Atchafalaya Trace Commission/
Atchafalaya National Heritage Area

Minutes: July 19, 2017 Regular Meeting

A regular meeting of the Atchafalaya Trace Commission (Commission), managing entity of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area (ANHA), was held Wednesday, July 19, at 10 a.m. at the Capitol Park Conference Center in Baton Rouge.

Commissioners present:
Ascension: Charles Caillouet
Iberia: Chris Burton
Pointe Coupée: J. A. Rummel
Terrebonne: Mart Black, Treasurer
Assumption: Phillip Daigle, Sr.
Iberville: Clifford LeGrange
St. Landry: Caitlin Bussey
West Baton Rouge: Angélique Bergeron
E. Baton Rouge: Michael Proctor
Lafayette: Jennifer Guidry, Chair
St. Martin: Aaron Flegeance

Commissioners absent:
Avoyelles: Wilbert Carmouche, Secretary
Concordia: Glenn McGlothlin
St. Mary: Carrie Stansbury, Vice-chair

Others present:
Debra Credeur, Executive Director; Ashley Herrick, Assistant Director; Justin Owens, Westaff contractor/Program Assistant; Don Haydel and April Newman, LDNR/Atchafalaya Basin Program; Gerard Overhultz, Laissez Faire Inc.; Steven Fullen; Amy Tilley, LA State Parks.

Commission Chair Jennifer Guidry called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. with the pledge of allegiance.

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

APPROVAL OF MAY 10, 2017 MEETING MINUTES
Mart Black made a motion to approve the May 10, 2017, regular meeting minutes. Charles Caillouet seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MAY 10, 2017 EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES
Mart Black motioned to accept the executive session minutes. Aaron Flegeance seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously accepted.

New Commissioner Introductions
Debra introduced three new commissioners: Angélique Bergereon, Michael Proctor and Caitlin Bussey. Jennifer Guidry welcomed them to the commission. Jennifer presented the Lt. Governor’s proclamation to Herman Fuselier, St. Landry Parish, thanking him for his service of a three-year term on the Commission.

Staffing Changes
Debra announced that Ashley will be leaving her position as assistant director at the end of August to join her husband in Houston, where he was recently transferred. She thanked Ashley for her contributions to the ANHA. Debra introduced Justin Owens, a contractor with Westaff, who will assist with the final phases of the Water Heritage Trail in addition to helping with various office procedures during this transition. Following up on the hiring of a full-time ANHA executive director,

Mart Black made a motion that the commission strongly recommend the Lt. Governor hire Steven Fullen as the new ANHA Executive Director and asked for a unanimous second. Jennifer Guidry asked if there was any objection to a unanimous second. Aaron Flegeance seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.
Debra introduced Steven Fullen to the commission. Steven’s most recent professional experience was with Cane River National Heritage Area in Natchitoches, and he is familiar with national heritage areas’ operations, requirements and reporting; the National Park Service and the Alliance of National Heritage Areas. He will assume the executive director role as of Aug. 8. Jennifer asked if Debra would also be staying on part-time. Debra said she will be full-time during the transition but could then transition to part-time as needed, depending on what projects Steven and the commission decide to pursue.

ADMINISTRATIVE & BUDGET
The remaining 2017 commission meetings are Sept. 13 and Nov. 8.

FY 2017 funding was confirmed by the National Park Service and the required reports have been submitted. The accumulated funding ensures the Atchafalaya Water Heritage Trail project expenses can be met, a process not uncommon among NHA’s with grant programs and large projects since Congress almost always maintains an extended continuing resolution and it is late in the federal fiscal year before funds are allocated.

Debra paid tribute to Greg Guirard, a well-known photographer, author and ANHA supporter who recently passed away. She said that Greg had contributed significantly to the ANHA by donating photographs, finding touring spots for the Today Show and supporting the natural and cultural resources of the Basin. Charles Caillouet added that Greg helped in the early days of the Experience Atchafalaya Festival. Angélique Bergeron said that Greg’s work is currently displayed in an exhibit about the Atchafalaya River and Basin at the West Baton Rouge Museum. Charles encouraged everyone to check out this exhibit. Aaron Flegeance said he knew Greg personally and commended his efforts to help local students.

Debra mentioned that someone has contacted her regarding a Rails-to-Trails project proposal involving the old railroad that crosses the Atchafalaya Basin. He will attend the next commission meeting to propose a project.

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

Debra said the trail kiosk contractor has begun installing concrete pads for the kiosks (3-5 per day depending on the weather and distances between sites). Once this is done (and the steel kiosks have finished “weathering” outdoors), he will install each of them and the panels at the trail sites. The road sign contractor will begin removing/replacing faded ANHA signs and installing water trail signs once all kiosks are installed. Justin Owens will help coordinate installation of the road signs with the contractor. Debra said this will probably wrap up around the end of August. She gave an example of an enthusiastic kiosk host, the Teche-Vermilion Pump Station in St. Landry Parish who is adding a covered area near the kiosk so that visitors can view the site in a shaded area, and when possible, give tours. Steven Fullen said that he has seen a preview of the website/kiosks/promotional materials and the commission should be very proud of this trail because it really brings the water story to life.

Atchafalaya Basin Update
Charles Caillouet showed a graph of water levels at Butte La Rose and explained that the rise and fall of water this year was totally opposite that of last year. He added that Greg Guirard’s passing was a significant loss for the Atchafalaya Basin.

Don Haydel said the ABP Annual plan didn’t receive any new projects, but boat launch updates at Wilson’s Landing have been completed. ABP is also working with The Nature Conservancy on a project in Grand Lake to dredge sediment out of the lake. Don mentioned that several people have completed LDNR’s new Geocache program, which only cost $800 to create. Participants can receive a special coin upon completion.
Charles added that the ANHA has gotten good exposure recently with news of this Geocache program as well as the Atchafalaya exhibit at the West Baton Rouge Museum. The updated exhibits at the Atchafalaya Welcome Center (AWC) are also receiving good feedback. Jennifer thanked April Newman for the newsletter she sends out regularly from the ABP.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Speaker Series Update
There have been several inquiries but there are no new speaker programs scheduled, so Debra encouraged commissioners to tell their communities about the program.

Jennifer reminded commissioners that they can download free copies of the ANHA educational curriculum at Atchafalaya.org. Ashley confirmed that quite a few hard copies are also still available (150 were distributed last Friday at an educational conference in Baton Rouge). Debra said the Lt. Governor’s education staff contacts the ANHA occasionally to obtain copies for groups.

HISTORY & CULTURE COMMITTEE
Atchafalaya Welcome Center Exhibit Update
Debra said the updates to the exhibits at the Atchafalaya Welcome Center are almost complete. The ANHA and the Office of Tourism are working together to wrap up the exhibit project with a brochure rack. Under consideration is a future interpretive exhibit about the railroad that traveled through the Basin, an interest of residents who have been helpful with preliminary research as has staff of the DNR Atchafalaya Basin Program.

SUSTAINABILITY
J.A. Rummler announced that he has scheduled a conference call with a consultant from Profitable Non-Profits who has many years of experience with the Bayou Land Conservancy. This consultant will offer suggestions for a direction in working on sustainability issues including developing a nonprofit to assist in supporting the ANHA. Mart Black asked to be added to that call.

OUTREACH
• EVENTS ATTENDED/HOSTED & MEDIA MENTIONS: Ashley presented to Louisiana LA Trust Conference (joint presentation with Cane River NHA) May 19 in Alexandria; at the LTPA LTSA class June 16 in Natchitoches; and at the West Baton Rouge Museum Teacher’s Institute June 18 in Port Allen
• SOCIAL MEDIA: The ANHA Facebook account has 2643 likes (+18 from May) and the page ranks 15th in likes out of 42 NHAs. This increase is purely organic (no ads used). Popular recent posts: Acadiana Park Nature Station trail site (reach of 1.7K); Does your iPhone speak Cajun and Creole (reach of 2K); and Chitimacha Museum water trail site photo (reach of 2.9K). The Instagram account (“atchafalaya_nha”) currently has 658 followers (+120). On Instagram, 14 out of 19 ANHA posts since May 10 have received more than 60 engagements. The ANHA Twitter account (“AtchafalayaNHA”) has 428 followers (+34). Ashley mentioned that in the next couple of months the ANHA could have the opportunity to access a department credit card to begin using Facebook/Instagram ads.
• Ashley showed new ANHA postcards that will be given out at the Atchafalaya Welcome Center to promote general ANHA awareness leading up to the launch of Atchafalaya Water Heritage Trail.
• Lt. Governor’s Office and Office of Tourism have started the Bayou Krewe Ambassador Program on social media to encourage locals and visitors to tag photos with #OnlyLouisiana. The program sends out a monthly newsletter and offers prizes to participants. Those interested in participating may sign up at http://www.louisianatravel.com/ambassador.
ELECTION OF FY 2017 OFFICERS
Debra presented the nominations for the state FY 2017 officers: Carrie Stansbury, Chair; Jennifer Guidry, Vice-chair; Mart Black, Secretary; Wilbert Carmouche, Treasurer. She reminded commissioners that officers are term-limited to three consecutive years in the same office. Jennifer asked if there were any other nominations from the floor. There being none,

Aaron Flegeance motioned to accept the nominated officers. J.A. Rummler seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS
Jennifer reminded commissioners of upcoming meeting dates: Sept. 13 and Nov. 8. She also thanked Debra and Ashley for their service.

COMMISSIONER ANNOUNCEMENTS
Commissioners announced upcoming events and projects in their parishes:

- Caitlin Bussey mentioned Fete de Dieu Aug. 15 on Bayou Teche and LA Trust for Historic Preservation’s annual Ramble Tour of Historic Homes Oct. 28
- Angélique Bergeron mentioned the current Atchafalaya-related exhibits at the West Baton Rouge Museum and educational speakers who will be presenting there

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