A regular meeting of the Atchafalaya Trace Commission (Commission), managing entity of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area (ANHA), was held Wednesday, Jan. 6, at 10 a.m. at the Capitol Park Conference Center in Baton Rouge.

Commissioners present:
Ascension: Charles Caillouet  
Concordia: Glenn McGlothin  
Lafayette: Jennifer Guidry, Chair
Assumption: Phillip Daigle, Sr  
E. Baton Rouge: Gerren Sias, Treasurer  
Pointe Coupée: J. A. Rummier, Vice-chair
Avoyelles: Wilbert Carmouche  
Iberia: Chris Burton  
St. Mary: Carrie Stansbury

Commissioners absent:
Iberville: Clifford LeGrange  
Terrebonne: Patrick T. Gordon, Secretary  
St. Landry: Herman Fuselier  
West Baton Rouge: Julie Rose
St. Martin: Aaron Flegeance

Others present:
Debra Credeur, Executive Director; Ashley Herrick, Assistant Director; Alex Strader and Shannon Blakeman, Jeffrey Carbo Landscape Architects; Charles Fryling and Willie Fontenot, Friends of Atchafalaya; Don Haydel and April Newman, Atchafalaya Basin Program; Charles Reulet, LA Department of Natural Resources; Jessica Dixon, Office of State Parks; Tracy Browning, Ascension Parish Tourism; Cathy Hernandez, LA Division of the Arts; Gerard Overhultz, Laissez Faire Inc.; Doug Bourgeois, LA Byways Program.

Commission Chair Jennifer Guidry called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m.

AGENDA APPROVAL
Wilbert Carmouche made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Gerren Sias seconded the motion and the agenda was unanimously accepted.

APPROVAL OF NOV. 4 MINUTES
Glen McGlothlin made a motion to approve the Nov. 4, 2015, regular meeting minutes. J.A. Rummier seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

ADMINISTRATIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS/FEDERAL FUNDS
Debra reminded commissioners that the remaining 2016 meeting dates are March 2, May 4, July 13, Sept. 14 and Nov. 2. Each of these dates is the first Wednesday of the month, except when conflicting with a holiday. Any commissioner who would like to suggest a meeting schedule change is welcome to do so. The Louisiana Office of Tourism is involved in a Destination Marketing Association International event honoring the National Park Service this February in Washington D.C. The ANHA will have a presence at the event and will give away a prize package. This is a great example of how the ANHA collaborates with the LOT. Also, Cane River National Heritage Area will host a symposium Feb. 19 in Natchitoches called “Resistance Escape Community” regarding the opposition to enslavement in North Louisiana. There is no charge for the symposium but registration is required.

FADED SIGN REPLACEMENT
Debra said that eight parishes have reported a total of 45 faded or missing signs. The fading issue almost exclusively involves the smallest signs. At a prior meeting someone suggested not replacing small signs on back roads. If the commission agrees with this, Debra suggested increasing the number of larger signs on state highways. The ANHA will eventually place kiosks and signs for the Atchafalaya Water Heritage Trail, so she advised commissioners to note which signs are really necessary by weighing the money spent vs. the impact made. Carrie said that if fading is a chronic problem with the small signs, she would be OK with not replacing them, but advised the ANHA remove the faded ones to reduce sign clutter. Debra said we could address sign
Some predictions suggest Atchafalaya Basin Update meeting before the next commission meeting to discuss this topic. Alex agreed that could be helpful geomorphological information when the consultants present the property owner information may have to a logo). That momentum is not lost on the project. Interests in this phase of the project because of the time commission to compare the amount of information on binder of historical marker, kiosk and could work with parishes to make that some sites will be ready for a marker and others trail map and signage. Alex Strader reported that the consulting team has finished evaluations data collected from field work and scoring sites according to the trail evaluation criteria. The sites are falling into 3 categories: sites recommended for immediate inclusion, sites in need of immediate development and sites to keep on the radar for future development. The team will then work on site narratives, a brochure, the trail map and signage, drafts of which will be presented at the March commission meeting. Debra added that some sites will be ready for a marker and others will need work. She reminded the commission that the ANHA could work with parishes to make that happen through grant and other assistance. Debra also passed around a binder of historical marker, kiosk and sign examples (some of which are NPS models) and asked the commission to compare the amount of information on a historical marker with the amount on a kiosk. Debra is interested in this phase of the project because of the time frame required if we have to put this out for bid so momentum is not lost on the project. Alex said we could consider small, simple way-finding markers (with just a logo) that lead people to the site kiosks. Although many sites are located on public property, Charles said we may have to work with landowners on kiosk placement issues. Alex said if that is needed, they will be providing property owner information through the GIS survey. Debra added that the commission can discuss geomorphological information when the consultants present the kiosk design. Charles suggested scheduling a meeting before the next commission meeting to discuss this topic. Alex agreed that could be helpful. Debra has been working on NPS annual reports and passed around a printed copy of the format. Commissioners could see what information is being requested and what should be considered for ANHA project selection and later, for grant program projects. All questions don’t apply to all heritage areas every year (ex. In previous years the ANHA has not reported on trail development, but next year it will). Data from these reports is used for NHA evaluations and to provide information to Congress. FY 16 funds have not been allocated yet but the ANHA expects to receive $300,000 (same as FY 15). After costs are firm for fabrication and installation of trail kiosks, it is hoped that ANHA would have approximately $100,000 to start the grant program. The amount of funding for grants could change yearly depending on additional projects selected and, of course, federal funding levels.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY REPORTS
NATURAL & OUTDOOR RESOURCES COMMITTEE
Trail Project Update
Alex Strader reported that the consulting team has finished site visits for suggested trail sites and is now evaluating data collected from field work and scoring sites according to the trail evaluation criteria. The sites are falling into 3 categories: sites recommended for immediate inclusion, sites in need of immediate development and sites to keep on the radar for future development. The team will then work on site narratives, a brochure, the trail map and signage, drafts of which will be presented at the March commission meeting. Debra added that some sites will be ready for a marker and others will need work. She reminded the commission that the ANHA could work with parishes to make that happen through grant and other assistance. Debra also passed around a binder of historical marker, kiosk and sign examples (some of which are NPS models) and asked the commission to compare the amount of information on a historical marker with the amount on a kiosk. Debra is interested in this phase of the project because of the time frame required if we have to put this out for bid so momentum is not lost on the project. Alex said we could consider small, simple way-finding markers (with just a logo) that lead people to the site kiosks. Although many sites are located on public property, Charles said we may have to work with landowners on kiosk placement issues. Alex said if that is needed, they will be providing property owner information through the GIS survey. Debra added that the commission can discuss geomorphological information when the consultants present the kiosk design. Charles suggested scheduling a meeting before the next commission meeting to discuss this topic. Alex agreed that could be helpful.

Atchafalaya Basin Update
Charles Caillouet said the water level in the floodway continues to rise due to significant rain in the Mid-West. Some predictions suggest levels close to the 2011 flood. The Corps will probably open the Bonnet Carré
Spillway and is debating opening the Morganza Spillway. Landowners have been notified and deer hunting season in the floodway could be closed this week because of flood waters.

The Friends of the Atchafalaya are still working on the cypress preserve concept distributed in proposal form last year. The group recently spoke with Jean Lafitte Park and Preserve Superintendent Lance Hatten and is reviewing past documents in order to gain more information. Debra will inform the Louisiana congressional delegation when she reports on activities in the ANHA. Charles confirmed he had seen the Grand Avoille Cove water study. Charles pointed out that preserves allow public use (ex. hunting and fishing) whereas parks have some restrictions. The area proposed for the preserve is state-owned (up to the high water mark) but not a state park. Jean Lafitte’s preserve has provisions allowing the federal government to enter into cooperative agreements. Charles added that DNR Secretary Steve Chustz reports the Basin Program is in the current budget plans for the upcoming legislative session, but details will not be available until the new governor and commissioner of administration assess the budget situation. DNR projects in the Basin will probably be on hold until the high water settles. There recently was a jury verdict in a whistleblower lawsuit against the DNR Basin Program for questionable activities but no current Basin Program employees were named in the suit and the state will undoubtedly appeal the decision. Debra added that the Atchafalaya Basin Program is working on a geocaching project that can be a good cross-promotional tie-in with the Atchafalaya Water Heritage Trail and give both projects more visibility.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Speaker Series
Debra said that a little over $7,000 of the approved $25,000 has been obligated for educational speakers. Upcoming events include how commercial fishing evolved (Concordia Parish) and birding (St. Mary Parish). The Solomon Northup Trail event just took place (Avoyelles Parish). Charles suggested providing fishing books to the event in Concordia. Jennifer said that leaves about $17,000 available. Debra said if there is a balance, it could be rolled into the grant program with open application dates. She reminded everyone that nonprofits and libraries are good venues especially in smaller communities.

HISTORY AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
Artisan Project Proposal
Debra said the ANHA used to have a tax credit for small culturally-based businesses that addressed our goal involving economic development. The program reached its termination date a couple of years ago. While the French Immersion Excursions support small resource-based businesses such as outfitters, local breweries, restaurants and other partners additional methods of support are desirable. We recently received a proposal—from the same company that completed the ANHA video—to support culturally-based businesses inspired by natural resources. The proposal is to make a 3-minute video of artists at work in the ANHA and talking about their inspiration. Potential artisans could include painters, photographers, chefs, jewelers, writers, etc. The cost of the project is $7500 and the video could be shown in welcome centers and on the ANHA website. Charles asked if we are required to put this project out for bid. Debra said no. Jennifer asked if this project could be routed through the speaker series but it would not involve speakers at events.

Charles Caillouet made a motion to pursue the project up to the amount of $7500. Carrie Stansbury seconded the motion and the proposal was unanimously accepted.

ANHA SUSTAINABILITY
Jennifer said she recently met with a longtime supporter of the ANHA who could possibly help with fundraising and setting up a nonprofit. Commissioners that are not reappointed to the Commission but are interested in continuing to support in some way are potential candidates. Gerren mentioned that Gene Seneca might be interested. Jennifer said he is already on her list of people to contact. Debra said that a nonprofit is typically less restrictive, can meet by phone and members are not bound by reporting requirements.
GRANT PROGRAM
Debra said that any grant the ANHA gives out will result in a grant agreement with the state, so the application and guidelines are being reviewed thoroughly by DCRT’s legal department. She asked commissioners for their input on the outline of the basic grant program structure included in their packets. Those eligible to apply are non-profits (501C3), public entities (parishes, municipalities and state agencies), federal tribes and academic institutions. Projects or activities must be located within or benefit one or more of the 14 parishes and must support one or more goals stated in the ANHA management plan: build regional identity and expand sense of place; increase economic opportunities; support healthier ecosystem; expand outdoor recreation. Two proposed cycles are: Feb. 1 applications, awards Apr. 15; July 1 applications, awards Sept. 15. Awards could range from $750 - $15,000; one award per applicant per 12-month period; reimbursable at completion of project. A pre-approved $1/$1 cash or in-kind match would be required. Each project would have a signed grant agreement before the start date and recipients would be required to notify legislators of the award. Projects would be completed within one year. The review panel would be made of up five or six community volunteers. Applications would be submitted to panel via electronic transmission. Suggested judging criteria would be (100 points possible):

- 20 Supports goals & mission
- 15 Ability to achieve stated goals
- 5 one-year time line achievable
- 10 Benefits more than one parish
- 10 Economic impact
- 10 Educational benefit
- 5 Partner collaboration
- 5 Measureable outcomes
- 10 Budget projections realistic
- 10 Strength of match

Carrie asked what the ANHA would do with leftover funds (ex. If a funded applicant couldn’t complete a project in time, would the extra money be awarded to another applicant who was not originally funded?). Debra said the commission will advise on grant program guidelines but won’t review and score applications. Instead, community volunteers would be selected for the Review Committee (commissioners and DCRT staff can volunteer). The ANHA mission encompasses culture/heritage/traditions as well as outdoor recreation, so the review panel will need representation from both areas. Debra said the Division of the Arts receives ~90 applications. Some NHAs have reported applicants having trouble with the match requirement so we don’t want to make the guidelines too restrictive. Charles said the Educational Speaker Series funding would have some changes if it were combined with the grant program. Debra suggested a cap on the amount for speakers if it is in the grant program. She added that some heritage areas use the previous year’s money for the current year’s grant pool. Each NHA has to spend its money in three years, so the one-year time frame on a project is reasonable. Some Commissioners related their experiences with other grant programs such as if money awarded is not actually used, etc.

J.A. suggested giving applicants 10 possible points for supporting one goal and 10 extra points for supporting more than one goal. Carrie said one ANHA benefit for rural St. Mary Parish is that she has not been in competition with Lafayette or bigger parishes. Debra asked how rural communities could get points so the awards don’t only go to large parishes. J.A. said he liked a rural weighting or geographic weighting. Debra said anything used when reviewing grants must be included in the guidelines so applicants know exactly what they are being rated on. Charles suggested taking five points from “ability to achieve stated goals” to add a “haven’t been awarded a grant in the last 2 years” for five points. Jennifer said she does not think we should give a preference to people who don’t regularly write grants. Wilbert said some grant programs make awards based on $x per # of people in the parish. Debra said if someone did something that benefits all 14 parishes, however, that wouldn’t work. Carrie suggested commissioners think about this and let Debra know if they come up with a
suggestion. J.A. asked if the criteria can be adjusted after a grant cycle. Debra said yes, there will be regular program reviews so changes can be made if necessary. She asked commissioners what they thought of the potential award range of $750 to $15,000. Jennifer said she thought it was definitely reasonable. Debra said that if funding is cut one year, we could reduce the maximum amount to $5000, for example. Charles asked if the panel could award less than what an applicant applies for. Jennifer said yes. Debra added that the review panel would score the applications and CRT would allocate the funds. The Division of the Arts has a review panel with a similar process. Jennifer added that the applicant would then have to submit a revised budget according to the funds awarded. Debra reminded commissioners that the information presented was just a draft. Wilbert asked to include a question regarding how an applicant would adjust their project if they are not fully funded.

OUTREACH

- EVENTS ATTENDED AND/OR HOSTED: Solomon Northup Trail launch in Bunkie; LDNR and The Nature Conservancy MOU signing at Atchafalaya Welcome Center.
- EXTRA ANHA PUBLICITY: Ashley Herrick was interviewed by TFO Canada (a French-Canadian TV show crew) about her work with French and the ANHA; France-Louisiane blog included post about the Atchafalaya Basin and the ANHA; ANHA blurb about French
- SOCIAL MEDIA: The ANHA Facebook account has 1,789 likes—up from 1,720 in November 2015—and the page ranks 17th in likes out of 42 NHAs. This increase is purely organic (no ads used). Popular recent posts: rare Louisiana photos from ‘30s and ‘40s; Plaquemine Lock history and Harvey Stern’s legacy cypress tree project. The Instagram account, atchafalaya_nha, currently has 196 followers, and the ANHA Twitter account, AtchafalayaNHA, has 165 followers.

OTHER BUSINESS

Charles said he received an email about conflict between vendors at Lake Martin. Debra said this is an ongoing issue that falls under the jurisdiction of the parish government. J.A. said he would like to discuss how to organize the Atchafalaya.org book list. He also suggested adding book reviews. Debra said, related to its upcoming conference about slavery, Cane River NHA is hosting a conference call about the book beforehand.

Commissioner Announcements

Commissioners announced holiday and other events and projects in their parishes including St. Mary’s Episcopal Church 100th anniversary in Pointe Coupée Parish, and the Miss-Lou Rural Tourism Conference in Leesville, LA.

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.