Atchafalaya Trace Commission/
Atchafalaya National Heritage Area

Minutes: March 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, March 4, 2015, at 10 a.m. at the Capitol Park Welcome Center in Baton Rouge.

Commissioners present:
Ascension Parish: Charles Caillouet
Lafayette Parish: Jennifer Guidry, Chair
St. Landry Parish: Herman Fuselier
St. Mary Parish: Carrie Stansbury
Terrebonne Parish: Patrick Thomas Gordon, Secretary
E. Baton Rouge Parish: Gerren Sias, Treasurer
Pointe Coupée Parish: J. A. Rummler, Vice-chair
Avoyelles Parish: Wilbert Carmouche

Commissioners absent:
Iberia Parish: Chris Burton
St. Martin Parish: Aaron Flegeance
Concordia Parish: Glenn McGlothlin
Iberville Parish: Gene Seneca
Assumption Parish: Phillip Daigle, Sr.
West Baton Rouge Parish: Julie Rose

Others present:
Debra Credeur, Executive Director; Ashley Herrick, Assistant Director; Diana LaGrange, Spirit of the Atchafalaya; Patricia L. Settoon, Spirit of the Atchafalaya; Jim Delahousaye and Willie Fontenot, Friends of Atchafalaya; April Newman, LDNR; Sara Krupa, LDNR; Jessi Dixon, Office of State Parks; Kristine Hebert, City of Plaquemine; Gerard Overhultz, Laissez Faire Inc.

After the Pledge of Allegiance, Commission Chair Jennifer Guidry called the meeting to order at 10:11 a.m.

Welcome New Commissioner
Jennifer welcomed Herman Fuselier as the new commissioner for St. Landry Parish. Herman is a journalist and also has a radio show on KRVS.

Agenda Approval
Carrie Stansbury made a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. J.A. Rummler seconded the motion and the agenda was accepted as presented.

Approval of January 7, 2015 Meeting Minutes
Gerren Sias made a motion to approve the January 7, 2015 regular meeting minutes. J.A. Rummler seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

Update on Washington D.C. Meeting
Debra reported on her successful trip to D.C. in February to attend the Alliance of National Heritage Areas meeting and meet with congressional members who represent parishes within the ANHA to make them aware of upcoming projects and related legislation that may come up in the coming year. Debra met with most of the Louisiana Congressional delegation (and/or their staff), discussed the upcoming ANHA water trail and explained issues related to the funding history of all NHAs. The newly-elected members already serve on several committees (Garret Graves, Committee on Natural Resources which oversees some NPS issues; Senator Cassidy, Committee on Energy & Natural Resources’ National Parks subcommittee). Garret was familiar with the ANHA. Congressman Abraham was interested in Avoyelles Parish programs, so Debra advised Wilbert to contact him.

Education Committee
Debra discussed the portal that is being developed to help teachers access the ANHA curriculum. Jennifer asked if the ANHA had received many requests lately for the curriculum. Debra said not lately from teachers, but people not involved with education have been discovering it. When teachers do inquire, Debra first asks them to consult
their school libraries since a copy was distributed to every school in the state. Charles asked if the educational budget cuts are going to affect the ANHA’s educational work. Debra said it will not.

Natural & Outdoor Resources Committee
Trail Project
Debra announced that Jeffrey Carbo Landscape Architects was selected as the contractor for the ANHA water trail and introduced Shannon Blakeman and Zach Broussard, in the audience, who will manage the project. The project’s team includes Suzanne Turner Associates, Center for Planning Excellence, LEO, LLC, Stantec and The Nature Conservancy. The Commission has already done quite a bit of preliminary research, so now the contractor will be able to use this information to get started. Patrick asked if commissioners could still submit sites for the trail. Debra said that the initial list of proposed sites is still a work in progress, so sites can be submitted, and we will begin to focus now on feasibility and sustainability of potential sites. The goal is to compliment water projects that parishes are already doing. Ex. If a parish has infrastructure needs, the ANHA could assist with seeking funding. The contract end date is mid-January 2016, but this can be amended in the future if needed. Debra added that she and Ashley viewed some potential developments in New Roads and Pointe Coupee Parish last week with this project in mind.

Atchafalaya Basin News
Charles Caillouet reported that the Friends of the Atchafalaya campaign raised double the amount of money expected, and purchased two Atchafalayaks for the Evangeline Area BSA Council SwampBase. FOA pledged $500 to start the campaign and gave an additional $133 to cover online campaign fees. Outside contributions totaled $1,900.

Charles reminded the commission that the proposed Cypress Preserve area includes parts of Lake Fausse Pointe, Lake Dauterive, and Grand Avoile Cove. Old cypress searcher Harvey Stern has cored a cypress on Lake Dauterive that he estimates to be 900 to 1000 years old. Debra asked to receive more information so she can add this cypress tree to the ANHA list online. FOA postponed its public meeting about this issue to do more research and receive input from partner organizations and advisors, including representatives of the Chitimacha Tribe. The Tribe is supportive in principle but is concerned about landowners’ issues with boundary decisions and cultural site access controls. Most of the sites are on private lands, and the tribes have agreements with private landowners to keep the locations secret for protection. Some input from advisors and partners suggest now is not a good time to introduce the proposal. FOA will keep the commission posted. Carrie added that the Chitimacha tribe will be apprehensive about this project because the Bayou Teche designation was not handled well by some local organizations and suggested that public meetings not be held at 6 p.m. on a Friday. Charles said that history is one reason why FOA is slowing down its work pace on this project. Jennifer explained to the public that some miscommunication among local stakeholders working toward the Bayou Teche designation has caused discord in the area.

In other news, Charles said the review of Atchafalaya Welcome Center repairs is still pending, the Atchafalaya Basin Program 2016 Annual Plan was approved by CPRA and sent to the Legislature, and the basin levee trail still has some areas that need to be coordinated with landowners. The parishes are responsible for that effort, and no state agency has signed on to sponsor the trail. Finally, the LWF Conservation award winners will be announced later this week, the USACE High Water Boat Trip Public Hearing will be held in Baton Rouge on March 27 and the LWF Awards Banquet will be held on March 28 at Juban’s in Baton Rouge.

Other
Jennifer asked Sara Krupa of LDNR to update the commission on the Grand Lake issue visited in October. Sara reported that the agency is planning to revisit the area to assess the increased sediment and water that has formed a peninsula in what is normally a deep-water habitat in the Basin. She will keep the commission informed.
Debra announced that Bayou Teche recently received National Water Trail designation from the NPS and is one of only 18 in the U.S. with the designation, an NPS initiative to recognize exceptional waterways and promote best water trail practices. Debra passed around an article about the designation that she helped coordinate for AAA Southern Traveler. Louisiana has 59 Natural and Scenic Rivers but only has one National Wild and Scenic River, 19 miles of Saline Bayou. There are 208 in the U.S.

J.A. Rummler reported a proposal by Christopher Kersey of the Baton Rouge Astronomical Society to add the Dark Sky initiative to the Outdoor Recreation tab of Atchafalaya.org and host daytime viewings at Welcome Centers throughout the ANHA. So far Christopher has identified the areas of New Roads, Port Allen, Sorrento and Gross Tête. This initiative would be low cost for the ANHA as BRAS would cover equipment and transportation. In exchange, the ANHA would publicize the events online. Charles suggested that state parks might be interested, and J.A. said we could start with a few locations and growing as necessary. Jennifer added that most lights in Lafayette Parish are capped except for in the Lafayette downtown area. Debra will contact Christopher to discuss this further.

**History & Culture Committee**
Debra said there were no new projects on which to report for this committee.

**Sustainability**
Debra is continuing to research sustainability for the ANHA before its federal funding sunsets in 2021. She reported on the model of a friends group or nonprofit which would offer fundraising opportunities the ANHA cannot currently take advantage of. Ex. Private landowners who want to donate land for the trail project might like the option of an easement, which would be easier to arrange with a nonprofit. All models of NHAs that form a coexisting friends group rolls management over to the nonprofit at the sunset date.

**Director’s Report**
1. **Administrative**
   - Upcoming 2015 Meeting Dates: May 6, July 8, Sept. 2, Nov. 4
   - Debra reminded commissioners to complete their annual ethics training either online or at a scheduled workshop and volunteer hours sheet (include meetings, committee work, planning, events hosted and any ANHA-related projects from 10/1/2014 through 9/30/2015).
2. **Other Promotions and Outreach**
   - Debra announced that the NPS is using the theme “Find Your Park” to celebrate its centennial from April through next year. The goal of this campaign is to engage the next generation of park visitors and stewards. She and Ashley have discussed incorporating the number 100 into events they may plan for this time period and advised commissioners to do the same for events geared toward a younger audience. A benefit of this is additional promotion of the event through the NPS. Debra also reported that the American Bus Association is accepting nominations for best group travel events now.
   - Ashley Herrick reported that Atchafalaya.org has received more than 92,000 page views since July 2014, which includes 42,000 sessions from 35,000 users. Most visitors spend about two minutes on the site and view two pages. Most visitors to the page access it from within the US, but statistics also include about 1 percent of visitors in Canada, France, the UK, Germany and Brazil. Ashley also reported that the ANHA received 9 constituent requests (for brochures, information, etc.) during the last quarter of 2014 and 20 requests during the first quarter of 2015. The ANHA Facebook account has 997 likes, a 109% increase from July, and the page ranks 20th
(in likes) out of 40 NHAs with Facebook pages vs. 30th last July. This increase is largely due to a photo and mention in 225 Magazine’s January issue, eagle photos and a tag posted to LouisianaTravel.com, photos from the Eunice Courir de Mardi Gras and photos of the Madonna Chapel in Bayou Goula, which is now the most viewed/engaged with post in the page’s history (+4,800 people reached, 834 post clicks and 275 likes, comments and shares). For reference, the only other post that comes close to this visibility is a National Geographic link shared for an article about the Atchafalaya area. The ANHA Instagram account, atchafalaya_nha, currently has 72 followers. Debra mentioned that Ashley spends a good amount of time researching and it shows in the increased online engagement the ANHA is receiving. Jennifer said she is glad the ANHA now has a staff of two. Debra added that Ashley also attended the Eagle Expo in St. Mary and Terrebonne parishes last week and is processing the photos from that event.

**Commissioner Announcements**
Commissioner announcements included updates about a successful 2015 Eagle Expo in St. Mary Parish; two Solomon Northup events in Avoyelles Parish, the new Broken Wheel craft brewery and egg-knocking traditions in Avoyelles Parish; Mardi Gras festivities in New Roads and archeology findings as a result of the False River draw down; the upcoming Irish-American parade March 15 and an arts and crafts event March 28 in Terrebonne Parish; the Baton Rouge Blues Fest April 11 and a performance about the first successful Civil Rights boycott March 18 at the Shaw Center; Bayou Teche Brewery events on Saturdays; LouisianaDancehalls.com and the new Bayou Vermilion paddle trail website/app.

After commissioner announcements, the meeting was opened for public comment. Kristine Hebert with the City of Plaquemine said that she is writing a letter to her congressmen and will encourage all Mainstreet managers within the ANHA to do the same. She offered to help start up the ANHA nonprofit mentioned earlier but not as a principal and noted that, due to recent budget cuts, the Plaquemine Lock State Historic Site is scheduled to close March 13. Plaquemine is committed to keeping it open, so she asked the ANHA to write to the mayor and city council to explain the site’s significance. The City of Plaquemine will continue to mow the grass and care for the outside of the building and Bayou Plaquemine Park is next door, both of which could be stops on the ANHA water trail. Jennifer asked how many jobs will be lost from the historic site closure. Kristine said one full-time and one part-time job would be lost. Debra noted that a lot of state parks are experiencing cuts so the local cities and parishes are trying to work out solutions. J.A. said that that area was a connection to southern Pointe Coupee parish even before the lock was build.

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