Atchafalaya Trace Commission/
Atchafalaya National Heritage Area

Minutes: January 18, 2017 Regular Meeting

A regular meeting of the Atchafalaya Trace Commission (Commission), managing entity of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area (ANHA), was held Wednesday, January 18, at 10 a.m. at the Capitol Park Conference Center in Baton Rouge.

Commissioners present:
Ascension: Charles Caillouet                  Assumption: Phillip Daigle, Sr.
Avoyelles: Wilbert Carmouche, Secretary Iberia: Chris Burton                  E. Baton Rouge: Gerren Sias
Lafayette: Jennifer Guidry, Chair            Pointe Coupée: J. A. Rummel
St. Martin: Aaron Flegeance                  West Baton Rouge: Julie Rose

Commissioners absent:
Concordia: Glenn McGlothin                  St. Mary: Carrie Stansbury
St. Mary: Carrie Stansbury                  Terrebonne: Mart Black, Treasurer

Others present:
Debra Credeur, Executive Director; Ashley Herrick, Assistant Director; Alex Strader, Carbo Landscape Architects; Ben Pierce, Louisiana Swamp Base; Nancy Broussard and Brandy Serette, LOT/Atchafalaya Welcome Center; Karen Westphal, Audubon LA; Lisa Thibodaux, LA RV Parks & Campgrounds & Visit Donaldsonville; Sara Krupa, LDNR; Gerard Overhultz, Laissez Faire Inc.; Willie Fontenot, Friends of Atchafalaya

Commission Chair Jennifer Guidry called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. with the pledge of allegiance.

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

APPROVAL OF NOV. 2, 2016 MEETING MINUTES
Gerren Sias made a motion to approve the Nov. 2, 2016, regular meeting minutes. Chris Burton seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

Bayou Teche Folklife Project
Maida Owens scheduled to present on the Bayou Teche Folklife Project was unable to attend. Her presentation will be rescheduled for a future meeting.

Boy Scouts of America Louisiana Swamp Base Update
Ben Pierce talked to the commission about the Louisiana Swamp Base’s history and current plans for expansion of their popular trek program through the swamp. Currently it is only for Boy Scouts, but with the recent purchase of McGee’s Landing in Henderson, they have plans to build a 40,000-ft. facility to house programs that will be open to the public, K-12 students, universities and special needs groups (Camp Atchafalaya). Swamp Base currently uses the ANHA curriculum in its programs and wants to continue doing so. They are planning to hire a teacher in summer 2019 and hope to have students start attending Swamp Base in fall 2020. They will still operate tours but focus on students and special needs organizations. The conference center they hope to build will be able to host up to 200 people. Chris Burton asked Ben how they deal with mosquitoes on their primitive treks in the swamp. Ben said they have netting for hammocks, have treated shirts available for purchase and (when possible) get everyone inside when the sun goes down. Herman said this sounded like an exciting project and asked how the public could get involved. Ben said they can always spread the word and suggest people who could provide in-kind or financial services to the program. He added that they hire about 40 18-25-year-olds each summer to work the program. Willie Fontenot in the audience asked if they had considered opening this program up to other Boy Scout councils outside of Acadiana and suggested contacting Southern University to reach more underserved populations. Debra thanked Ben for his presentation. She said that most of the ANHA’s
goals can be achieved through education and asked him to let the ANHA know when he saw ways we could work together in the future.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY REPORTS
NATURAL & OUTDOOR RESOURCES COMMITTEE
Trail Project Update
Debra passed around the updated road sign and kiosk design drafts and pointed out the only change is the NPS logo will not be on the road sign (but it will be on each kiosk). Debra submitted a request to NPS for approval to use the NPS arrowhead. Apparently there are new guidelines and road signs must be a certain size and design in order to include the arrowhead and these guidelines were received after our sign was designed. Because the project was far along and our road sign design was complete and approved, our road signs will have only the ANHA shield. Debra passed around graphics. Our original ANHA road signs are grandfathered in.

Alex said now that the list of trail sites is finalized, the design for the map and the brochure and kiosk graphic panel have also been done. He passed around a sample brochure mock-up that will fit in standard brochure racks. The next step for kiosks is to review narrative drafts for each site. The ANHA webmaster is building the website pages for the trail based on the original design. Debra pointed out that sites on the map are listed with both a letter and a number so that it is easier to add future sites in their respective parish if needed. Julie said the design looked great but she found the numbering system on the map confusing. She suggested sites be labeled by map square (ex. C1 would be in the C column under line 1). Debra said she and Ashley discussed possibly removing the list of-parishes on the map since tourists are not usually concerned about parish lines. Wilbert agreed that visitors are mostly not concerned with boundary lines. Jennifer said if the numbering system were based by column, there would be a lot of sites in the C column and it might still be confusing for visitors. Julie asked if all visitor centers are named by the parish they are in? Debra the naming inconsistent. Charles said eliminating parish organization on the map made sense and suggested organizing the numbering of sites by the four regions. This would also help to not highlight the fact that some parishes have fewer sites than others.

J.A. pointed out that, on the other side of the brochure with the four geographic regions, the Upper Atchafalaya panel description seemed to be the only one that focused more on the engineering in the area than the natural environment. He asked if this description could be edited to include the context of the natural forces that brought about these engineering structures. Alex said that could be incorporated. Clifford said he took the title of the Upper Atchafalaya region panel “Origin and Engineering” to mean “source”, which is the big draw of that area. J.A. said his point was to emphasize the power they’re trying to harness there. Charles suggested “Sources in Control” as a title. J.A. suggested something including about the dynamic power or a synonym. He liked the words origin and source. Jennifer said she’d read a few of the site narratives and found the tone to be a bit formal. She suggested editing the text to make it more engaging in general. Julie suggested “Ebb and Flow.” Jennifer said the Natural Resources Committee had begun reviewing the site narratives and asked Debra when they needed to send in their comments. Debra asked for the comments within a few days of receipt. She reminded the commissioners that these kiosk narratives are limited to 500 words and need to present a broad idea of the site. More detail can be included on the trail website.

Atchafalaya Basin Update
Charles Caillouet said the Wilson’s Boat Landing project has begun and coastal cooperation discussions continue. The new CPRA Master Plan is less optimistic about saving land than the previous plan. The Bayou Bridge Pipeline battle involves not just people in the affected parishes but others who tie it to climate change. Some local organizations are opposed to it because of the local history of not enforcing restrictions on pipelines. Others are frustrated that the Atchafalaya Basin Program hasn’t made an effective dent in restoration of the Basin. Problems include landowner access, permitting and mitigation. Also, groups do not agree on what “restore the basin” means. Charles advised commissioners to pay attention to this issue and noted that one problem is the Corps has its public hearings toward the end of their permitting process. Julie asked if commissioners could send any interesting articles they find about this issue to Ashley to include in the weekly clips email. Ashley agreed and reminded commissioners they are always welcome to send her links related to ANHA activities to include in the clips emails. Phillip added that the next meeting regarding this project is Feb.
8 in Napoleonville and asked Charles for his personal opinion on the issue. Charles said he wondered if we can do anything about it and if we are making the problem worse. He said he does not think that the enforcement division of the Corps can do their job well if they do not have a boat. Clifford thanked Charles for his objective synopsis of the issue and said he had also looked into the data for his parish president. He asked Debra to email his slides to commissioners. Clifford said he sees more upsides to the project than downsides if done properly, stressing he is not in favor of degrading the Basin but suggesting that remediation work be done during this project. Iberville Parish is not going to object to the project. Philip asked if the commission should take a position on the issue. Clifford said he did not know if they should. Charles said he liked the position some are taking—if they do it right, its fine. The commission did not decide on an official position.

Julie Rose shared a print she and her husband purchased on the Northshore that an artist had made of an ANHA sign with an egret perched on top. The artist’s name is Chase Mullen. He is based in Baton Rouge and focuses on wildlife paintings.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Speaker Series Update
Debra said the last Educational Speakers Series event was the Avoyelles Fais-Do-Do workshop Nov. 19 in Bordelonville. The next event is a birding presentation around the February Eagle Expo in St. Mary Parish.

HISTORY & CULTURE COMMITTEE

Atchafalaya Welcome Center Exhibit Update
Debra introduced Brandy Serette, the new supervisor of the Atchafalaya Welcome Center. Brandy thanked the commission for their support in upgrading the exhibit monitors and equipment. She showed photos of the exhibits and said thanks to a bit a rearranging, the changed items give a new look to the exhibits. The ANHA artisan videos are playing on a monitor and she is also working with DOTD to get photos and video footage (which could be played upon visitor request) of the Atchafalaya Basin Bridge. The center’s visitor count is down because DOTD shut down the restrooms on that side of the Interstate to do sewer repairs. Brandy does not know when the repairs will be completed. Debra thanked Brandy and Charles for all their hard work with the exhibits. Willie Fontenot asked if DOTD was planning to add on to the building. Brandy said she could ask. Nancy said LOT put in a capital outlay request several years ago that never got off the ground so it would probably be even less feasible now. Gerren thanked Brandy for coming and suggested hosting a commission meeting at the Atchafalaya Welcome Center. Brandy said she hopes to host a grand reopening once the AWC restrooms are fully operational again.

SUSTAINABILITY
Debra passed out an evaluation of Yuma National Heritage Area and reminded commissioners that the ANHA will go through the same process before our sunset date. She has spoken with the consultant that conducted Cane River NHA’s sustainability plan and asked her to address the commission about the process they underwent and potential scenarios for the commission.

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATE

1. The remaining meeting dates for 2017 are on the SECOND WEDNESDAY. Mark your calendars for March 8, May 10, July 12, September 13 and November 8.

2. Please turn in your signed Conflict-of-Interest statement required by the National Park Service.

3. Several Commissioners’ terms expire in March 2017 as indicated in Commissioner packets. Debra will be requesting each commissioner’s reappointment unless they have instructed her otherwise.

OUTREACH

• SOCIAL MEDIA: The ANHA Facebook account has 2,427 likes—up from 2,323 in Nov. 2016—and the page ranks 16th in likes out of 42 NHAs. This increase is purely organic (no ads used). Popular recent posts: Signing of France-Louisiana Accords (reach of 1.7K); US river basin map (reach of 3.2K); and Facebook Live video of Mississippi River fog (reach of 12.9K). The Instagram account, atchafalaya_nha, currently has 477 followers (+74 since Nov.). Frequency of posts from 2015 to 2016 increased by 54% and engagement on posts increased 180%. The ANHA Twitter account, AtchafalayaNHA, has 350 followers (+32 since Nov.).

OTHER BUSINESS
Commissioner Announcements
Commissioners announced upcoming events and projects in their parishes. Reports also included

• Wilbert Carmouche: Bunkie exhibit “Lives Purchased” loaned from the Smithsonian; promoting ANHA at trade show in Florida; Spring Bayou self-permitting tickets have significantly increased since Tour de Spring Bayou event
• Gerren Sias: Baton Rouge celebrating 200 years of incorporation all year long
• Herman Fuselier: his book Ghost of Good Times is sold out – second printing coming
• Aaron Flegeance: St. Martinville is also celebrating 200 years this year
• Jennifer Guidry: starting to plan for Opelousas Tricentennial; resurrected bilingual signage initiative with CODOFIL; Miss-Lou rural tourism contest

There being no further announcements or business, Phillip Daigle made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Aaron Flegeance seconded the motion and, passing unanimously, the meeting was adjourned.