Atchafalaya Trace Commission/Atchafalaya National Heritage Area

Minutes: March 2, 2016 Regular Meeting

A regular meeting of the Atchafalaya Trace Commission (Commission), managing entity of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area (ANHA), was held Wednesday, March 2, at 10 a.m. at the Capitol Park Conference Center in Baton Rouge.

Commissioners present:
Ascension: Charles Caillouet
Iberia: Chris Burton
Pointe Coupée: J. A. Rummler, Vice-chair
St. Mary: Carrie Stansbury
Avoyelles: Wilbert Carmouche
Iberville: Clifford LeGrange
St. Landry: Herman Fuselier
West Baton Rouge: Julie Rose
E. Baton Rouge: Gerren Sias, Treasurer
Lafayette: Jennifer Guidry, Chair
St. Martin: Aaron Flegeance

Commissioners absent:
Assumption: Phillip Daigle, Sr
Concordia: Glenn McGlothlin
Terrebonne: Patrick T. Gordon, Secretary
Pointe Coupée: J. A. Rummler, Vice-chair

Others present:
Debra Credeur, Executive Director; Ashley Herrick, Assistant Director; Alex Strader, Jeffrey Carbo Landscape Architects; Jeannette Dubinin, CPEX; Charles Reulet and Sara Krupa, LA Department of Natural Resources; Jessica Dixon, Office of State Parks; Joanie Lemieux, Avoyelles Commission of Tourism; Gerard Overhultz, Laissez Faire Inc.

Commission Chair Jennifer Guidry called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

AGENDA APPROVAL
Charles Caillouet motioned to amend the agenda to discuss repairs at the Atchafalaya Welcome Center. Gerren Sias seconded the motion and the topic was added to the agenda.

Julie Rose motioned to accept the amended agenda. J.A. Rummler seconded the motion and the amended agenda was unanimously accepted.

APPROVAL OF NOV. 4 MINUTES
J.A. Rummler made a motion to approve the Jan. 6, 2016, regular meeting minutes. Wilbert Carmouche seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

ADMINISTRATIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS/FEDERAL FUNDS
Debra said the legislature is in a special session now and discussing funding reductions to balance the budget. This should not affect ANHA funding but could affect state parks, museums and other cultural resources in the parishes so commissioners can visit Legis.la.gov if they would like to stay informed. Also, Congress is discussing Congressional HR 581, a bill regarding the longevity of National Heritage Areas (but not funding).

More information can be found at Congress.gov. Debra added that the ANHA financial update in the commissioner packets is a rough estimate until we get final costs on trail kiosks and signs. She displayed two maps John Ruskey produced about paddling the Mississippi and Atchafalaya rivers and mentioned that the Coalition for Recreational Trails is requesting nominations for trail awards. Charles asked if the ANHA was in danger of losing match money if CRT loses funds. Debra said it is not likely because most of our match comes from her expenses, office space, supplies, commissioners’ time and other sources. She said the grant program will also help with match once it is in place.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY REPORTS
NATURAL & OUTDOOR RESOURCES COMMITTEE
Trail Project Update
Alex Strader reported that the consulting team has finished selecting trail sites, received feedback from commissioners about the selected sites and is now developing graphic elements such as the website, brochure
and trail signage. The team is also getting ready to contact site landowners. When he showed a sample trail webpage using the Plaquemine Lock site, Julie asked if the photos were placeholders or the final images. Alex said they were field photos. The team could ask for other photos once landowners confirm sites will be on the trail. Charles said these photos are not really intended for marketing but do a good job of describing the sites. J.A. asked if the consultants had confirmed GPS coordinates for the locations or if they were based on Google Maps. Alex said they did have GPS coordinates, especially for remote sites. Charles added that sometimes Google Maps leads users astray but in general it is a good tool to have on the website. He encouraged commissioners to check the information on the final site locations in their parishes so any needed edits can be made promptly. Alex agreed that commissioners should review the information once it’s compiled and showed how the site will link back to Atchafalaya.org in several places. He added that the website is the greatest source of content, the most frequently accessed and the easiest to edit. Julie asked if the site could link to chambers of commerce, too. Debra said Atchafalaya.org already does link to chambers of commerce in the two ANHA parishes that do not have CVBs but CVB websites generally provide more visitor information. Carrie said St. Mary Chamber of Commerce’s webpage links back to hers as soon as visitors click on “tourism,” so linking to both websites in her parish is not necessary.

Alex displayed the draft brochure that will serve as a supplement to the website information. It would be the typical brochure size to fit in brochure slots at welcome centers and hotels and would open to a map that won’t be detailed enough to navigate from but will give a good overview of the trail. The backside of the brochure could highlight certain anchor sites and sort the trail sites into different themes (birding, paddling, hiking, and learning). J.A. suggested an edit to the draft: upper Pointe Coupee parish is not in the Atchafalaya Floodway. He also asked if site descriptions would contain blurbs about the geomorphology of each site. Alex said yes, and the interpretive sign for each site would have a brief description of this as well.

Alex broke trail signage into three categories: general trail markers (marking that you are on the trail); roadway signs (marking that a site is nearby); and interpretive signs (at the trail site). He showed sample water trail roadway signs that are 2’x3’ (same size as #3 ANHA road signs) on a pole with the medallion size ANHA sign above it. Alex said an advantage of this was to make all these signs the same. Charles asked if they could add an arrow at the bottom pointing toward the site. J.A. suggested putting the distance to the site instead. Charles said he liked that idea but added that it probably wouldn’t be possible to make these distances standard. Alex said he thought adding distances might be better than arrows. Julie asked if names could be added to roadway signs for sites that aren’t already clearly labeled. J.A. agreed that not all sites need names but others might. Carrie said these signs are at the site, so since you’re looking for it, you really just need acknowledgement that you’re in the right place. J.A. said some people might come across the sign accidentally and want to follow where it leads to learn more. Debra said most people who discover the Trail exists from seeing it on a road sign will probably Google it.

Alex showed an optional trail marker sign designed to raise awareness that visitors are on the trail. Its usefulness can be weighed vs. sign clutter. Debra asked for a rough estimate of the number of these signs the consultants are considering. Alex suggested ~100 (approximately 50 signs, 2 directions each). Debra mentioned that, at the last meeting, the commission had discussed not replacing the smaller, faded ANHA signs on less-traveled roads and said maybe the Water trail sign could replace those signs and be affixed to the ones we already have. Alex showed another sample with the Water trail sign with the current #3 (2’ x 3 ½”) ANHA sign. Charles added that using the ANHA medallion size sign could fix the #3 sign fading problem because the medallion size sign does not include the shield. J.A. said that it seemed there are some gaps between trail sites on the map and suggested possibly using way finding signs in these areas as reference sites. Jennifer suggested perhaps some of these issues might be looked at by an advisory committee later. Debra added that DOTD will also have to approve these signs.

Alex said the site interpretive panels would be low profile so as to not obstruct the view of the site and mounted on metal. The face/graphic part would be 2’ x 3’ and require little maintenance. Sign content would include an overall map of the trail and the site’s relation to geomorphology with a full or summarized narrative and imagery. It would also include general ANHA information and logo. Charles said he didn’t want to include too
much information on the panel. Alex said the layout has bold sections that are meant to be read quickly if someone only wants to spend 20 seconds reading the sign and looking at the pictures. Charles said the Plaquemine Lock site, for example, already has good interpretation but some sites will have nothing. Alex said he wanted to first get bullet point narratives for each site to make sure all the important information is covered and then develop the narratives. Next steps: 1) confirm design; 2) determine pricing; 3) contact property owners.

Atchafalaya Basin Update
Charles Caillouet said the ABP Research and Promotion Board submitted the 2017 Annual Plan to the Legislature after it was approved by CPRA. The new LDNR Secretary is Tom Harris, formerly the LDNR administrator of the technology assessment division. He has held that post since 2014 and Harris spent nearly a decade with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality before then. Charles Reulet added that Grand Lake is currently the Atchafalaya Basin Program’s first priority.

Clifford LeGrange noted fishermen are not catching a lot of wild crawfish in the Basin right now and the price is ~$2/pound on the east side of the Basin. The crawfish market is not suffering, however, because the pond crawfish supply is stable.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Speaker Series
Debra said upcoming events include a presentation May 19 about how commercial fishing evolved (Concordia Parish) and the (French/English) Tour de Spring Bayou (Avoyelles Parish) March 30, which Joanie Lemieux is developing with the Avoyelles Tourist Commission. Joanie is also translating Avoyelles brochures into French. Charles said the Avoyelles project is a good example of site development along the Water trail (Spring Bayou is a potential site) and encouraged Wilbert to keep Debra and Alex involved so this information could be included in trail materials. Debra reminded the commission that more sites can be considered and added after the initial ones are launched. Carrie Stansbury reported on the birding presentation we sponsored February 26.

HISTORY AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
Artisan Project Proposal
Debra said the videographer is locating local artisans such as Henry Watson; NUNU’s artisans featuring a French table, quilting and music; a photographer and perhaps a Chitimacha basket weaver. Julie suggested that they also look into the Pelican wood carvers group based in Baton Rouge.

Atchafalaya Welcome Center
Debra said previous estimates for AWC repairs have been costly, but she recently received a list of lesser fixes that are still quite noticeable to visitors but that could be repaired with less funds (in the $12,000 to $14,000 range – significantly lower than the original one). Charles said fixing the animatronics would be an additional ~$30,000. He said he thought $15,000 or less was a good price for the repair package presented. Debra added that this price is lower than the originals because one of the employees at the AWC has some background in electronics and can help with the repairs. Also, this quote also does not include developing a new video. Carrie agreed that we already have lots of good videos. Jennifer said the Lafayette Convention and Visitors Bureau has been producing videos that we could potentially invite them to show at the AWC. Gerren asked Debra if the commission had the funds to support this. Debra said yes. Charles asked if the new AWC sign had been unveiled yet. Debra said no.

Charles Caillouet made a motion to allocate up to $15,000 to Atchafalaya Welcome Center repairs and let Debra work with the Center staff on the project. Carrie Stansbury seconded the motion and the proposal was unanimously accepted.
GRANT PROGRAM
Debra said the Commissioners’ suggestions from the January 2016 meeting were added to the draft of the ANHA grant program and resubmitted to DCRT’s legal department. The staff has been very busy with the special legislative session and the transition of a new administration so we are still waiting to receive recommendations if any from the legal department.

OUTREACH

- EVENTS ATTENDED AND/OR HOSTED: French Immersion Excursion in Pierre Part; TECHE Project Annual Banquet in St. Martinville; Destination & Travel Foundation Gala in Washington D.C.; NPS Centennial Event in Eunice; and NPS Reception at Chalmette Battlefield and Cemetery.
- SOCIAL MEDIA: The ANHA Facebook account has 1,913 likes—up from 1,789 in January 2016—and the page ranks 17th in likes out of 42 NHAs. This increase is purely organic (no ads used). Popular recent posts: traditional boatbuilding documentary event; how a sleepy bayou saved New Orleans and the Cajuns adapted; and hummingbird spring migration map. The Instagram account, atchafalaya_nha, currently has 239 followers, and the ANHA Twitter account, AtchafalayaNHA, has 204 followers.

OTHER BUSINESS
There was no other business.

Commissioner Announcements
Commissioners announced upcoming events and projects in their parishes including the unfortunate losses of the owner of Cajun Jack Swamp Tours in St. Mary Parish and Councilwoman Ronnie Edwards in East Baton Rouge Parish. Carrie reported the NPS was highlighted at the Morgan City Mardi Gras celebration. Wilbert announced the dedication of the Sarto Bridge in Avoyelles Parish, the first bridge named to the National Register in Louisiana. Gerren Sias reminded everyone to keep in mind in our work that we want to engage our youth to become stewards of ANHA. Julie Rose pointed out the History Relevance Campaign is a movement very significant to the work ANHA does.

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