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

Commissioners present:
Ascension: Charles Caillouet
E. Baton Rouge: Gerren Sias
Iberville: Clifford LeGrange
Lafayette: Jennifer Guidry, Chair
St. Mary: Carrie Stansbury, Vice-chair
Terrebonne: Mart Black, Treasurer
Iberia: Chris Burton
St. Martin: Aaron Flegeance

Commissioners absent:
Assumption: Phillip Daigle, Sr.
Avoyelles: Wilbert Carmouche, Secretary
Concordia: Glenn McGlothin
Pointe Coupée: J. A. Rummler
St. Landry: Herman Fuselier
West Baton Rouge: Vacancy

Others present:
Debra Credeur, Executive Director; Ashley Herrick, Assistant Director; Julie Samson, Chief of Staff, Lt. Governor’s Office; April Newman, LDNR/Atchafalaya Basin Program; Gerard Overhultz, Laissez Faire Inc.; Jim Bergan, The Nature Conservancy – Louisiana; Jessica Dixon, Office of State Parks

Commission Chair Jennifer Guidry called the meeting to order at 10:22 a.m. with the pledge of allegiance.

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

APPROVAL OF MARCH 8, 2017 MEETING MINUTES
Carrie Stansbury made a motion to approve the March 8, 2017, regular meeting minutes. Charles Caillouet seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

Staffing Change
Debra announced that she will be reducing her hours to part time in an effort to move toward semi-retirement and take care of some family matters. She will assist in the search for a full-time Executive Director. Ashley Herrick will remain in her role as Assistant Director.

Mart Black made a motion for the commission to go into Executive Session to discuss personnel matters. Aaron Flegeance seconded the motion and it was unanimously accepted. The attending public excused themselves from the meeting room during the Executive Session.

ADMINISTRATIVE & BUDGET
1. Farewell and best wishes to Gerren Sias whose term has expired and has some commitments that prevent him from serving another term. Julie Samson, chief of staff for Lt. Gov. Billy Nungesser, presented Gerren Sias with a certificate of appreciation and thanked him for his years of service on the Atchafalaya Trace Commission. Gerren said he truly enjoyed his time working with the ATC and learned a lot as well. Mr. Michael Proctor of Baton Rouge has been appointed in his place and hopefully will attend the next meeting.
2. Meetings are held on the SECOND WEDNESDAY. Mark your calendars for July 12, September 13 and November 8 for the rest of 2017.
3. Aaron Flegeance has been reappointed for a 3-year term for St. Martin Parish. Openings currently needing appointments: West Baton Rouge (partial term) and St. Landry Parishes.
4. This is National Tourism Awareness Week (May 8-12). We had a table set up at Atchafalaya Welcome Center this week to distribute information. The Office of Tourism arranges a schedule for the Lt. Governor during this week. This year, he made visits to Lafayette, Avoyelles and Ascension Parishes among others.

5. Election of officers occurs in July, following the state fiscal year. Please submit nominations for FY 2018 officers by June 30. New officers will be installed at the July 12 meeting. Per our bylaws, terms of officers shall be one year. Officers may be re-elected by a vote of a simple majority of the appointed Commission members. Each officer shall serve no more than three consecutive terms in one particular office.

Debra presented a budget that included costs for the Atchafalaya Water Heritage Trail kiosks (about $127,000 for fabrication and installation) and road signs (about $136,000 for fabrication and installation). State purchasing has sent contracts to the prospective contractors so Debra hopes to begin fabrication and installation of kiosks and road signs soon. She has budgeted $6000 for temporary help with the complicated scheduling process that will go along with installation of these trail signs, about $20,000 for a sustainability plan and another $20,000 for the required economic evaluation study that will need to be done. After these costs, there is about $232,000 left in the account. We’re in 2017, but Congress is in continuing resolution again, so Debra has not included the 2017 money in the budget. NHAs throughout the U.S. are trying to educate legislators so that 2018 budgets are not threatened. Though it is unexpected that the whole program would be cut, it is still possible, so Debra advises to keep a bit of a cushion so that the funding change is not abrupt. Jennifer Guidry asked if the ANHA has a buffer. Debra said yes, but recommended not using funds for a grant program until after the continuing resolution is lifted and allocations are guaranteed. Charles asked if the commission could keep the Educational Speaker Series at the same level as last year. Debra said there is still money left that was budgeted for that purpose and encouraged commissioners to work with local entities to apply for speaker funds.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY REPORTS
NATURAL & OUTDOOR RESOURCES COMMITTEE
Atchafalaya Water Heritage Trail Kiosk and Sign Project Phases

Debra said the trail kiosk contractor is James Decker Builders of Alexandria and the road sign contractor is Traffic Solutions of Metairie. Debra has not met with them yet because State Purchasing still has their contracts and asked her to wait until that process is complete. Coordinating installation of these signs will be quite involved because site managers want to be present for installation. Debra has also received signed permissions for five sites that will be on Army Corps of Engineers property and she is negotiating with a private land owner for the sixth site because it was not possible to place it on Corps land. Jennifer suggested commissioners could possibly assist with this process. Debra said she would keep the commissioners informed of installations in their parishes. Once the kiosks and road signs are in place, there will be PR and ribbon cuttings for the trail. Debra mentioned that the Teche-Vermilion Pump Station will be laying a concrete pad near the kiosk and an overhang to shade visitors. They will also give personalized tours of the grounds for those who call ahead. Debra estimated that installation may begin by mid-July and passed around samples of kiosk panels, the brochure and the webpage. She and Ashley are providing content to their webmaster now. Charles asked about the target date for this information to go online. Debra said it will go live when the kiosks are all installed. Debra added that Charles had a great suggestion to print paper directions to the sites that will be distributed at welcome centers since some sites are difficult to find. She is also planning frontline staff training at the Lt. Governor’s Tourism Summit and August, follow-up trainings to CVBs throughout the area and delivery of the brochure and driving directions.

Atchafalaya Basin Update
ABP Annual plan (& Coastal Annual plan) goes before Senate Natural Resources committee tomorrow. There is also a bill in the legislature that would tighten the rules on Scenic Rivers, including Bayou Manchac, and make it easier to clear and dredge the streams. Many people on the Bayou think this bill is unnecessary, undesirable and damaging to the value of the scenic streams.
Charles and Dr. Ray Brassieur gave a very successful presentation about the Flood of 1927 April 5 at the Jeanerette Museum. They reprised this presentation at the latest Friends of Atchafalaya meeting along with recently discovered video flood footage from the Signal Corps. Ashley said the footage was very interesting and asked if it could be added to the Atchafalaya Water Heritage Trail website. Charles said he is happy to work with anyone interested in showing the footage. He and Dr. Brassieur plan to continue working on their presentation in preparation for the 100th anniversary of the flood.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Speaker Series Update
The next event is a presentation by Alexandra Giancarlo about Creole Cowboys Saturday, May 13, at Vermilionville. Jennifer commented that Alex is very knowledgeable on this culture and has traveled from Canada several times to work with the local communities.

HISTORY & CULTURE COMMITTEE
Atchafalaya Welcome Center Exhibit Update
Debra said the Atchafalaya Welcome Center exhibits look great now that all the monitors are installed and displaying content. She said all that remains is to possibly build a brochure rack. Charles asked if the $1700 in the budget was left over from this project. Debra said yes.

SUSTAINABILITY
Debra said we might revisit sustainability planning again now that the trail project is wrapping up. She said the Commission could possibly combine sustainability planning with strategic planning since the ANHA has been operating from the management plan for a while now.

OUTREACH
- EVENTS ATTENDED/HOSTED & MEDIA MENTIONS: Ashley presented to Louisiana Photographic Society March 11 in Denham Springs and OLLI Class taught by Charles Fryling March 13 in Baton Rouge; Sponsored 11th annual Louisiana Groundwater, Surface Water & Water Resources Symposium at LSU; Attended Ebb & Flow Festival April 1 in Baton Rouge, Cycle Zydeco April 19 in Lafayette, Earth Day at Vermilionville April 23 in Lafayette, Tourism Week May 8-9 at Atchafalaya Welcome Center in Butte La Rose
- SOCIAL MEDIA: The ANHA Facebook account has 2625 likes (+116 from Jan.) and the page ranks 15th in likes out of 42 NHAs. This increase is purely organic (no ads used). Popular recent posts: Louisiana natural wonders (reach of 1.7K); Old River Control Structure story (reach of 2.2K); and History behind Louisiana parish names (reach of 16.7K). The Instagram account, atchafalaya_nha, currently has 538 followers (+24). The ANHA Twitter account, AtchafalayaNHA, has 394 followers (+19).
- Ashley encouraged commissioners to like the ANHA social media accounts and also share ANHA posts regularly. Debra mentioned that they looked into advertising on Facebook (which can offer significant results for minimal investment). Because they are not allowed to keep a state credit card on file with Facebook and cannot use their own credit card to receive reimbursement, they have not been able to take advantage of this advertising. Jennifer said she will look into how the Center for Louisiana Studies advertises on social media.

OTHER BUSINESS
Commissioner Announcements
Commissioners announced upcoming events and projects in their parishes. Reports also included:
- Clifford LeGrange: Water is rising in the Basin, so it looks like there will be a good crawfish season throughout the month of June.
- Chris Burton: Chitimacha Tour de Teche races between New Iberia’s City Park and Charenton will take place May 20
- Mart Black: TFAE 5K and Downtown Food Fest in Houma May 13
- Carrie Stansbury: the Cajun Coast Visitors Center is open but had to leave their building temporarily because the Corps was upgrading the levee in front of their building; Deep South Racing Association powerboat race in Morgan City June 24-25; Cajun Coast will be highlighted in August as part of Lt. Gov. Nungesser’s new Destination Louisiana initiative
- Jennifer Guidry: The St. Landry welcome center is finally open again after flooding repairs; Center for Louisiana Studies is hosting a water conference Aug. 14 at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette – they are planning to bring in John Barry (author of Rising Tide)
- Charles Caillouet: Donaldsonville Market on the Square the first Saturday of every month (May – September) and music in the evenings

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