Atchafalaya Trace Commission/
Atchafalaya National Heritage Area

Minutes: July 23, 2014 Regular Meeting

A regular meeting of the Atchafalaya Trace Commission (Commission), managing entity of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area (ANHA), was held Wednesday, July 23, 2014 at 10 a.m. at the Capitol Park Welcome Center in Baton Rouge.

Commissioners present:
Ascension Parish: Charles Caillouet
Assumption Parish: Phillip Daigle, Sr.
Avoyelles Parish: Wilbert Carmouche
Pointe Coupée Parish: J. A. Rummler, Chair
E. Baton Rouge Parish: Gerren Sias, Treasurer
Lafayette Parish: Jennifer Guidry, Vice-chair
St. Martin Parish: Aaron Flegeance
Iberville Parish: Gene Seneca
Iberia Parish: Chris Burton
West Baton Rouge Parish: Julie Rose

Commissioners absent:
Concordia Parish: Glenn McGlothin
St. Mary Parish: Carrie Stansbury
Terrebonne Parish: Patrick Thomas Gordon, Secretary
St. Landry Parish: Pam Cannatella

Others present:
Debra Credeur, Executive Director; Ashley Herrick, Assistant Director; Cash Cooper, Lafayette Parish citizen; Aldus Guidry, Lafayette Parish citizen; Karen A. Westphal, National Audubon Society; Bryan Piazza, The Nature Conservancy; Christopher Kersey, Baton Rouge Astronomical Society; Sara Krupa, Louisiana Department of Natural Resources; April Newman, Louisiana Department of Natural Resources; Gerard Overholtz, Laissez Faire Inc.; Jessica D. Dixon, Louisiana Office of State Parks; Charles Fryling, Friends of Atchafalaya; and Willie Fontenot, Friends of Atchafalaya.

After the Pledge of Allegiance, Commission Vice-chair Guidry called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m.

Agenda Approval
Julie Rose made a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. Gerren Sias seconded the motion and the agenda was accepted as presented.

Approval of May 7, 2014 Meeting Minutes
Gerren Sias made a motion to approve the May 7, 2014 regular meeting minutes. Gene Seneca seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

Introduction of Assistant Director
Debra introduced Ashley Herrick, ANHA’s new assistant director, who will be working on various projects. She also mentioned organizing a tour of the basin for Ashley. Aaron Flegeance expressed interest in participating and other commissioners agreed. Debra said she would inform those commissioners who are interested in participating once more details have been confirmed.

The Nature Conservancy
Bryan Piazza from The Nature Conservancy gave a presentation about the Atchafalaya River Basin, explaining his book, *The Atchafalaya River Basin: History and Ecology of an American Wetland*, the research that had been compiled and steps to set the ARB on a path to a sustainable future. Bryan also answered several questions from the commissioners.

Officer Nominations and Elections
Debra submitted the officer nominations for the State fiscal year 2015: Chair, Jennifer Guidry; Vice-chair, J.A. Rummler; Secretary Patrick Gordon; and Treasurer, Gerren Sias.
Gene Seneca made a motion to accept the nominations. Wilbert Carmouche seconded the motion and the officers were unanimously elected.

**Education Committee**

The curriculum has been distributed to all schools in the state through regular mail. One principal wrote a thank you letter in response, and Debra also received a request to translate all or part of the curriculum into French so that students in French immersion schools could also benefit from it. Translating the entire curriculum would be expensive, but translating parts of it that are not text-heavy and placing them on Atchafalaya.org could be a possibility.

Debra reminded the Commissioners that about $5,000 remains in the fund for educational speaker events. The next scheduled event will take place Oct. 18 (Solomon Northup symposium). Wilbert Carmouche explained that he is organizing a panel and hopefully a musician from Concordia Parish to accompany, since Solomon was a fiddle player. He is also working on reestablishing a trail in Rapides and Avoyelles Parishes. Julie Rose mentioned that she will submit a form for an exhibit of landscape paintings that the West Baton Rouge Museum will be hosting. These paintings helped inspire a movement to create state parks and an interest in conservation. The museum is also working to showcase Audubon prints, bring in an Audubon historical re-enactor and organize a bird watching walk at Oakley Plantation.

**Exhibit Panel**

Debra distributed a photo mock-up of the curved pop-up display, 10’ curved, with led lights, roller bag, and printed graphics that could be used by staff and commissioners at events. Jennifer Guidry demonstrated a model of the display and explained how it worked. Debra explained the costs. Julie Rose suggested purchasing just the backdrop with lights and the podium stand as long the total was less than $6500.

Julie Rose made a motion to acquire the display unit at a cost of up to $6500 for use at events. Jennifer Guidry seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously.

**Natural & Outdoor Resources Committee**

Debra reported the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the development of the Water & Land Trail is still under review by the Division of Administration. Debra referred to the list of potential sites distributed previously and welcomed any additions of places in the parishes that illustrate the story of the water’s effect on the land and the culture. Of particular interest are sites that do this as well as serve as a trailhead for a non-motorized trail (hiking, biking or paddling). Non-motorized trails can be linked eventually.

Debra mentioned that, out of the 19 guides the American Birding Association has in print, *A Birder’s Guide to Louisiana* is the best-selling guide on their website. ABA attributed the guide’s success to the downloadable pdf available at Atchafalaya.org and will use the Louisiana guide as a model for one being developed for Michigan.

Debra reported attending Trail Mix, an organizational meeting hosted by Bayou Teche, the Teche Project and Bayou Teche Brewing Company that explored ways to build economic development through paddling. The meeting was attended by a variety of stakeholders including area paddling clubs, small State organizations, The Teche Project, St. Landry Parish tourism and government representatives, private businesses and more. The groups gave updates on their projects and goals. Anyone interested in attending the next meeting should contact Debra for more information.

Waterways Updates: Bayou Teche has applied for National Water Trail status. Bayou Manchac has applied for RTCA assistance.
History & Culture Committee
As part of the parking lot upgrade at the Atchafalaya Welcome Center, a new sign will also be installed that includes the ANHA logo. Debra showed the blueprints for the sign and mentioned that Ashley Herrick visited the center last week to meet the employees and take an inventory of things that are broken. AWC has become the face of the Atchafalaya area for many visitors and the ANHA is also able to use it for matching funds. The compressor the commission voted to fix at the May 7 meeting has been repaired, but there are still several parts of exhibits that are not functioning. The estimate to fix these items came in higher than expected, so Charles Caillouet and Gene Seneca volunteered to visit AWC to evaluate the situation and try to find simpler fixes that could achieve the same result.

Director’s Report
1. Administrative
   • Remaining 2014 Meeting Dates: Sep. 24, Nov. 5
   • On the Volunteer Hours Sheet, include meetings, committee work, planning, events hosted and any ANHA-related projects from 10/1/2013 through 9/30/2014.
   • St. Landry Parish has an impending vacancy that should be filled soon.
   • The House Subcommittee on Interior Appropriations started proceedings by recommending NHA funding at 50% of what was enacted last year (not unusual), followed by an amendment that suggested full funding. The start of FY 15 is still two months away.
   • Debra noted the federal funding spreadsheet of all 49 NHAs included in Commissioners’ packets.
2. Promotional
   • Register attractions, etc. at www.usgulfcoaststatesgeotourism.com for National Geographic promotion. Brochures will soon be in State Welcome centers.
   • An ANHA article was included in the Louisiana/New Orleans Sales Guide insert in Travel Journal Japan.
   • State retailers no longer have to pay a fee to participate in the Louisiana Tax Free Shopping Program for International Visitors.
   • Ashley Herrick has updated and taken over the ANHA’s Facebook account. After an initial increase from 476 likes on July 13 to 688 likes as of July 23, the page’s growth has stabilized. Ashley will maintain regular postings related to the area and the activities it supports. She has also created an Instagram account, atchafalaya_nha, and will begin developing it as a visual medium to engage with the public. Debra encouraged commissioners to send any photos they would like to be published on the account.
   • Debra showed the ANHA license plate sample under consideration as a potential source of revenue for the ANHA.
3. Project Updates
   • An effort is underway to take an inventory of Mississippi River area slave cemeteries (including those in the ANHA).
   • USACOE has issued an Assessment for The Need for Mississippi River-Related Recreation and Access to undergo public review.
   • In June Debra and Charles Caillouet escorted Marlene Yu, a renowned Asian American artist from New York, around the Atchafalaya Basin and Gulf Coast for a series of paintings she will create about the area.
• Harold Schoeffler informed Debra the Sierra club has received approval for a 55-mile bike trail between Henderson and Bayou Teche, basically the whole west side of the levee. The trail will have multiple opportunities for scenic vistas.
• The Sierra Club is rallying support for National Park designation of a 150-mile area in the Atchafalaya Basin.
• The American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association is holding its 16th Annual American Indian Tourism Conference September 14 – 18 in Marksville. Exhibit opportunities are available.
• The Lt. Governor’s Tourism Summit is Aug. 26 –28 in Kenner. Tickets can be purchased at www.ltpa.org. Exhibit opportunities are available.
• Debra will participate via conference call in the Trash Free Waterways program July 25 at LDEQ.
• André Lyon of First Lomas Mon Ltd Production Company is directing an independent film about the history of Louisiana coastal erosion and restoration.

Commissioner Announcements
Commissioner announcements included updates about French tables in Avoyelles and St. Martin parishes; Assumption: a cancer fundraising event at Lake Verret; Avoyelles: a floating dock and pavilion at Spring Bayou Wildlife area; Iberville: the exposure of the ANHA sign at Miss USA and the U.S. Youth Soccer Region III Championships (in photos and TV cameras); Point Coupe: a Night Sky update and information about the Highland Road Observatory; Lafayette: the 40th anniversary of Festivals Acadiens et Créoles and the reincarnation of the Backyard Series; East Baton Rouge: updates Louisiana becoming the Hollywood of the South and movies filmed in Baton Rouge; Ascension: a downed sign that needs to be fixed, a parish Comprehensive Recreational Plan that includes trails and will soon be up for millage, and the Land and Water Conservation fund is looking for places in Louisiana that might be able to benefit from funding; LWF convention in Monroe in August and an upcoming USACOE boat trip on the MS River.

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