Atchafalaya Trace Commission/
Atchafalaya National Heritage Area

Minutes: May 4, 2016 Regular Meeting

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

Commissioners present:
Ascension: Charles Caillouet
E. Baton Rouge: Gerren Sias, Treasurer
Lafayette: Jennifer Guidry, Chair
St. Mary: Carrie Stansbury
Assumption: Phillip Daigle, Sr
Iberia: Chris Burton
St. Landry: Herman Fuselier
Terrebonne: Mart Black
Concordia: Glenn McGlothin
Iberville: Clifford LeGrange
St. Martin: Aaron Flegeance
West Baton Rouge: Julie Rose

Commissioners absent:
Avoyelles: Wilbert Carmouche, Secretary
Pointe Coupée: J. A. Rummel

Others present:
Debra Credeur, Executive Director; Ashley Herrick, Assistant Director; Alex Strader, Jeffrey Carbo Landscape Architects; Sara Krupa, LDNR; Jessica Dixon and Ray Berthelot, Office of State Parks; Gerard Overhultz, Laissez Faire Inc.; Robert Barham, DCRT Secretary and State Parks Assistant Secretary; Tracy Browning, Ascension Parish Tourism; Supt. Lance Hatten and Deputy Supt. Rebecca Lasell, both of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park & Preserve.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL
Gerren Sias motioned to accept the agenda. Mart Black seconded the motion and the agenda was unanimously accepted.

APPROVAL OF March 2 MINUTES
Charles Caillouet made a motion to approve the March 2, 2016, regular meeting minutes. Glenn McGlothin seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

ADMINISTRATIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS
Debra announced that Patrick Gordon resigned from the Atchafalaya Trace Commission. The Terrebonne Parish president has appointed Mart Black as the new commissioner. Debra thanked Patrick for his many years of service and welcomed Mart, who served on the commission when it was a state heritage area. She also introduced Robert Barham, the interim secretary of CRT, representing the Lt. Governor who is traveling throughout Louisiana this week for National Tourism Week. Upcoming 2016 ATC meeting dates are July 13, Sept. 14 and Nov. 2. The 2016-17 officers will be elected at the July 13 commission meeting. Please submit nominations via email by June 15. Officers are limited to no more than 3 consecutive years in the same office, so Jennifer could serve one more year as president, the vice-chair position is vacant, Wilbert could serve two more years as secretary and Gerren cannot serve another year as treasurer but could be nominated for another office. Debra asked anyone unwilling to serve to let her know.

The Ethics Board ruled in March on changes in the personal disclosure filing requirements for certain Boards and Commissions. Effective 3-21-2016, Atchafalaya Trace Commission members are no longer required to file disclosure statements with the LA Board of Ethics. Charles asked if they still needed to complete the Ethics training class. Debra said she would confirm after the commission meeting (NOTE: She confirmed that Atchafalaya Trace Commission members DO still need to complete the ethics training annually). Debra also reminded commissioners that they can check State Legislative Information at http://www.legis.la.gov/legis/home.aspx. Click on My Legis (upper right corner) to track up to 50 legislative
instruments during special and regular sessions. ANHA budget projections are in commissioner packets and remain unchanged until we receive actual bids and firm pricing on trail signage and kiosks. The Coalition for Recreational Trails issued a call for nominations for achievement awards. This is open to projects that that were funded after 2007 by Recreational Trails Program funding. For more info go to http://www.americantrails.org/awards/CRTawards.html, Debra introduced Lance Hatten, superintendent of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve and the ANHA’s official NPS partner. Lance introduced his deputy superintendent, Rebecca Lasell, who recently arrived from Alaska. Debra also mentioned that Congressional HR 581, the National Heritage Area Act (https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/581): establishes a system of NHA’s to ensure their continuity. Last week Debra attended the Alliance of NHA’s meeting in Baltimore and said there was a lot of discussion about funding equality for NHAs (commissioner packets include a spreadsheet of the federal funding history of all NHA’s since each one’s designation). The Alliance supports consistent, equitable funding among all NHA’s. Jennifer asked if this was the first year that everyone in the Alliance could vote. Debra said previously only board members could vote but now all members can. Jennifer asked why some NHAs had gaps in funding on the spreadsheet, and Debra said those gaps are because the NHA may not have existed or, because funding was withheld due to non-compliance.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY REPORTS
NATURAL & OUTDOOR RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Trail Project Update
Alex Strader reported that the consulting team has begun reaching out to site owners while also developing road and interpretive signage and the overall trail layout. Gerren asked what the feedback they have received so far. Debra said she has received positive responses to the letter mail-out as well as a few contact information changes. Alex said most sites already accommodate visitors, but some like the Old River Control Structure will need to be worked out. Glen said he could help in discussions with the Army Corps of Engineers in Concordia Parish, and Debra said her communication with the Corps about the Port Allen Lock indicated visitors would not be allowed on-site, so a site in view of the area will need to be identified. Charles said we should note in the text of the website and kiosks which places visitors cannot access. Alex said he hopes to have the site list finalized by the end of May. The trail has been laid out into four loops (between 100 and 400 miles each) that correspond with the ANHA’s four designated regions: Upper Atchafalaya, Between Two Rivers, Bayou Teche Corridor and Coastal Zone. One single loop of the entire trail would be about 1000 miles. Debra reiterated that Atchafalaya.org has visitor amenities classified in these four categories because it helps make them doable for people who don’t have a week to drive around the entire region, and also aids with accessing visitor amenities in a particular area. Alex said people would still be able to sort through the entire trail on the website for specific experiences such as paddling, biking, birding, etc.

Alex said DOTD has approved the roadway signage after giving feedback and making a few changes to the original design. The sign will have a small ANHA sign at the top and the trail sign below and will be placed on the side of the road when near a site. Since new standards by DOTD require heavier poles, most existing sign poles cannot be reused. Alex showed a sample onsite kiosk design—a single sheet of steel bent and painted with a graphic cut out and site information on top. It would be embedded in the ground. Debra asked if the beak of the egret would be strong enough to withstand vandalism. Julie asked if they could reverse the cut out and have the bird profile in the steel, instead. Alex said they had thought about attaching the beak to the other side, though 3/8th inch steel is very strong so it may not be an issue. Julie suggested opening up space on the other side of the bottom section of the kiosk so that people in wheelchairs could roll closer to it and more of the site/ground would be visible to people standing in front of the sign. Mart said it might be cheaper to bolt the sign to the ground instead of welding it so that it could be replaced more easily if necessary. Alex said that was a good idea. Charles asked why there was no ANHA shield on the small top road sign. Debra said the colors that are fading were eliminated, and the focal point of the shield is the egret. Charles replied that the small sign doesn’t have the egret on it either and noted two signs on the basin bridge between Whiskey River and Ramah that are faded. Mart asked if the trail sign would be used in all four sections of the trail or if there would be anything identifying each zone. Alex said they didn’t want to separate the zones too much since they’re pretty big and it’s not likely visitors will be crossing them often. Carrie added that visitors don’t usually pay attention to that level of detail. Charles said they’ll be looking at the website or brochure or a map or by curiosity if they happen upon
a sign accidentally. Alex agreed that it’s a lot of text to take in while driving down the road. Philip asked if it would be difficult to add the distance to the site on each sign. Alex said he talked to their engineer about that but they decided it wasn’t worth it because it would be too individualized for each sign, and the proposed format allows any sign to be used anywhere on the Trail. Carrie added that it might confuse visitors if signs aren’t placed exactly where they claim to be. Charles said from a local maintenance standpoint, it is good that signs can be easily swapped out. Since DOTD has approved this design, Alex said the next step is to see if DOTD can fabricate it in-house or if they need to put it out for bid along with sign installation. The consultants will also continue to develop the kiosk design. Julie said the commission would want to see a revision of the kiosk and suggested approving it electronically. Debra said this could be done. Alex said the website design was ongoing until all sites and content are developed. He will send rough drafts of narratives to commissioners once they are ready. Jennifer said she had a few corrections for letter contacts that she would send to Debra. Gerren said commissioners could help if needed by talking to site owners who have concerns.

Atchafalaya Basin Update
Charles Caillouet showed a graphic explaining that the water stages in the basin for 2016 have not followed patterns of previous years. Sara Krupa reported on the Atchafalaya Basin Program’s (ABP) activities: the Grand Lake Project to close the breach at the river; the restoration of Bayou Pigeon and their partnership with the Nature Conservancy. The Wilson’s Boat Landing project has been permitted and they just received a permit for the Butte La Rose walking trail at the Atchafalaya Welcome Center. The geocaching project in the basin will have 20 to 30 sites, some which will overlap with the Atchafalaya Water Heritage Trail. ABP is contacting site owners now. Debra said there are opportunities to cross-promote the geocaching with our Trail. Cliff asked what the problem was with the landowners at Bayou Pigeon. Sara said they have to redo the land survey to make sure they do not infringe on the landowner’s property. ABP hosts public meetings to gather input and the Technical Advisory Group and Research & Promotion Board meetings are open to the public. Charles gave a brief update on the DNR whistleblower lawsuit and the Friends of the Atchafalaya who is reviewing its direction as an organization and looking for younger people to serve on its board.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Speaker Series
Debra said the next Educational Speaker Series event is May 19 about how commercial fishing evolved (Concordia Parish). She encouraged commissioners to let her know if they have organizations in their parishes that would like to request a speaker. She also reminded them that the NPS is celebrating its centennial and thanked Lance Hatten for helping the ANHA get promotional materials to hand out as well as a pop-up sign.

HISTORY AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
Atchafalaya Welcome Center
Debra said we’re replacing some books at the AWC that are worn, and invited the Commissioners to look through the old copies. To continue the AWC upgrades, Charles said the CRT information services director is helping to look for commercial grade equipment that can handle power issues. They are also looking for files of existing images and replacements to display. Debra thanked Charles for helping with this project. Also, the copper and cypress AWC sign has finally been unveiled by DOTD, and Charles said it is very visible and looks great from the road.

History Relevance Campaign
Julie Rose explained a history relevance campaign based on the success of the STEM program and showed commissioners a handout called The Value of History that she asked them to endorse. There is no financial obligation for endorsement, and the ANHA name and logo would be included on the website. Jennifer said she noticed on the website Historyrelevance.org that other NHAs had endorsed it. Carrie asked if there were any downsides to endorsement, but Julie did not know of any.

Gerren Sias made a motion to endorse the “The Values of History.” Mart Black seconded the motion and the proposal was unanimously accepted.
Aaron Flegance said that every history teacher in St. Martin Parish would have a copy of the values by next week. Jennifer said she would bring the handout back to the Center for Louisiana Studies. Gerren suggested asking Cane River National Heritage Area to endorse this as well.

SUSTAINABILITY
Jennifer said she attended the Friends of Atchafalaya meeting and learned a lot more about it and its mission. A fellow ANHA supporter, Flo Ulmer, is also interested in helping to establish a nonprofit for the ANHA.

OUTREACH
- EVENTS ATTENDED AND/OR HOSTED: NCPTT Dancehall symposium March 22-23 in Lafayette; Southeast Tourism Society Spring Symposium April 4-6 in Baton Rouge; Louisiana NPS Coordinators’ Meeting April 19 in Baton Rouge; National Tourism Week May 2-3 at Atchafalaya Welcome Center
- FEATURES: ANHA’s attendance at 2016 Destination & Travel Foundation Gala in Washington D.C. featured in NPS/NHA first quarter 2016 newsletter; ANHA French Immersion Excursion featured in LouisianaTravel.com blog and Louisiana Travel newsletter
- SOCIAL MEDIA: The ANHA Facebook account has 2,101 likes—up from 1,913 in March 2016—and the page ranks 17th in likes out of 42 NHAs. This increase is purely organic (no ads used). Popular recent posts: what Lafayette was like 150 years ago; streams that feed the Mississippi River; Atchafalaya Basin fog photo. The Instagram account, atchafalaya_nha, currently has 286 followers, and the ANHA Twitter account, AtchafalayaNHA, has 225 followers.

OTHER BUSINESS
Debra mentioned the ANHA water bottle at each commissioner’s seat is a less expensive version that will replace the green aluminum bottles. Cliff asked if the ANHA had lapel pins. Debra said she would look into it. Charles said the Wildlife Federation worked with Cabela’s to produce shirts that people could order. Debra said we could look into that as a future fundraiser.

Commissioner Announcements
Commissioners announced upcoming events and projects in their parishes including: the Chitimacha Race May 14 on Bayou Teche and the Cajun Country Cruise May 12-14 in New Iberia; the election of a new mayor in Vidalia and Glen McGlothin’s pending retirement (though he hopes to be able to stay on the ATC); bountiful crawfish supply in Iberville Parish; Jean Lafitte Center in Eunice and a free Market & Music series on Fridays in Opelousas; Jambalaya Festival May 27-29 in Ascension; Church Fair May 24-25 in Pierre Part; Cajun Coast CVB hosted the Lt. Governor for Tourism Week; Freedom Fest near Memorial Day weekend, Dat Sauce in St. Mary Parish is participating in an auction for a 3-4 day Louisiana experience (fishing, boating, crawfishing, private lessons and food and music) to benefit wounded warriors and their families; “Last Honky Tonk Series” in Morgan City project to get live music in venues throughout the country; Terrebonne Foundation for Academic Excellence’s 5K and food festival May 7 and the Houma CVB almost ready to open new interpretive center; French table and Creole table in St. Martinville; installation dates for two floating docks on Bayou Teche are May 26 and 27 in Loreauville and Charenton.

There being no further announcements or business, Charles Caillouet made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Glenn McGlothin seconded the motion and, passing unanimously, the meeting was adjourned.