Atchafalaya Trace Commission/Atchafalaya National Heritage Area

Minutes: Nov. 4, 2015 Regular Meeting

A regular meeting of the Atchafalaya Trace Commission (Commission), managing entity of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area (ANHA), was held Wednesday, Nov. 4, at 10 a.m. at the Capitol Park Conference Center in Baton Rouge.

Commissioners present:
Ascension: Charles Caillouet
Concordia: Glenn McGlothlin
Iberville: Clifford LeGrange
St. Mary: Carrie Stansbury
Assumption: Phillip Daigle, Sr
E. Baton Rouge: Gerren Sias, Treasurer
Lafayette: Jennifer Guidry, Chair
Terrebonne: Patrick T. Gordon, Secretary
Avoyelles: Wilbert Carmouche
Iberia: Chris Burton
St. Landry: Herman Fuselier

Commissioners absent:
Pointe Coupée: J. A. Rummler, Vice-chair
St. Martin: Aaron Flegeance
West Baton Rouge: Julie Rose

Others present:
Debra Credeur, Executive Director; Ashley Herrick, Assistant Director; Alex Strader, JCLA; Kristine Hebert, City of Plaquemine; Charles Fryling and Willie Fontenet, Friends of Atchafalaya; Brian Goad, Susan Turner & Associates; April Newman, Atchafalaya Basin Program; Rebecca Triche, Louisiana Wildlife Federation; Gerard Overhultz, Laissez Faire Inc.; Ray Berthelot and Jessica Dixon, Office of State Parks; Doug Bourgeois, LA Byways Program.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL
Jennifer Guidry made a motion to amend the agenda to add a discussion about the future and sustainability of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area. Wilbert Carmouche seconded the motion and the agenda was accepted as amended.

APPROVAL OF JULY 8 MINUTES
Patrick T. Gordon made a motion to approve the Sept. 2, 2015, regular meeting minutes. Wilbert Carmouche seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT AND ANNOUNCEMENTS
Debra reminded commissioners to turn in their timesheets for the fiscal year that ended 9/30/2015 and to begin their new timesheets for the federal fiscal year beginning 10/01/2015. Commission meeting dates for 2016 are: 1/6, 3/2, 5/4, 7/13, 9/14 and 11/2 at the Capitol Park Conference Center.

FINANCIAL REPORT
Debra reported that once the inventory of faded signs and damaged and missing signs and poles is completed, a more accurate estimate of the replacement cost will be available. Federal funds for 2016 have not been allocated by the National Park Service among the NHA’s, but she expects $300,000 again for the fiscal year that just began. Depending on final costs of sign replacement and Trail markers, roughly 2/3 of this ($201,000) would be available for the grant program and new projects.

GRANT PROGRAM
The ANHA grant program guidelines, modeled after programs by other NHAs are now under review by DCRT’s legal department. Some items for discussion include: 1) The geographic restriction of a project taking place in the ANHA vs. the project can take place anywhere as long as it achieves an ANHA goal. Ex.: A videographer could produce a work outside of the ANHA but that benefits it significantly. Jennifer commented there could be no limit to the number of (unqualified) applications received unless the project was focused on one of the 14 parishes. Debra noted the theme of the project or the goal it would achieve was important, rather than a specific parish benefitting. Carrie suggested weighting the evaluation scale so that projects for
organizations based in the ANHA receive more points than those that include projects outside of it. The NPS would not have geographic restrictions as long as a project achieves ANHA goals, which will be monitored and ensured through a contract with deliverables produced before grantees are reimbursed. 2) Review or evaluation committee members could be experts from the community rather than the Commission. The review committee would not approve grant applications but would make recommendations to DCRT. Jennifer said she knows of a grant application that asks applicants to suggest their own reviewers. Debra said there would be confidentiality statements the review committee volunteers would sign and they would have the opportunity to recuse themselves if they had ties to a particular grant applicant. Charles asked what ethics paperwork community volunteers have to complete because he thinks they should know beforehand if they will be required to complete forms and file with the Board of Ethics. Debra said she hopes to have a draft of the grant guidelines before the next meeting.

On the subject of the Ethics Board, Carrie advised the commissioners to complete the required filing to avoid penalties. Chris asked how to check on his status with the ethics board. Debra suggested calling them. Debra said she will send a reminder email closer to the form filing date with a link to the forms and if there are any changes, she will pass along the information.

Patrick made a motion that Debra confirm with the DCRT attorney what (if any) Board of Ethics obligations community grant review volunteers would have. Carrie seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.

FADED SIGN REPLACEMENT
According to feedback received, only the decals on smaller ANHA signs (#3) are fading. With three parishes reporting, 27 have been counted as faded. Once more parishes’ replacement needs are reported, an accurate cost estimate can be obtained from DOTD. Several poles have also been reported damaged. Glen said there are several signs missing in his parish that were probably moved when a road was redone, but the highway department knows nothing about them. Debra said we need to consider whether to replace signs that were located in areas that were not highly trafficked. Jennifer said she also noticed one sign that was warped in the brown section. Debra said she has learned from conversations with 3M, Avery and DOTD that the traffic-type paint (as opposed to the graphic-type paint) has a guaranty period of 10 years.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY REPORTS
NATURAL & OUTDOOR RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Trail Project Update
Alex Strader reported that the consulting team has finished gathering site suggestions and is narrowing down the list of more than 200 sites. The team is now conducting field evaluations, focusing on each site’s geomorphological qualities and current trail links/amenities as well as opportunity to be developed for outdoor trails/amenities. Brick-and-mortar structures that have less direct links to water are not target sites for this trail, but they could still be incorporated if they are connected to a water-site that is selected (ex. Could be listed on the website but not have a marker, or be included in the “story” of another nearby site). Examples of sites the team has eliminated are: Acadian Village in Lafayette (not located on a body of water and doesn’t have strong geomorphology link; only store in Melville to survive the great flood – doesn’t have enough water connection itself, but it is close to the Melville Ferry which could have more potential as a site; Bartram Trail markers –the bodies of water on which Bartram traveled could become sites that refer to the Bartram Trail. Examples of sites still in consideration: Old River Control Structure in Concordia Parish; Bayou des Glaises in Avoyelles; the control gate at Bayou Manchac in Ascension parish. Alex showed a map-in-progress with sites in consideration.

Patrick asked what the ideal number of sites is. Alex said it depends on a number of factors. Debra added that the proposal estimated 100 sites, but that number could change since what is most important in the end is the integrity of the trail. Charles asked if anyone is looking at the trail from a visitor standpoint. Debra said visitors will be able to sort through the website for sites specific to paddling, hiking, biking, etc., so it is expected that people will travel to more than one parish. Charles said there seem to be two levels of sites—main ones and
secondary ones (which may not need a marker but are still worth mentioning). Debra agreed that information about relevant secondary sites could be included on the website. Clifford said he knows of some paddling trails near Bayou Pigeon that are not on the map and said he would speak to Alex about them after the meeting. Debra added that some trails will only be accessible by boat or foot. Charles Fryling said out-of-state visitors coming to Louisiana for conferences and attractions such as the Bartram conference and the Bartram Trail could be interested in our trail. Alex pointed out that a lot of the bodies of water Bartram traveled on are being considered for trail sites. Debra passed around a binder with kiosk/sign design examples that range in price from $1000 to $5000. Patrick cautioned that, in his experience, signs placed off roadways can become targets for vandalism and said he’s seen quite a few historical markers in poor condition. Debra said the process to request a historical marker is a lengthy with applications accepted only twice per year and these signs are expensive while offering limited content. The commission will have to decide whether it wants to go that route or if it would like more information on the markers. Alex said we could have a marker along the road and then a more descriptive sign off-road.

**Atchafalaya Basin Update**

Charles Caillouet reported that, after a record-setting late summer high water stage, the Atchafalaya River dropped in September to the bottom of the normal range and then bounced back up just a little after the heavy rains last week. The Friends of the Atchafalaya has been dormant for a couple of months but the superintendent of the Jean Lafitte park system will speak at the Nov. 24 meeting. The Corps is holding public workshops on the proposed LA Wetlands Rapid Assessment Method to evaluate conditions of wetlands located on proposed project sites. The new method is expected to simplify calculations for the amount of mitigation needed to offset project damage to wetlands and make the determination of mitigation costs more consistent. Woody Martin and Harold and Sarah Schoeffler attended the St. Martinville workshop, and Woody provided links to the Corps documents related to the proposal. The final meeting is scheduled for tonight in Mandeville and comments are open until Thanksgiving. You can get more information on the home page of the New Orleans District of the Corps. http://mvn.usace.army.mil

April Newman showed pictures of the sandbar that has been forming in Grand Lake since 2011 that was mentioned at the September meeting. It now stretches almost entirely across the lake. Removing this sediment is the Atchafalaya Basin Program’s main priority and the Army Corps of Engineers will work on removing the blockage at the river. Charles suggested the Technical Advisory Group and the Corps should let some water flow through the area and putting the sediment in the WMA to make a built-in sediment trap. Debra reminded that these projects are recommended and acted upon at the Dept. of Natural Resources (LDNR) public meetings, Research and Promotion Board (RPB) meetings and Technical Advisory Group meetings. April said there’s a meeting November 5 at 9:30 a.m. at LDNR. Jennifer said the commission’s field trip to Grand Lake took place almost a year ago and asked April to let her know of other educational trips.

Charles asked why the Atchafalaya Welcome Center sign had not been unveiled yet. Debra said she was told the entire project is not yet complete and the contractor will turn over all deliverables at the same time.

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**Speaker Series**

Pending events with speakers include how commercial fishing evolved (Concordia Parish), the Solomon Northup Trail (Avoyelles Parish), birding (St. Mary Parish) and the migration of the Acadians (Lafayette Parish). Debra said one of these is the first library to request a speaker and encouraged commissioners to inform their local libraries of our speaker program.

**OUTREACH**

- EVENTS ATTENDED AND/OR HOSTED: Tour du Teche; Swamp Life Expo in Grosse Tete; three French Immersion Excursions the ANHA hosted in conjunction with Atchafalaya Month and the Grand Réveil Acadien; John Ruskey and River Gator team launching from Baton Rouge on a paddle to the Gulf of Mexico; TECHE Project’s Bayou Teche floating dock ribbon-cutting in
Breaux Bridge; ANHA booth at the Louisiana Book Festival (Ashley showed the Wheel of Questions she uses to engage attendees in learning more about the ANHA).

- **SOCIAL MEDIA:** The ANHA Facebook account has 1,720 likes—up from 1,594 in September 2015—and the page ranks 17th in likes out of 42 NHAs. This increase is purely organic (no ads used). Popular recent posts: French Immersion Excursion; an article about houseboats and from BREC’s Pumpkin Paddle Parade at the LSU lakes. The Instagram account, atchafalaya_nha, currently has 181 followers, and the ANHA Twitter account, AtchafalayaNHA, has 144 followers.

**OTHER BUSINESS**
Rebecca Triche with the Louisiana Wildlife Federation presented a litter ordinance template and handbook that parishes can download to help them establish a litter court and collect fines. The handbook is based on the best practices found from St. Tammany Parish’s model and is available at [http://water.epa.gov/type/obe/mbarinebebris/](http://water.epa.gov/type/obe/mbarinebebris/). Debra reminded the commission that the ANHA partnered with LWF to produce the children’s fishing booklets, which have been distributed at the Louisiana Book Festival, the Atchafalaya Welcome Center and to other organizations.

**ANHA Sustainability**
Jennifer reminded the commission that the ANHA’s federal legislation states that assistance from the Dept. of the Interior is scheduled to sunset in 2021. Debra said when NHA’s reach this de-authorization point, many NHAs have successfully applied for reauthorization which requires Congressional action. Jennifer said a model many NHA’s use is to set up a non-profit foundation that will support the goals of the NHA. In addition, there are often funding opportunities open to nonprofits that are not to governmental agencies. Often, non-profits have more flexibility in meeting and other requirements than do public entities. Patrick added that people could also donate to the nonprofit. Debra said she was recently involved in a similar effort to form a nonprofit and it was not very complicated. Jennifer pointed out that we could receive assistance from an organization like The Community Foundation of Acadiana. CFA offers several fundraising options that can be combined if needed: 1. Fiscal sponsorship (project-based) 2. Designated funds (all funds go to one organization) 3. Interested groups (ex. local governments are project managers for projects occurring in their parishes). The ANHA could choose one or a combination of these options and could use the CFA as a fiscal agent and to sell loyalty items (though they would not conduct order fulfillment). Carrie thanked Jennifer for looking into this.

Gerren asked if there are any steps the Commission should take before the next administration to ensure a smooth transition. Debra said that, while the Commission is an agency of DCRT, ANHA staff is approved by the Commission and our variety of programs follow NPS guidelines.

Philip asked if the ANHA was contributing to the BTNEP calendar again. Debra confirmed that $5,000 had been recommended at a previous meeting. She passed around previous versions and said she would distribute copies of the 2016 calendar once they are printed.

Carrie asked if the commission could send a letter to Lt. Governor Jay Dardenne thanking him for being so supportive of the ANHA throughout his term. Jennifer said she would draft the letter.

**Commissioner Announcements**
Commissioners announced holiday and other events in their parishes

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