Atchafalaya Trace Commission/
Atchafalaya National Heritage Area

Minutes: July 25, 2012 Regular Meeting

A regular meeting of the Atchafalaya Trace Commission (Commission) was held Wednesday, July 25, 2012 at 10:00 AM at the Capitol Park Welcome Center in Baton Rouge.

Commissioners present:
Ascension Parish: Charles Caillouet
Avoyelles Parish: Wilbert Carmouche
Assumption Parish: Phillip Daigle, Sr.
Concordia Parish: Tommy Polk
East Baton Rouge Parish: Gerren Sias
Iberville Parish: Gene Seneca
Lafayette Parish: Jennifer Ritter Guidry, Secretary
Pointe Coupee Parish: J. A. Rummler, Vice-chair
St. Landry Parish: Pam Cannatella
Terrebonne Parish: Patrick Thomas Gordon, Treasurer
West Baton Rouge Parish: Julie Rose
Assistant Superintendent Joe Llewellyn, Jean Lafitte National Historic Park, Ex Officio

Commissioners absent:
Iberia Parish: Chris Burton
St. Mary Parish: Carrie Stansbury, Chair
St. Martin Parish: Vacant seat

Others present:
Debra Credeur, Executive Director
Erin Sullivan, LA State Parks Naturalist
Gerard Overhultz, Laissez Faire, Inc.
Charles Fryling, Friends of Atchafalaya
Dana Naquin, DNR/Atchafalaya Basin Program
Nancy Broussard, Louisiana Office of Tourism/Welcome Centers

After the Pledge of Allegiance, Vice-chair J.A. Rummler called the meeting to order.

Agenda Approval
Julie Rose moved to adopt the agenda as presented. Pat Gordon seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Approval of May 23, 2012 Meeting Minutes
Gene Seneca moved to approve the May 23, 2012 regular meeting minutes. Gerren Sias seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Election of Officers
Debra Credeur presented the Executive Committee’s recommendation for FY 2012/2013 Commission officers: Chair, J.A. Rummler; Vice-chair, Jennifer Ritter Guidry; Secretary, Pat Gordon; and Treasurer, Carrie Stansbury. J.A. Rummler requested Commissioners make additional nominations at this time if anyone so wished. There being no additional nominations,

Wilbert Carmouche moved to accept the slate of officers recommended for FY 2012/2013. Tommy Polk seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.
Experience Atchafalaya Days
Debra Credeur reported a new format for Experience Atchafalaya Days. Since there are so many outdoor events in October, additional events planned during October only compete with events groups already have established. October would remain “Atchafalaya Month” with an emphasis on awareness of the resources. Events such as lectures, presentations and exhibits would be deferred to “off-season” months scheduled quarterly or bi-monthly, and developed with partners such as museums, thus meeting multiple organizations’ goals.

Discussion:
- Atchafalaya Month ties-in with Archaeology Month, also in October.
- Consider the tagline “Experience Atchafalaya Every Day.”
- The Swamp Life Expo in Iberville Parish is the one “anchor” event in October, best to keep partnering with Iberville Parish.

Projects Report
1. Atchafalaya Trace Commission:
   - Charles Caillouet was appointed to ATC as Ascension Parish’s Commissioner
   - The Commission seat remains vacant for St. Martin Parish.
   - “Atchafalaya” Web News received through a Google search is sent weekly by email.
   - 2012 Meeting Schedule: 9/26, 11/28, Capitol Park Welcome Center, 10 AM.
2. Time sheets were distributed for recording Commissioners’ time on meetings and projects.
3. NPS Passport Program: The Passport Stamp for the Heritage Area is now available at Capitol Park Welcome Center, Atchafalaya Welcome Center and US 84 Vidalia Welcome Center, in addition to the 3 Jean Lafitte NHP Cultural Centers.
4. The top 25 International Visitor Sign-ins in 2011 from 13 LA Welcome Centers was made available to the Commission with Canada leading followed by France/Belgium/Luxembourg.
5. The Atchafalaya Welcome Center will undergo parking lot & restroom improvements for several months beginning sometime after Mardi Gras. Options such as an alternate, temporary road up to the Center, and, if not feasible, a temporary relocation space are being researched. In meetings with State Tourism staff, the subject came up of the ANHA working with them on new exhibits if the Center must be shut down for any period of time. We also discussed installing an ANHA sign on the grounds during the construction process, as some visitors have asked staff where they might have their photograph taken near one of our signs. DOTD has indicated the Welcome Center may be closed for approximately 3 months. J. A. Rummler suggested a Committee to deal with projects and issues with the Atchafalaya Welcome Center.

Several issues arose during a discussion:
- Maintenance of exhibits and equipment is sporadic.
- The design, building and maintenance of a new exhibit should be coordinated on the front end of the planning process. J.A. Rummler suggested ANHA request a flexible exhibit space that allow for easy adjustment of exhibits by ANHA.
- Lobby space is very limited for the types of functions held in the Center.
J. A. asked that during discussions about the construction process, consideration be given to preservation and protection of the nighttime environment which contributes to the landscape that makes a National Heritage Area. Simple measures such as down-directed lighting and/or shields can maintain the nightscape in that area and serve as an example for future construction projects.

6. All ANHA signs have been installed. Additional location recommendations will be considered for future installation. There is some confusion regarding different types of signs appearing about the same time. The ANHA office has received several calls for clarification including calls from DOTD and from the public. Dana Naquin representing Department of Natural Resources (DNR) confirmed the DNR signs were being placed at boat landings and other DNR project sites, contrasted to ANHA signs placed on highways.

7. There was a recognition ceremony for one of the 6 LA Bicentennial Cypress Trees, a project that stemmed from volunteer Harvey Stern’s research. The ceremony was at Jean Lafitte NHP Barataria Preserve Unit on June 19, and was well-attended by the public and the media.

8. Bayou Teche Paddling Trail is targeting August 15 as the completion date for their plan, and the date the plan will be available for public review. Jennifer Guidry reported they are completing mapping and logo development this month. The Tour du Teche has added a youth race and other components for this fall.

9. Details about the DOTD Statewide Historic Bridge Study can be found at http://www.dotd.la.gov/administration/public_info/projects/historicbridges/ Public presentations scheduled are August 8, 7PM at DOTD Building Auditorium, Baton Rouge; and August 9, 6 PM at the Natchitoches Events Center, Natchitoches. Additional meetings are expected to be in mid-September in Monroe and on October 4 in Lafayette. J. A.. Rummler encouraged Commissioners to provide input to the study.

10. Debra updated the Commission on recent meetings about the Civil War Sesquicentennial. Vicksburg National Park will host extra activities for Civil War Sesquicentennial in 2013, and is exploring ways to include Natchez National Historical Park and Atchafalaya National Heritage Area. Discussed was the possibility of a website, a Vicksburg to Baton Rouge trail, an exhibit and funding possibilities. Discussions with Cane River NHA & Cane River National Historical Park indicate support for joint efforts becoming a state-wide project. Meanwhile the State Civil War Task Force appointed by Lt. Governor Dardenne is exploring possibilities of a web site and plan to meet soon. Past efforts from Civil War research in CRT resulted in sites categorized by area on http://louisianatrace.com/louisiana-civil-war-sites . Debra passed around a working notebook with information about both the State’s and the ANHA’s efforts concerning the Civil War Sesquicentennial. The notebook included an initial list of Atchafalaya Civil War significant sites spearheaded by J. A. Rummler; the Vicksburg Driving Tour Guide; a statewide CW site data base; a list of State parks with Civil War themes; and a previously published, map-style brochure.

11. Current Agency Master and Management Plans in some status of review are:


Charles Caillouet summarized the comments on the Draft Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System Project, Louisiana Master Plan from several partner organizations. Charles pointed out common threads among all of the comments. Most groups are
seriously concerned about the environmental health of the lands and waters inside (and outside) the Floodway, and have stated that concern in their comments. There seems to be a consensus that a higher priority should be given to the protection and restoration of the remaining quasi-natural environment, heavily modified as it may be. This paragraph from the Atchafalaya Basin Program’s comments summarizes a prevailing theme:

“We understand that the primary function of the ABFS is flood control, and Louisianans certainly appreciate the successful implementation of that function, especially during the flood event of 2011. However, we are deeply concerned about the priority and pace of the protection, preservation, and restoration activities that are essential in preventing the permanent loss of this unique environment.”

Comments from several organizations can be reviewed on the Friends of Atchafalaya [http://www.basinbuddies.org/news/?p=1340] web site. Other management plans include:


12. A recap of several organizations’ meetings about issues in the Atchafalaya Basin and Atchafalaya National Heritage Area will be provided by Friends of Atchafalaya and posted at [http://www.basinbuddies.org/news/?p=1369], compliments of Charles Caillouet. A summary of April meetings was distributed to Commissioners, and can also be found on the Friends of Atchafalaya website.

13. We were able to order promotional items before the fiscal year ended, which amount when finalized can be applied toward our match. Purchased were tumblers, insulated water bottles, first aid kits and lip balm.

14. Research on developing a waterway tour is underway. Commissioners were given an inventory/survey sheet to complete or to give to a parish official to complete. The survey collects information on rivers, bayous and coastal water areas regarding water access, outdoor recreation opportunities, on-shore tours and programs near the water, and visitor infrastructure. Once compiled into a data base, strengths and development potential will be analyzed to determine area or regional strengths for a collective, progressive or multi-tour visitor experience. Information is also being collected for a related exhibit about the influence of the water on the land and the people, a Management Plan interpretive theme. Surveys should be submitted by August 31.

J. A. Rummler suggested formation of an Exhibit Committee. Anyone wishing to serve on this Committee may contact Debra.
Other Business
Guest Gerard Overhultz inquired about his suggestion at the May meeting of planting cypress trees in the 14 parishes as the first step in a statewide project. J.A. Rummler suggested formation of a Forest Heritage Committee to discuss projects such as this one, the Bicentennial Cypress recognition with Harvey Stern, and projects concerning live oaks which represent other land forms and tell the story of the larger ecosystem complex. Possibilities may exist for partnering on projects with the Live Oak Society. Anyone wishing to serve on this Committee may contact Debra.

Commissioner Announcements
Charles Caillouet: 1) The Coastal Forest Conservation Initiative opened the application process from July 12 – September 28, 2012 for projects that conserve critical coastal forest habitat and enhance forest sustainability. Interested landowners are encouraged to apply. http://coastal.louisiana.gov/index.cfm?md=pagebuilder&tmp=home&nid=72&pid=24&fmid=61&catid=0&elid=0. 2) The Bayou Manchac Group I working to maintain and enhance the ecological integrity of the Bayou and its tributaries by seeking methods to balance conservation and development. Bayou Manchac runs through East BR, Ascension and Iberville Parishes. There is a draft Management Plan in the public comment period through LA Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries.

Jennifer R. Guidry: 1) Twitter has a Civil War page. 2) Atchafalaya was featured in the Center for Cultural and Eco-tourism’s (CCET) Backyard series in June. 3) CCET will be hosting French Canadian author Marcel Provonost in the fall. 4) CCET is looking into documenting an Iberville Parish boat builder on video and through oral history.

Pat Gordon: Terrebonne Parish has developed a new brand: Louisiana’s Bayou Country. A festival will promote the brand on September 29.

Tommy Polk: 1) Vidalia will host the Jim Bowie Festival September 29-30. 2) The annual Miss-Lou Conference is August 7-9 in Natchez, MS.

Julie Rose moved to adjourn the meeting. Jennifer Ritter Guidry seconded the motion and, passing unanimously, the meeting was adjourned.