates for users, the consultants suggest the responsive website and mobile app be one in the same. Tim suggested several slogans and then demonstrated how paddle trail markers, t-shirts and billboards could fit into this concept. Charles Caillouet said he likes the idea of combining the website and mobile app, but asked how the newsletter will be related to the original site. Tim said the newsletter, initially to be used to inform stakeholders of the trail project progress, would bear similar graphics as those to be used in the water trail site. Shannon added that it will still tie back to the original site. Carrie Stansbury asked if they used the same color palette as the original logo. Tim confirmed that it did, and that they expanded it. Charles noted that download speeds will be important for the site. Tim said the site will be completely HTML responsive and will update instantly, but connectivity in remote areas will be a challenge. As cell service gets better, however, it should become less of a problem, and users will have the option to pull some things up on their phone beforehand that they can then use on-site. J.A. thanked the consultants and said it sounds like they’re on the right track with Charles Caillouet and Aaron Flegance concurring. Debra added that they have begun fleshing out a website map, which will highlight sites, their historical, cultural and archeological significance, ecological data, etc. In the initial meeting, Dr. Haag—whose work is similar to the goal of the trail—was mentioned, so the site could include some information about him.

**LWF/Children’s Fishing Book**

Debra presented a children’s fishing booklet that the Louisiana Wildlife Federation would like to reprint with the help of sponsorships. She noted that LWF did take some of her editing suggestions in updating it. Thus far, the book has been popular and Friends of Atchafalaya donated $500 toward a reprint. Carrie asked what sponsorship amount LWF requested. Debra said a reprint could range from $1300 for 1000 booklets to $3100 for 5000. LWF is targeting a young audience, so this booklet could segue into the ANHA curriculum. J.A. asked where the booklets would be available. Debra said LWF would give the Commission some and the rest would be given to school groups. Charles added that Friends of Atchafalaya gave booklets away at Earth Day and Step Outside Day this year. Julie asked how many they wanted to print and Carrie said she loved the idea but wanted to know how much money they needed. Glenn said the pricing sounded reasonable and that it is important to bring kids into this type of activity. He suggested that the Concordia Parish Library could distribute the booklet. Debra noted that the commission does still have some variables with the trail project that will determine how much funds they have left for this kind of project. Julie asked if LWF had requested a certain number of booklets, and Debra said they’ll probably give us the quantity we request since we will be helping with distribution. Julie added that 1/3 of the 20,000 visitors to the West Baton Rouge Museum each year are kids, so she could easily distribute 5000 booklets. J.A. said that just helping with a small amount wouldn’t give the commission as much bang for its buck as a higher number. **Carrie made a motion to spend up to $3100 on this project and Philip seconded.** Aaron said he would like to see the booklets in classrooms and Gerren asked if they could be distributed through the State Library system. Debra noted that most of the pages are activity pages, but that she could ask about putting the booklet on Atchafalaya.org for teachers to download. Debra will also find out how many booklets LWF can give us from the reprint.

**BTNEP/Birding Calendar**

Last year the Commission sponsored the BTNEP birding calendar for $10,000. The 2016 calendar will be based on John James Audubon and will cover several ANHA themes, including history and natural resources. This year BTNEP lost a major calendar sponsor and the support of some local CVBs due to funding issues. The calendars are distributed for free and the Commission can have as many as it wants. J.A. asked what the 2016 calendar will include. Debra said it will have prints, information about Audubon’s travels and time spent in Louisiana, as well as flora that he came across. It also includes birding events. Carrie said that her CVB has supported the calendar in the past but had to cut her budget this year. She would consider sponsoring in part but not $10,000. Julie said more people are using electronic calendars these days and a booklet with the same content might go farther. J.A.
added that many people already have calendars or use their phone. Charles said he loves the calendar but the Wildlife Federation is still distributing their 2015 calendar even though the year is half over. J.A. would like to hear what else BTNEP has in mind. Carrie said they may be open to other ideas. J.A. asked if the Commission could fund a small amount just to get the ANHA logo on the back of the calendar, and Julie and Wilbert agreed. J.A. said he liked the idea of tying Audubon to actual places in and around the ANHA. Debra noted that, though Audubon spent a lot of time in Louisiana, it was mostly in West Feliciana. Charles said he would like a better estimate of what the Commission will spend on the trail project. Debra said that at this point in the project it is difficult to estimate the final trail expenses since prices for signage and markers, web design, etc. could vary greatly depending on estimates still to come in, type of informational markers, etc. Julie asked if it would be possible to receive a treasurer’s report at each Commission meeting to see how much financial leeway the Commission has for decisions like these. Debra said once requested estimates are received, a budget report would guide requests such as these. Gerren motioned that a budget report be included with each agenda. Julie seconded the motion.

Lower MS River Assessment
Debra discussed the US Army Corps of Engineers’ Lower Mississippi River Resource Assessment to determine river-related recreation and access needs. The study team identified areas that need boat ramps, bike trails, outfitter and guide services, lodging and dining, parks and vistas, interpretation, riverboat landings and marketing. The study determined the biggest obstacle to expanding fishing and paddling is the lack of well-located boat ramps designed for launching small watercraft. Debra also mentioned an outfitter based in Clarksdale, MS, who frequently paddles the Mississippi River. He reported that due to the industrial nature of the lower Mississippi River, he recommends to paddlers to divert to the Atchafalaya River at that point on the MS River because it’s safer when paddling to the Gulf of Mexico.

Bayou Teche Paddling Trail
Debra and Ashley attended the second annual Trail Mix meeting organized by the T.E.C.H.E. Project. This meeting discussed the Bayou Teche National Water Trail designation and grants received for floating boat launches along the bayou at Port Barre, Arnaudville, Cecelia, St. Martinville, Loreauville, New Iberia, Charenton and Patterson. A trailhead will be placed at Breaux Bridge with a handicap-accessible boat launch, restrooms and possibly a storage facility.

Astronomy Education Programs
Debra reported that she and Ashley have had discussions with Christopher Kersey of the Baton Rouge Astronomical Society about Astronomy education. They talked about adding a Dark Sky page to the Outdoor Recreation tab of Atchafalaya.org and possibly hosting nighttime viewings at Welcome Centers or other sites throughout the ANHA. BRAS has a campaign through 2017 to darken the sky around the Highland Observatory. J.A. said he’d like to see something happen in our local area. He noted that BRAS is limited in the distance staff can travel to present programs but that the organization could put together a starter packet for people who want to learn about stargazing. Carrie asked if there is any part of the year when it is best to do a stargazing event. Chris said it is easiest to see with the unaided eye from late fall to mid-winter skies, but something can be viewed in the sky on any given day. Carrie said she really wants to do something related to this in her area. J.A. added that amateur astronomy is what got him into the earth sciences, and the National Park Service has identified a dark sky as a resource.

Atchafalaya Basin Update
Charles Caillouet said the Atchafalaya Basin annual plan was approved by the committee and goes to the House next. Don Haydel in the audience added that there is no new funding for projects so they expect to be out of money for projects by this time next year. However, Charles added that they are trying to redirect money tied up because of landowner issues to use for new projects.
Atchafalaya.org Update
Debra explained that the ANHA website has been going through a few updates, including consolidation of some pages. Once the trail is complete, a link to it will be prominently displayed on the home page of Atchafalaya.org.

Portal Update
The Office of Cultural Development is still pulling several curricula together so that the portal developed will be teacher-friendly. There will be an Atchafalaya NHA scavenger hunt and some other interactive features.

HISTORY & CULTURE COMMITTEE
AWC Exhibits
Charles Caillouet reported that he and Gene Seneca visited the Atchafalaya Welcome Center to determine the state of the exhibits. They considered three main factors: usefulness of current exhibits; maintenance issues; and possible upgrades. Charles said the projector in the theater doesn’t fit its screen and expensive bulbs are lost each time the power goes off. The projector could be replaced with a flat-screen TV, but the screen/box would have to be refitted. He estimates this would cost about $10,000. The air compressor for the animatronics is getting repaired. Other issues are mostly in the $1,000 range. The UV lights in the theater are not all working. Two out of the five scrolling photo boxes are not working, but all need to be updated. They could be replaced with electronic displays. Several graphs and display books need to be replaced—these are things that staff could do. A custom accordion was stolen, and the computer kiosk is still largely a mystery since no one knows where the software is. Charles said he estimates these repairs could total $50,000. Gerren asked what the state did during the three months that the welcome center shut down. Charles said they put in a security system. He also noted that the center still has operational issues controlled out of Baton Rouge when the power goes out. Jules Babineaux in Lafayette is the welcome center’s fixer. Carrie said Jules told her they’ve had problems with the animatronics for years. Charles said when it was built, all money for maintenance had to be put in the construction budget, so when that ran out there was no money to fix it. J.A. said it’s great that we’re looking at these things in terms of maintenance. Carrie asked if they could prioritize the issues, and Charles said fixing the theater should be the first step. Gerren asked how the Commission can be sure the facility will remain open since the Capitol Park Welcome Center may be sold soon. Charles said at the next commission meeting he will know more about pricing for repairs.

Charles also asked commissioners if they have any feedback from their parishes about the Cypress preserve he spoke about at the last commission meeting. He said they may have some boundary issues and are moving slowly on the proposal.

Director’s Report
1. Administrative
   • Upcoming 2015 Meeting Dates: July 8, Sept. 2, Nov. 4
   • Updated commissioner contact information is printed on the back of the meeting agenda and commissioners should add attended meetings to their time sheets.

2. Other Promotions and Outreach
   • FRENCH IMMERSION EXCURSION: Ashley Herrick reported on the first French Immersion Excursion that the ANHA hosted April 4 at Lake Martin and in Arnaudville. The event included a morning paddle in French with a Louisiana-French speaking guide and kayaks/canoes from Bayou Teche Experience. After paddling, the group toured Bayou Teche Brewing in French. A total of 32 participants and 4 Bayou Teche Experience representatives-guides attended the paddle and 13 participants toured the brewery. Reviews of the event were overwhelmingly positive and all participants who responded to the survey said they would recommend the event to others. Ashley is working on arranging similar events in the future.
• EVENTS: Ashley and/or Debra attended a variety of events including Le Grand Pique-Nique at Magnolia Mound, the T.E.C.H.E. Project’s Trail Mix, Cycle Zydeco, the Bayou Teche National Water Trail Ceremony, Fête de la Terre at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, and National Travel and Tourism Week at the Atchafalaya Welcome Center. At the ULL event Ashley debuted an ANHA-themed wheel of fortune game that involved students accessing ANHA social media accounts to find answers to themed questions. The game was a big hit with students, and Ashley used a version modified for a less tech-savvy audience at the Atchafalaya Welcome Center.

• SOCIAL MEDIA: The ANHA Facebook account has 1188 likes—up from 476 in July—and the page ranks 18th in likes out of 40 NHAs with Facebook pages vs. 30th last July. This increase is largely due to photos posted from the French Immersion Excursion and a LouisianaTravel.com blog post about flora and fauna in the ANHA. The Instagram account, atchafalaya_nha, currently has 105 followers, and the new ANHA Twitter account, AtchafalayaNHA, which was started in mid-April, has 41 followers. Debra said she especially liked that the wheel game drives traffic to our social media sites, and J.A. and Carrie commended Ashley on these initiatives.

Commissioner Announcements
Commissioner announcements included updates about the annual Jim Bowie BBQ Throwdown, a boat ramp and walk along the Mississippi River in Vidalia, and Delta Music Museum funding cuts; the Swamp Pop Festival at Lamar Dixon; a welcome to Clifford LaGrange and a thank you to Gene Seneca (from Gerren Sias) for his 60 to 70 years of service to this commission and the State of Louisiana; the recent Pointe Coupee Museum open house; the 41st annual Cochon de Lait, the Tunica Biloxi Powwow and the 60th anniversary of incorporation for Hessmer; the unveiling of the Cajun Coast Convention & Visitors Center interpretive exhibits; the St. Joseph the Worker fair in May and the status of Louisiana French and Creole in St. Martin.

There being no further announcements or business, Charles Caillouet made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Gerren Sias seconded the motion and, passing unanimously, the meeting was adjourned.