Atchafalaya Trace Commission/
Atchafalaya National Heritage Area

Minutes: July 8, 2015 Regular Meeting

A regular meeting of the Atchafalaya Trace Commission (Commission), managing entity of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area (ANHA), was held Wednesday, July 8, 2015, at 10 a.m. at the Capitol Park Conference Center in Baton Rouge.

Commissioners present:
Ascension: Charles Caillouet
Concordia: Glenn McLothin
Iberville: Clifford LeGrange
St. Martin: Aaron Flegeance
Terrebonne: Patrick T. Gordon, Secretary

Assumption: Phillip Daigle, Sr
E. Baton Rouge: Gerren Sias, Treasurer
Lafayette: Jennifer Guidry, Chair
St. Mary: Carrie Stansbury

Avoyelles: Wilbert Carmouche
Iberia: Chris Burton
St. Landry: Herman Fuselier
West Baton Rouge: Julie Rose

Commissioners absent:
Pointe Coupée: J. A. Rummiler, Vice-chair

Others present:
Debra Credeur, Executive Director; Ashley Herrick, Assistant Director; Gene Seneca; Shannon Blakeman, JCLA; Alex Strader, JCLA; Jeannette Dubinin, CPEX; Tim Basilica, CPEX; John Welch, STA; Ann Westmoreland, City of Vidalia; Gerard Overhultz, Laissez Faire Inc.; April Newman, LDNR Atchafalaya Basin Program; Don Haydel, LDNR; Sara Krupa, LDNR; Charles Reulet, LDNR

Commission Chair Jennifer Guidry called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. Debra Credeur made the following announcements: Gene Seneca was presented with a plaque commemorating the 10 years he served on the Atchafalaya Trace Commission. Joe Llewellyn, the ATC’s Jean Lafitte representative, has been transferred to work for a national monument in California but told Debra he had thoroughly enjoyed his time working with the ATC. Commissioners may send in officer nominations and voting will take place at the September meeting. The Louisiana Geological Survey received a national award for its Bayou Teche Paddle map, which will be placed in the Library of Congress. Ashley visited LUMCON in mid-May for a photo-related workshop related to the Louisiana coast. Debra taught a class at the LTPA Leadership Academy and highlighted the ANHA’s upcoming water trail. All NPS partners, including the ANHA, will now meet on a quarterly basis. The first of these meetings was held in Lafayette. The ANHA curriculum was used extensively at a summer camp in Avoyelles Parish for 400 youth through a partnership with The Kennedy Center of Louisiana and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers After School Program. DOTD is hosting a meeting about biking in Louisiana and the ANHA will attend since it advises the state tourism office for its bike and paddle websites. The 2015 Lt. Governor’s Tourism Summit will be Aug. 17—19 Rouge at the Crowne Plaza in Baton Rouge. Registration is available online at Ltpa.org. Upcoming 2015 meeting dates are Sept. 2 and 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.

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

APPROVAL OF MAY 6 MINUTES
Patrick T. Gordon made a motion to approve the May 6, 2015, regular meeting minutes. Carrie Stansbury seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

FINANCIAL REPORT
Debra reported on the ANHA’s federal funding. She made some rough estimates on post-trail development expenses in order to estimate available funds: ~100 markers for each site and at an average of $3,000 each. The worksheet included in the commissioner packets shows federal funds from each federal fiscal year (current FY ends Sept. 30). Debra explained that the commission should spend all but ~$72,000, so assuming funding for 2016 is the same, there will be a balance of ~$320,000 which could be used for the ANHA grant program/Educational Speaker Series and repairs at the Atchafalaya Welcome Center. Debra reminded the commission that, if we haven’t completed a project or used funds, Debra does have to explain why to the NPS. This happens often with large projects that require longer state processes and Congress goes into continuing resolution. Jennifer Guidry asked if the $72,000 is money we have to spend before Sept. 30 of this year. She said fiscal years can be confusing with both the state and federal ones to deal with, and matches required. Julie Rose asked if the commission would talk about the AWC repairs. Debra said yes.

GRANT PROGRAM
Debra explained key points of the proposed grant guidelines draft based off of other similar NHAs, including Blue Ridge NHA and Muscle Shoals NHA. The state’s legal advisor will make sure the guidelines meet state regulations once the commission approves. Highlights: Nonprofits, units of state and local governments, academic institutions and federally-recognized Native American tribes would be eligible for grants. Most NHAs allow 1 application per grant cycle and 1 project per grant cycle. Most NHA grant programs require that the project be completed within 1 year. Categories include: preservation and conservation; interpretation and education (the Educational Speaker Series could fit here); development (planning, developing sites/projects). Julie asked about the difference between presentation and conservation. Jennifer passed Julie her copy of the guidelines to see. The ANHA cannot use grant funds to acquire property or an interest in property. Charles said if this is the case, how do we help the Atchafalaya Welcome Center? Debra said interpretive exhibits are fine, and the AWC project is not part of the grant program so it’s different. We could offer a rolling mini-grant for $1000 or less. NPS also wanted a clause in our implementation plan that allows for grant-in-aid for emergency response (ex. Helping partners restart programs after a natural disaster). Evaluation criteria would include program quality and impact; capability/partnerships; environmental responsibility; local/regional community support; and required matching contributions. Matches could be 50% , which is what the NPS requires of the ANHA, and could be both cash and in-kind (but in-kind would have to be preapproved and cash matches could not predate the grant award). A NHA colleague in Alabama who just started a grant program said she’s having a hard time getting applicants because people aren’t used to following strict guidelines and getting matches (especially cash). Patrick asked if the state parks trail grant allows an all in-kind match. Carrie said she thinks applicants have to have some cash, but that’s it’s a defined percentage. Jennifer said university matches are almost always in-kind, so a cash requirement would be more difficult. Applicants could approach another partner to fund, but she advises against needing a cash match. She added that indirect costs should not be included for matches. Julie said the mini grants could have all in-kind matches, but cash matches could be scaled for larger projects since obtaining them does often reflect on quality of a project. Debra said no matches can be from federal sources. Patrick added that he knew of some federal grants that allow federal sources for the match. Charles asked who would preapprove the grant applications. Debra said she already knows the NPS guidelines and how we are required to report, so she can sort through the applications initially to make sure they follow these rules. The NPS has questioned some spending in the past, like the article/ad placed in the Louisiana tourism guide, but Debra was able to demonstrate that our legislation requires the ANHA to promote itself. Carrie said Debra and Ashley did a great job of putting the document together and asked what needed to be decided today. Debra said we’re in a good situation now to start because we have reserve funds, but in order to be safe in case of a situation with Congress in continuing resolution, most NHAs use last year’s money to fund their grant programs. Since we’d also try to coordinate timing with other trail grants, etc. Debra suggested a grant application deadline of Feb. 1, and a three-months review period for the ANHA. Applicants will be encouraged to call Debra before they submit anything to ensure that guidelines are understood upfront. We could host an in-service in different parishes, but Debra said it would be nice to address particular concerns as they arise since each project will be different. The application review process and scoring sheet would be similar to the water trail RFP and could be completed electronically, but Debra asked the commission to think about whether they wanted a committee to oversee this and if that...
committee should be limited to commission board members (most NHAs and Arts Councils allow outside experts to be included as well). She emphasized that this will be a commitment, and Louisiana ethics laws will apply to the review board. Committee members will have to recuse themselves when they have financial and/or familial ties to a project application, but they would not have to do so if an event or project was just taking place in their parish. Charles said he doesn’t think we would want outside people to have to worry about the ethics board requirements involving financial disclosures. Debra said she will verify if they’d need to do that part. Jennifer said some of her grants include justification for buying supplies or hiring consultants, etc., vendor sources and different ways to structure the budget so there’s a lot of information if it goes up for review. Debra said, yes, that will be included in Excel spreadsheet for applicants to complete. At the next meeting, when the grant guidelines are adopted (with state input), the commission will also decide on the pool of funds for each category. Debra noted that some large NHAs have surprisingly small grant programs because they spend so much money on salaries, so it is great that state of Louisiana helps the ANHA. She also said this program will be something commissioners can tell their communities and legislators about.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY REPORTS
NATURAL & OUTDOOR RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Trail Project Update
Shannon Blakeman from JCLA explained that the consultant team has completed most research and data collection for the Atchafalaya Water Heritage Trail. Now they are focusing on site selection criteria and field testing. Tim Basilica from CPEX showed the commission the responsive website that will take the place of the app described in the RFP and will be launched along with a press release later in July. The website uses the branding the commission saw at the May meeting. The first phase of the website will be a basic shell to lead press and the public to learn more about the trail and allow them to suggest a site, but it will offer more information as the trail develops and link back to Atchafalaya.org. Charles suggested adding “trail” to the “suggest a site” button so people don’t confuse it with a “web” site. Julie asked if there will be tools to help people get around the trail. Tim said that will be developed later. Julie asked what the press release will do. Shannon said it will introduce the project to the public. Debra will send the press release to the commissioners. Carrie asked if this website would be long-term. Debra said yes—it will be a seamless link because we’ll also highlight it on Atchafalaya.org and be able to update both sites. Tim added that this website’s platform is quite simple to use. Carrie told commissioners to let their local CVBs know about this announcement because they could help people submit sites. Debra said CVBs will be included in the press release distribution list. Patrick asked if geocaching will be linked to this trail because some CVBS already have that. Debra said yes, and LDNR has a plan to connect their future geocaching trail as well. Finally, John Welch with STA explained the general site criteria, and Jeannette Dubinin of CPEX briefly described the press release and newsletter which will be launched.

Gene Seneca asked why East Baton Rouge and Ascension parishes are included in the ANHA because he frequently receives that question. Debra said when the ANHA was a state heritage area, it included 13 parishes. Ascension was added later—before it became a NHA. She was told when she first came onboard that the ANHA is roughly the parishes around the Atchafalaya River and those that provide access to it, but no one really knows the answer and the number of the people who did the initial boundary studies is disconnected. Charles said he tells people that the ANHA has to do with all the people who are affected by and who affect the Atchafalaya Basin.

Atchafalaya Basin Update
Charles Caillouet said the legislature approved the Atchafalaya Basin Program’s annual plan but did not allocate any more money to the program for the third year in a row. Past funds have been moved from stalled projects to current projects. The ABP has been successful in getting at least one oil company to remove spoil from within the floodway as part of a location canal dredging operation. This will save state project money in the future for access and spoil removal costs. And the Dog Leg Canal Sediment Trap project is in its third year. Results show that bigger traps are more efficient and may offer beneficial use of dredge materials in land building projects along the
coast, so the Basin Program and the CPRA are exploring opportunities to place additional sediment traps. This could benefit both programs and leverage project funds to provide more activities.

Charles also explained that The Nature Conservancy purchased more than 5,000 acres in the lower floodway from A. Wilbert Sons LLC, for the creation of a preserve adjacent to state land in the East Grand Lake area along Bayou Sorrel. This will create larger blocks of land controlled by cooperative landowners and facilitate construction of the large East Grand Lake restoration project approved in the 2012 annual ABP plan. Initial land management will not change significantly and hunting leases will remain for the foreseeable future. The land will not initially be open to the public but will support restoration and scientific study projects. Debra added that those who know the basin really well could contribute some sites to our trail so that, when this nature site is booming in 10 years, the ANHA will be ready to include it on the water heritage trail. Charles said we could start with a marker outside the area and could develop that once public access is allowed. This acquisition is a good example of a private ownership entity in the middle of a floodway and how we deal with it.

On Oct. 1 the USGS Wetland Center in Lafayette will merge with the Southeast Ecological Science Center in Gainesville but will continue similar projects to those familiar in south Louisiana. The merger is one of many in the USGS Southeast Region in an effort to increase efficiency and reduce costs. But the rumor that the USGS in Baton Rouge is closing is false.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed the Louisiana black bear for delisting.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Speaker Series
Debra explained that the funds for the Educational Speaker Series have been used up and asked the commission if they would like the series to fall under the new grant program. Julie said she likes that the speaker series is so nimble. Debra replied that mini grants with a rolling deadline could become the educational speaker series and asked the commission to think of other things a mini grant could cover. Julie suggested they also could cover consultant fees. Jennifer said she would like to see the speaker series continue and, since this grant program will take some time to be allocated, she encouraged the commission to reallocate funding now at the same level as last year. Debra said she would like to see the speaker series continue and, since this grant program will take some time to be allocated, she encouraged the commission to reallocate funding now at the same level as last year. Debra said there was about $25,000 dedicated to the program last year and advised commissioners who are interested in submitting another application for this series to contact her prior to doing so to make sure they have the most up-to-date forms. She also stressed that they must follow the regulations or they won’t be reimbursed. Wilbert asked Debra to resend the form to him. Charles said The Nature Conservancy wants to sponsor some scientific educational opportunities in the long run. He has spoken with Karen Gautreaux with The Nature Conservancy and will get a timeline and recommended she apply for some grants in the future. Debra explained that with the grant program, the commission will be able to respond better to pitches such as the Boy Scouts’ Swamp Base and will receive more publicity.

Wilbert Carmouche motioned to fund the Educational Speaker Series at the same amount as last year and Aaron Flegeance seconded the motion. It was unanimously approved.

HISTORY & CULTURE COMMITTEE
AWC Exhibits
Charles Caillouet reported that one additional display went down at the Atchafalaya Welcome Center and they’re still having lighting maintenance issues in addition to the other problems already noted. His next step is to track down Jules Babineaux with Exhibits, etc. Debra suggested the commission recommend an amount that Charles could work within, explaining that there is ~$42,000 in unobligated funds. Jennifer said $42,000 seems high for welcome center repairs. Charles said he’s looking to reduce costs and improve efficiency with so some repairs in the $5,000 range and others closer to $10,000. Debra said we don’t have to do them all at once. People do
perceive the AWC as the ANHA’s welcome center and Debra does use it for some of the necessary match. Jennifer said she would like to see a list of everything that needs repair or replacement. Charles said that’s where he started, so now he’s creating a spreadsheet with costs. Patrick said we should look at all funding sources like capital outlay and talk to legislators. Jennifer told Charles she could meet him at the AWC if he wanted some help with this project.

OUTREACH

- EVENTS: Ashley showed pictures from her visit to Cocodrie in mid-May for a LUMCON photo workshop related to coastal land loss. One of the photos of an abandoned fishing camp was featured in the July 2015 print and online issue of Country Roads Magazine as part of the publication’s 2015 Relics Photo Project. The ANHA is mentioned in the accompanying article, which links to the ANHA Facebook page. Ashley also showed photos from Creole Culture Day at Vermilionville, which the ANHA sponsored through the Educational Speaker Series.

- SOCIAL MEDIA: The ANHA Facebook account has 1,392 likes—up almost 200% from July 2014—and the page ranks 19th in likes out of 42 NHAs with Facebook pages vs. 30th in July 2014. The three most popular recent posts were a press release about The Nature Conservancy’s recent land purchase, a photo of a grandfather teaching his 2-year-old grandson to play the accordion, and a blogpost about difficult Louisiana words to pronounce. The Instagram account, atchafalaya_nha, currently has 121 followers, and the ANHA Twitter account, AtchafalayaNHA, has 85 followers. Jennifer congratulated Ashley on her 1-year work anniversary and her promotion of the ANHA throughout photography and French.

Commissioner Announcements
Commissioner announcements included: the West Baton Rouge recently won a restoration award from the Foundation for Historical Louisiana; the opening of a new Zydeco exhibit in Opelousas and the death of Louisiana swamp pop musician Lil Bib; Dancing for a Cause July 11 in Gonzales, Taste of Ascension July 13-26 and the Swamp Pop Music Fest July 17-18; Mickey Gilley concert Aug. 1 in Vidalia to raise money for the Delta Music Museum; fishing tournaments in Cocodrie; July 4 festivities in Avoyelles Parish and the development of an annual Solomon Northup event; a lawsuit filed against a potential Belle River injection well that could affect several parishes; Morgan City BBQ Bash July 24-25 and the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival Labor Day weekend; Bayou Teche Paddle Trail; Lafayette’s Eat Local program; updates about a recreational trail grant for floating docks along Bayou Teche that is still in the permitting phase with Corps; bilingual signage task force updates.

There being no further announcements or business, Patrick T. Gordon made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Wilbert Carmouche seconded the motion and, passing unanimously, the meeting was adjourned.