Atchafalaya Trace Commission/
Atchafalaya National Heritage Area

Minutes: July 13, 2016 Regular Meeting

A regular meeting of the Atchafalaya Trace Commission (Commission), managing entity of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area (ANHA), was held Wednesday, July 13, at 10 a.m. at the Capitol Park Conference Center in Baton Rouge.

Commissioners present:
Ascension: Charles Caillouet Assumption: Phillip Daigle, Sr
E. Baton Rouge: Gerren Sias, Treasurer Iberia: Chris Burton
Lafayette: Jennifer Guidry, Chair Pointe Coupée: J. A. Rummel
Avoyelles: Wilbert Carmouche, Secretary Iberville: Clifford LeGrange

Commissioners absent:
Concordia: Glenn McGlothin St. Landry: Herman Fuselier
St. Mary: Carrie Stansbury St. Martin: Aaron Flegeance
West Baton Rouge: Julie Rose

Others present:
Debra Credeur, Executive Director; Ashley Herrick, Assistant Director; Alex Strader, Jeffrey Carbo Landscape Architects; Sara Krupa, April Newman and Don Haydel, LDNR; Jessica Dixon and Ray Berthelot, Office of State Parks; Gerard Overhultz, Laissez Faire Inc.; Dora Veracruz Martinez and Nathan Hall, both of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park & Preserve; Jim Landry, Spring Bayou Restoration Team; Michael Sias; Sharon Stam and Kathy Gutierrez, West Baton Rouge Convention and Visitors Bureau; Charles Fryling, Friends of the Atchafalaya.

Commission Chair Jennifer Guidry called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. The commission said the pledge of allegiance. Then Jennifer asked everyone to take a moment of silence to reflect on the recent events in Baton Rouge and throughout the U.S.

AGENDA APPROVAL
Charles Caillouet motioned to accept the agenda. Gerren Sias seconded the motion and the agenda was unanimously accepted.

APPROVAL OF May 4 MINUTES
Mart Black made a motion to approve the May 4, 2016, regular meeting minutes. Phillip Daigle seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

ELECTION OF FY 2017 OFFICERS
Debra listed the nominations for the FY 2017 slate of officers: Chair – Jennifer Guidry; Vice-chair – Carrie Stansbury; Secretary – Wilbert Carmouche; Treasurer – Mart Black. Debra said the Commission could call for nominations from the floor or approve the slate as is.

Gerren Sias moved to accept the slate of officers as presented. Mart Black seconded the motion and the slate was unanimously accepted.

ADMINISTRATIVE & FEDERAL FUNDS UPDATE
Debra said due to the length of time involved in requesting bids and awarding the projects for the various Water Trail phases, only an estimate can be made for funds that will remain from existing funds after Trail expenses to start a grant program and for other projects (Estimate: approximately $131,000). Among the housekeeping items: She reminded guests to sign in on the Guest Sign-In sheet near the door. The remaining 2016 ATC meetings will be Sept. 14 and Nov. 2. Debra asked commissioners to let her know if there are any recurring dates in 2017 (ex. the first Wednesday of the month) that they could not make meetings due to already scheduled commitments or other known conflicts. Charles said he will be absent Sept. 14. Debra asked
commissioners to complete the Conflict of Interest form in their packet. Which the National Park Service requires the ANHA keep on file. Commissioners who have a conflict of interest can stay on the commission but they need to disclose and address the conflict. Debra listed the current ATC committees, the commissioners on each and asked everyone to let her know if they had any changes or had been omitted from the following: Natural Resources & Outdoors: Caillouet and Rummler; History & Culture: Rummler and Rose; Education: Caillouet, Burton, Guidry, Rummler, Stansbury and Rose; Sustainability: Sias, Guidry and Black. Finally, Debra showed two mock-ups of a potential lapel pin that had been requested at the last meeting. The pin would have the ANHA shield with the words “Atchafalaya National Heritage Area” on the front and “America’s Foreign Country” on the back. Debra asked commissioners what their intended distribution is. Jennifer said she would like one for herself and could give them to Ed. Speaker Series speakers. Chris said he would like some. Debra mentioned that since the ANHA shield is very popular but is fading from road signs, a lapel pin with the shield could become popular. Charles added they could be given to parish officials and Mart suggested giving the Lt. Governor some. There may be additional situations for distributing that arise. The minimum quantity is 300 @$4.65 each.

Charles Caillouet motioned to purchase 300 lapel pins. J.A. Rummler seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.

Debra offered the two remaining 2016 BTNEP birding calendars printing as well as MS River maps sponsored by the Lower Mississippi River Foundation. She also mentioned that Leave No Trace is requesting nominations for Hot Spots. The ANHA nominated Bayou Teche last year. Leave No Trace teams assist Hot Spots by addressing problems that impact natural resources such as litter, wildlife feeding, pollution, etc. through offering community education, helping with volunteer efforts and other means. Nominations will be accepted until July 31. The 2016 Lt. Governor’s Tourism Summit will take place Aug. 23-25 in Shreveport, and Creole Heritage Days will take place Sept. 23-24 in Natchitoches (the ANHA will have a booth and Ashley will probably make a presentation about the French Immersion Excursion program since the theme is French Languages in LA). Debra mentioned that the ANHA is looking for opportunities to work with its sister NHA, Cane River.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY REPORTS
NATURAL & OUTDOOR RESOURCES COMMITTEE
Trail Project Update
Alex Strader reported that the consulting team has been preparing roadway and kiosk signage specs for the bidding process. Ashley and Debra are reaching out to site owners to confirm participation and placement of the kiosks. There are 15 sites that have yet to be confirmed due to awaiting feedback from some governing bodies such as local police juries. Alex said that once the first draft of the site narratives are done, he will review them with the ATC’s Natural Resources committee, the CVB directors, parish representatives and site owners and other site stakeholders. Alex said the road signage design was almost completed and showed specs of weathering steel that will be used for the kiosks instead of powder coat finish. This steel is more durable and will evenly rust a bit over time to give the signs a natural/industrial feel. The trail page will be added to the existing Atchafalaya.org page by the ANHA webmaster. The consultants will provide the files to make that transition seamless.

Debra added that she has had several meetings with DOTD and they definitely advise against use of the ANHA shield on future signs. She is waiting to hear if 3M can guarantee that the pantone blue on the Atchafalaya Water Heritage Trail signs won’t fade. The kiosk blue and the map blue are all coordinated with the sign, so she wants to get the right traffic sign quality of ink in that blue to assure durability. The double Atchafalaya Water Heritage Trail signs will be placed on roadways near trail sites, referring to a foam-board printout in the front of the room.

Atchafalaya Basin Update
Charles Caillouet reported presenting several nature sessions at the summer day camp, KidCam this summer, reaching ~150 kids. The ANHA provided water bottles and decals. Don Haydel with DNR said that the Atchafalaya Basin Program has $5.6 million in HB2 for construction projects. This funding disappeared
temporarily during the legislative special session but was restored before it ended. There is a total of $1.2 billion in approved capital outlay projects, but the available funding won’t cover all this, so they are not sure which will be funded. Current projects include work on two boat launches at Butte La Rose and Wilson’s Landing; the Grand Lake Project (the sandbar at the lake has almost completely cut the lake in two now, but ABP must wait for the Corps to restore the blockage so they can then restore the lake to what it was 10 years ago). ABP is partnering with The Nature Conservancy on projects in their Bayou Sorrell land that hopefully will result in old growth cypress many years from now. The Atchafalaya Basin Research and Promotion Board supports this but funding it is an issue. Clifford Lagrange asked about the project at Little Bayou Pigeon. Don said the ABP received a permit objection from the adjoining land owners, so unless The Nature Conservancy buys the land, that project won’t happen.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Speaker Series – Concordia Event
Debra said the last Educational Speaker Series event was held in Concordia Parish at the Vidalia library on May 19. The subject was the history and evolution of commercial fishing. Speakers included Dr. Pete Gregory of NSU, Dr. Ray Brassieur of ULL and Wayne Coco with ties to the fishing industry in Simmesport, LA. It was well-attended and led to subsequent discussions with the speakers, the Avoyelles Parish Tourist Commission Director and Cane River National Heritage Area about additional presentations and the cultural and economic connectivity throughout our state.

Speaker Series/Collaborative Effort
The discussions indicated there is adequate material, much interest and additional qualified presenters to consider a series of presentations, similar to the Civil War Sesquicentennial series the ANHA presented in 2013. Debra passed around the brochure that was used to promote the year-long Civil War Sesquicentennial series, indicating a series about the history and culture of fishing could be developed in a similar format. A collaborative effort with Cane River NHA would yield a more far-reaching series. Each NHA could cover the costs of events occurring in its area, and cross-promote each other’s events which would likely increase attendance. She reminded commissioners that $25,000 had been set aside for the Ed. Speaker Series and as of today, a little over $18,000 is remaining. She encouraged commissioners to let her know if organizations in their parish would like to request a speaker on topics that reflect our themes and further our goals. Jennifer asked if the leftover funds can be carried forward if necessary. Debra said yes. Charles said Dr. Brassieur who was a speaker at the May 19th event was very enthused afterward because he discovered how little people in the Concordia area knew previously about the Atchafalaya Basin, which was discussed during the presentation.

HISTORY AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
Atchafalaya Welcome Center
Debra thanked Charles for all his help with the Atchafalaya Welcome Center. Charles showed a PowerPoint of photos he is looking to reuse in digital format for the welcome center exhibits. They include the work of CC Lockwood, Greg Guirard and Henry Cancienne. He thanked Jennifer for helping to get the digital versions of Greg’s photos from the Center for Louisiana Studies archives. He is also collecting images from a few other people, such as Charles Fryling. Advantages of electronic displays are numerous, but he stressed not losing the quality of the photographs in the old displays which were immensely popular. The 10,000-year history display will also be updated. Charles thanked the DCRT’s IT department for supporting this project.

SUSTAINABILITY
Jennifer said Mart Black joined the Sustainability Committee, and she reminded commissioners that the ANHA’s legislative sunset date is 2021. Debra pointed out that every NHA that has submitted reauthorization legislation thus far has been reauthorized. Jennifer stressed the need to be prepared just in case. She is looking for individuals interested in helping to form a nonprofit that will support the mission and goals of the ANHA
and explore options for its financial sustainability. Mart asked how many NHAs there are nationwide. Debra said there are 49. Mart said when they were starting the ANHA, there were only ~10 NHAs. Since then federal financial commitments have grown significantly. Debra said there is an NHA movement to move program legislation through congress so that NHA’s are regulated under the same set of guidelines. The enabling legislation of an NHA authorizes it to receive up to $1 million per year, but that doesn’t mean that they will receive that amount. Mart asked if the legislation would standardize NHA feasibility studies. Debra said it would with more accountability proposed, which would indicate some degree of capacity. J.A. asked if there had been interest from groups or individuals in helping with setting up the nonprofit. Debra said yes, and anyone else interested could talk to Jennifer. Mart asked if they had looked at all other NHAs and their friends groups. Debra said she had and the majority of NHAs are overseen by a nonprofit already, so they are less restricted than a state agency. Some of them also have friends groups, but those aren’t as active because they don’t need to be. Debra said she would send data to Mart and added that Volunteer Louisiana is a good model state agency with a very active friends group.

ORIGINAL SIGN REPLACEMENT UPDATE
(This discussion occurred during the Trail Project Update under Committee Reports earlier in the meeting but has been recorded under the correct title.)

The top portion of the double sign (“Atchafalaya National Heritage Area” with the NPS arrowhead) will replace all the smaller ANHA signs currently on roadways. Jennifer asked if we could repurpose the old ANHA signs that are taken down. Debra said yes, it will be included in the project specifications that the removed signs be delivered to a storage area. Charles said at a prior meeting we discussed only replacing faded signs. Debra said because of cost and time involved, it’s best to replace them all now, as we know this certain size will fade. Jennifer agreed that this would be more cost effective. Charles added that at a prior meeting someone said we didn’t need to have some backroads signs there in the first place so we shouldn’t replace them at all. Debra said that even if we take down those signs without replacing them, there would be an increased cost due to removing the pole which, if left without a sign, would pose a safety hazard. J.A. said it will be good to have a record of exactly where all the signs are since some were put in slightly different places than originally marked. Mart asked if the signs are standard aluminum blanks with a screen film so that the blanks could be reused. Debra said yes, but some of the signs have been damaged or are missing, and different sizes are proposed. J.A. asked if a small medallion-type plate with a number only, for instance, could be added later for a possible future geomorphological project. Debra said she did not see why not provided the DOTD standards of clearance-from-the-pavement-to-the-sign, and font size are met.

OUTREACH
• EVENTS ATTENDED AND/OR HOSTED: Quebec delegation visit to Atchafalaya Basin May 6 in Henderson; French Immersion Excursion to Bayou Teche May 14 in Breaux Bridge; 2016 Culture Connection May 24 in Baton Rouge; Louisiana Tourism Leadership Academy product development presentation June 10 in Natchitoches; Houma CVB grand opening July 9 in Gray
• FEATURES: ANHA named to Travel + Leisure’s “Best National Park in Every State” list; Atchafalaya Basin featured in TIME Magazine’s great American landscapes July 4 issue; Bayou Teche Hot Spot featured in Leave No Trace 2015 Annual Report
• SOCIAL MEDIA: The ANHA Facebook account has 2,217 likes—up from 2,101 in May 2016—and the page ranks 17th in likes out of 42 NHAs. This increase is purely organic (no ads used). Popular recent posts about: Southern places you probably mispronounce; Louisiana historical bridges for sale; and 8 amazing places you can go on one tank of gas. The Instagram account, atchafalaya_nha, currently has 333 followers, and the ANHA Twitter account, AtchafalayaNHA, has 264 followers.
OTHER BUSINESS
Dora Veracruz Martinez with Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve said that the ANHA was represented at the recent IPW convention held in New Orleans. Dept. of Interior Secretary Sally Jewel also attended. The next IPW convention will be in Washington D.C., and she encouraged the ANHA to consider attending. Debra said our partner, the Louisiana Office of Tourism participates each year and through their appointments, IPW attendees access the ANHA resources. Nathan Hall, Centennial Coordinator for Jean Lafitte NHP and Jazz, said that Jean Lafitte kicked off celebrations in January for the NPS Centennial and have been present at every festival this year in New Orleans. The park also put together a Centennial Band that is touring and bring jazz to people throughout the country. Jean Lafitte hosted a NPS Centennial Kids Day at French Quarter Fest and a community poetry event at Essence Fest. In 2017 the centennial will continue with focus on sustainability and continued creativity. Debra congratulated Dona and Nathan on their great work and thanked them for helping the ANHA get NPC Centennial materials. Debra also gave Dora a multilingual ANHA DVD that is marketed to international visitors.

Commissioner Announcements
Commissioners announced upcoming events and projects in their parishes including: Clifford LeGrange’s presentation Aug. 24 at WBR Museum about Bayou Pigeon; Swamp Pop Festival July 15-16 in Gonzales; art market at Houmas House July 16; Bastille Day activities July 15 at Fox Theatre in Marksville; 10th Annual La Cuisine de Louisiane benefit July 28 at Paragon Casino; Lake Bash on Lake Verret July 24; Houma Downtown Live After Five July 29; another likely drawdown of False River beginning in September; Miss-Lou partnership contest to build your own tour; Les Vues film series July 25 at Vermilionville; Lafayette Travel’s new website and regional calendar; next ANHA French Immersion Excursion July 30 at West Baton Rouge Museum; Delcambre Shrimp Fest Aug. 17-21.

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