

20120719 TAG meeting

On Thursday morning, mJuly 19, 2012, the Atchafalaya Basin Program Technical Advisory Group (TAG) held a scheduled meeting to introduce projects proposed by the public for inclusion in the 2014 Annual Basin Plan. The process was modified this year to solicit proposals earlier in the year so that the TAG would have more time to study details of the proposals and review historic data. The Group tries to consider the pros and cons of each proposal with reference to likely future effects on all areas that could be affected by the proposed change.

The usual administrative details were handled, including agenda approval and minutes review from the previous meeting. The TAG meetings are public meetings and as such, are documented and recorded for the public record.

Legislative Update

Steve Chustz, Basin Program Director, presented a Legislative update on the recently completed session. Actions included:

HB01 - Appropriations - provided funding for the Atchafalaya Basin Program through the Department of Wildlife and fisheries from the conservation fund;

HB02 - Capital Outlay - provided \$1M in Priority 2 - cash but subject to the impending \$120M budget cut; funding would not be available before the September Bond Commission meeting - plus \$3M in priority 5 - non-cash and non-spendable;

HB954 - reauthorized the Department of Natural Resources, which apparently sunsets every five years;

HCR31 - approved the Atchafalaya Basin Program Annual Plan;

HB571 - made changes to the Research and Promotion Board composition by giving one Parish President, selected by the Police Jury Association, voting power on the Board, and made changes in the procedure for appointments to the Technical Advisory Group to simplify filling uncontested vacancies;

SCR46 - approved Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority Master Plan;

[Note: The CPRA Board is working on a Sediment Management Plan - Dave Fruge is representing the Basin Program in that effort.]

SCR41 - approved the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority Annual Plan;

HB916 - renamed the Office of Coastal Protection and Restoration to the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority Board;

HB656 - revised the coastal Zone definition and included parts of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System from Iberia Parish south;

HB532 - made rules governing sales of surface water usage;

SCR31 - urged the US Congress to get the Corps to adopt more reasonable mitigation rules;

HCR117 - asked the Corps for more water through the Old River Control Structure - this request was denied by the Colonel in New Orleans;

[Note: Low water is now causing transportation issues in north LA and Corps is holding periodic conference calls on low water with the concerned Agencies; this is similar to the weekly high water conference calls in 2011 and represents closer cooperation between the Corps and other resource agencies.]

Corps Projects Update

Melanie Labiche of the New Orleans District, Corps of Engineers, presented the status of Corps Project activity in the Floodway.

Preparations are underway for commencement of repairs to and completion of construction on features in the the Buffalo Cove pilot Water Management Unit, begun in 2004 and interrupted after resources were transferred to Katrina Hurricane recovery after the 2005 storm and subsequent flooding in New Orleans.

Plans and Specifications are under review for a contract to be let in Sept 2012 with possible construction start in Nov 2012.

Corps and TAG personnel did a March survey to review the situation.

Cuts in spoil banks south of Buffalo Cove Lake are planned.

Repairs to the cuts and sediment traps on Bayou Eugene are also planned.

TAG members plan to review the current design and use Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment tools to judge the likely effectiveness of the upcoming work.

Corps officials hope that funds made available this fiscal year can be carried over into the next one and utilized for the repairs; the current indications are that the funds will still be available.

Real estate issues are still unclear at this time; DNR staff have reviewed the plans, think that all repairs could be on state land, and suggest that it would be possible to move any features that are currently planned onto State Lands if they are not now.

The Corps estimate is approximate 9 months to complete condemnation proceedings on private land, if any are required and landowners are not cooperative.

2014 Proposed Projects Review

[Note: The current proposals are available online at:
<http://abp.cr.usgs.gov/Library/Default.aspx?folder=496>

201201 - Proposed by Harold Shoemaker, Acadian Group, Sierra Club

Location: Buffalo Cove in Iberia Parish

Purpose: To improve flow in the system and improve water quality

Approach: Eliminate Corps Buffalo Cove Feature 9-1 and achieve the same effect by dredging an opening using a nearby location canal from the Atchafalaya River into Mile Point Bayou. Also clear debris in Mile Point Bayou below the cut.

TAG members plan to review the status of the current Corps planning with reference to the original Buffalo Cove Plan and to evaluate how this proposal fits into the current planning.

Corps personnel are resistive to changing from the originally approved plan and hope to be able to demonstrate improvements through repairs to the constructed features and minor modifications to the plan.

As in all proposed flow modifications, the balance of sediment loading vs water quality benefits to the rest of system needs to be evaluated.

The TAG consensus was to not clear Mile Point Bayou to the point of capturing more flow from the Atchafalaya River because that would provide a path for large amounts of sediment into the area.

Corps personnel agreed to review current elevations with reference to those planned in the original work and report to the TAG on the current status.

Tag members volunteered to talk to the proposer about the approach, and Corps personnel agreed to participate in the talks.

201202 - Proposed by Charlie Davis, Commercial Fisherman

Location: Bayou Tensas - Upper Grand River to Atchafalaya River

Purpose: Remove sediment accumulation from the north and south ends of Bayou Tensas to improve water quality in the Bayou and in the Cow Pen Swamp area.

There are three other related proposals in the Pigeon Bay Area:

201204 - Proposed by Thomas Lively, Commercial Fisherman; dredge Bayou north of Bayou Sorrell to improve water quality

201205 - Proposed by Robert Welch; dredge between Upper Grand River and East Fork Bayou Pigeon

201206 - Proposed by Dean Wilson, Atchafalaya BasinKeeper; dam Upper Grand River and dredge Tensas Bayou

The TAG consensus was that dealing with the four proposals in a unit-level review of the area might be a good idea.

The TAG voted to:

combine the four proposals and review them together

combine related previous element and engineer proposal from last meeting

form a committee to do a unit-wide analysis and propose action[s]

201203 - Proposed by Paul Kemp of National Audubon Coastal Initiative

Location: Cocodrie Swamp

Purpose: Use new hydraulic model tool to sort out conflict issues

Estimated Cost: \$50-70K for Moffatt-Nichols

TAG members would like to see an analysis of current plans using the model but it may be late to start this analysis and get much useful information before starting the project.

DNR Staff reported that landowner issues are driving the Basin Program back to the drawing board so there might be time but it would have to go through the annual funding process.

A discussion proceeded on two ways to address planning for projects.

A theoretical numeric approach from a model can be used.

Real-world observations plus satellite data of historic conditions can be used.

This might be an opportunity to see if the model gives any advantage in planning.

It might be more appropriate to fund the analysis through the engineering design process.

Karen Westphal of Audubon suggested the possibility of adding in some sediment data to the hydraulic model.

DNR personnel noted that they have only one funding mechanism and that is the annual plan and that the analysis should be part of any original design.

The TAG voted to table any action until the next meeting and look at options to using the model for something timely but keep this proposal in the list.

201207 - Proposed by Dean Wilson, Atchafalaya BasinKeeper

Location: Coon Trap and Atchafalaya River

Action: Close Coon Trap and put a rock jetty in the Main Channel

Purpose: To drive more water into the swamp through bigger diversions from Bayou Sorrel

TAG members agreed that closure of Coon Trap has been addressed and should be deferred until they can see how to get more water in from Bayou Sorrell to replace the water coming from Coon Trap; closing Coon Trap would reduce, not increase the total amount of water.

They also agreed that any Coon Trap closing decision should be deferred until the rest of the East Grand Lake review is complete so that they can see where the replacement water might come from.

A discussion ensued on the idea of jetties in the Main Channel.

Glen Constant noted that usually a series of jetties is designed to restructure the river; there may be issues with the curve and with effects on the bank below any jetty.

Mike Walker went on record as supporting the general idea of jetties in Main Channel to improve habitat for fish.

Mike got support from other biologists but all were concerned about unintended consequences.

DNR Staff noted that the Corps has to approve any work and everything is funding limited, but that they may want to bring it forward to address sedimentation issues; It could be will see if it should be surfaced in the sedimentation plan through CPRA

The proposal was tabled pending input from outside groups (COE and CPRA.)

201208 - proposed by Bryan Piazza, The Nature Conservancy

Location: Murphy Lake

Action: Remove the siltation barrier at the southwest end of Murphy Lake to prevent stagnating the Lake.

Bill Kelso of LSU noted that getting closed off might actually help fishing but he is not opposed to opening it up for more access to fishermen. He also noted that the Lake is developing serious problems with water plants.

Mike Walker of LA Wildlife and Fisheries agreed with Bill Kelso.

DNR staff noted that making it possible to maintain would be cheaper now than later.

The proposal was held for review as a possible project for inclusion.

One additional project was introduced by the DNR Staff as an example of projects that had been passed up in previous years, pending further review. The sample project chosen was 200933 - Proposed in 2009 by Matt Jewel, Iberville Parish Councilman

Location: Bayou Des Glaises

Action: Reconnect Bayou Des Glaises across the I-10 Canal barrier.

Purpose: Access and Water Quality

The proposal was deferred because of concern about draining the channel at low River stages.

This is a public land project opportunity.

Glen Constant noted that pulling the plug on the southern side might drain the channel and put camps high and dry

Mike Walker suggested that now is a good time to look at the water level differential.

Glen also noted that the proposal was conceived before LIDAR showed more information about elevations.

DNR staff noted that it does not have a champion but was submitted as an option for state land actions and to start the review process on earlier projects that had been deferred. The staff will provide a list of previous deferred projects on state land for the TAG.

Public Comment on projects

Because the TAG allowed public comment during the discussion of the proposals, there was no public comment submitted at the allotted time.

Review of Ongoing Water Management Projects

Steve Chustz and the DNR staff reviewed the status of previously approved projects.

The Basin Program has obvious funding issues - not enough to do everything approved by the TAG and the Research and Promotion Board (the managing entity of the Atchafalaya Basin Program.)

There continue to be landowner issues; some say flat out "NO"; some say "maybe", but then give no response; and some are cooperative.

The Dog Leg Maintenance project went out for bid; several bids came in; DNR were getting ready to award the bid when the coastal boundary changed so they had to apply for a coastal use permit; the project is expected to start by Oct, 2012.

The Upper Grand River Flats project has received no response from the primary land owner and hence, no approval; they are trying to find alternative locations to achieve similar improvements.

Bayou Boutte Area: After positive discussions at the May TAG meeting; an oil company submitted an application for a Corps permit to dredge a canal and block another one and to dispose of spoil at an offsite dry location; The area is now in the coastal zone so it will need a coastal use permit; no new information is available but the project will be included as part of the unit-wide analysis approved at this meeting.

Also part of that analysis is the work on the location canal north of Bayou Sorrel.

Bayou Fourche dredging at the mouth of the Bayou with reintroduction of spoil in the River is in planning.

The East Grand Lake Study revisions are ongoing and East Grand Lake Construction in the upper region is in planning to utilize limited funds to get the best improvement in habitat. This one is also subject to landowner issues.

The Henderson Channel dredging to the four private launches was approved, bids opened and is planned to start by early fall. This will clear the way for Wildlife and Fisheries to aggressively fight the invasive hydrilla problem in the Lake through draw-downs over several successive years.

In Cocodrie Swamp, key landowners have not been cooperative and the Program Staff is looking at limiting features to see if something could be done. They are also still meeting with the landowners.

The Beau Bayou CIAP project by St Martin Parish is in Engineering Design. Estimates indicate that the cost would be more than the available money and that much of it is from mitigation cost. More coordination is needed and priority features could be funded if the landowners agree on the approach.

Status Summary: This fall should see dirt moving at Dog Leg, Henderson Channel and Buffalo Cove COE repairs.

Old Business

Steve Chustz also reported on recreation projects.

The Big Alabama boat launch is nearing completion this fall.

The Bayou Sorrel boat launch project is pending Corps permitting.

The Butte La Rose boat launch expansion and rework is in the land acquisition phase.

The Krotz Springs boat launch is still in litigation discussions after structural problems surfaced close to completion.

Lake End Park cabins constructions continues.

The Cajun Coast Welcome Center was close to completion but suffered a failure in its foundation and attorneys are now involved in discussions with the engineers and contractors.

The Catahoula Pavilion work is completed.

New Business

Comments on COE Master Plan update due today - ABP sending in comments today; requesting revisions and extended time for comments

The Corps has two Supplemental Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) underway.

A Floodway-wide recreation EIS is now expected to be available in December for comments and to be finalized in February

A Henderson Water Management Unit SEIS is also in work. Corps engineers are investigating at pump station from the Atchafalaya River and that document is expected a few months after the recreation SEIS.

Steve Chustz also noted that the Basin Program is working with the Division of Administration and the Attorney General Office to acquire a conservation servitude to prevent cypress cutting on St Martin School Board Section 16 land. The State already owns the land but the management is vested in the School Board, so the easement would allow the State to purchase rights to preserve the cypress, while giving the School Board much needed funds that would have come from logging the area.

The coastal forest initiative is being reopened and parts of the Basin Floodway is now included, so landowners can offer to sell title to land or permanent conservation easements on forest or potential forest land in order to increase storm surge protection along the coast.

Path forward

Steve Chustz distributed a printed schedule that laid out the milestones required to get the 2014 Annual Plan to the Legislature. There are no early public meetings this year; the deadline has passed for submission of new proposals for review this year and there will be public meetings held after the Draft Plan is approved by the Research and Promotion Board. Until then, the TAG meetings will be public forums for discussion of the proposals that have been introduced.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12 noon.

20120724 - FOA Board meeting - 6:40 PM - Audubon Office

The July meeting of the Board of Directors of Friends of the Atchafalaya (FOA) was held at the Audubon Coastal Initiative conference room in Baton Rouge at 6:30 PM on July 24, 2012.

Attendees included:

Board Members: Charles Caillouet, Willie Fontenot, Charlie Fryling, Lu Cutrera, and Jim Delahoussaye

Advisors: Karen, Don Haydel, Pam, Debra

No Guests attended

President Charlie Fryling opened the meeting.

The agenda was approved.

Old Business

Reports

Charles Caillouet presented the Secretary/Treasurer's report. Minutes from the April Board and Annual meetings were approved. No meetings were held in May or June but the Corps Master Plan comments committee met several times in June and July to draft comments for the Draft Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System Project (ABFS), Louisiana Master Plan. The comments were distributed via email to the entire Board, approved electronically and submitted to the Corps of Engineers on July 18. The comments and a cover letter submitted with them are available on the FOA web site at www.atchafalaya.info.

The web site has been active and several new messages are posted, mostly related to recent meetings around the area and to the Corps of Engineers' ABFS Master Plan.

The Treasurer's report showed a current balance of approximately \$1,551 in the bank account.

Charles has been appointed to the Atchafalaya Trace Commission, the managing entity of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area and reported on activities of the Commission, including partnership with the Jean Lafite National Park which recognized 200 year-old cypress trees in the Park, participation in discussions with regional heritage and cultural sites on plans for Civil War sesquicentennial activities, and an inventory of potential sites for water tours in the Area.

Don Haydel provided an update on Atchafalaya Basin Program Activities. A Technical Advisory Group meeting was held to introduce public proposals for inclusion into the 2014 Annual Plan and that meeting was discussed. The proposals are available online in the Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment Tool at: <http://abp.cr.usgs.gov/Library/Default.aspx?folder=496>

Charles reported on a meeting concerning the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority Coastal Forest Conservation Initiative. A second call for proposals has been issued and now includes part of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway - the first came in 2010 and produced 21 proposals for purchase of title or conservation easements on 27 pieces of land. The purpose of the effort is to secure protection for coastal forests that

increase storm resistance along the coast. Landowners with at least 20 acres in the coastal zone are eligible for the program.

Charlie suggested that the Basin Program propose to buy conservation easements on all Section 16 land in the Basin, as they did in the St. Martin Parish case, where the State paid for protection easements on State land controlled by the School Board.

Charles reported that the LA Wildlife Federation is meeting this weekend in Lafayette to review planning for the upcoming year, especially committee activity but that he will not be able to attend. Charlie Fryling expressed interest in attending the meeting for the FOA.

Reports from Committees

Blue Cross Grant - Lu Cutrera reported that he has called Blue Cross weekly for updates on the Challenge for a Healthier LA Grant status but has not received any new information. Results are still expected by the end of July.

Corps Comments - The comments on the Corps Draft ABFS Master Plan were completed, approved, and submitted. Copies of comments from other groups have been received and Charles will send copies of the comments to the Board or post them on the web site, if the partners agree.

Charlie questioned whether there are any provisions for wilderness areas in the Corps Recreation Plan and suggested that we include that in our comments on the upcoming Environmental Impact Statement if they are not.

New Business

Plans for upcoming activities

Mississippi River Commission low-water-trip meeting on August 21 in Houma.

We may miss this one again because of lack of time. Charles will check with the partner organizations to see who is planning to testify.

This is the listing from the Federal Register:

TIME AND DATE: August 24, 2012, 9:00 a.m.

PLACE: On board MISSISSIPPI V at Cenac Towing Dock, Houma, LA.

STATUS: Open to the public.

MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED: (1) Summary report by President of the Commission on national and regional issues affecting the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Commission programs and projects on the Mississippi River and its tributaries; (2) District Commander's overview of current project issues within the New Orleans District, and (3) Presentations by local organizations and members of the public giving views or comments on any issue affecting the programs or projects of the Commission and the Corps of Engineers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Mr. Stephen Gambrell, telephone 601- 634-5766.

BY: George T. Shepard, Colonel, EN, Secretary, Mississippi River Commission.

Jim Delahoussaye reported that the documentary program currently shooting in the Basin for National Geographic will cover the river shrimp "bloom" this weekend at his dock on the Atchafalaya River and will also shoot laboratory scenes at University of Louisiana/ Lafayette. He also noted that there is another group of organizations trying to fund a documentary on the building of a non-motorized push-skiff popular in the Basin over a hundred years ago. The builders have agreed to build the boat if financial support for materials and production can be found.

Upcoming Events

ANHA/Trace Commission Meeting 07/25, 10AM, Capitol Park Welcome Center

Mississippi River Commission low-water-trip meeting - 08/24, 2012 - Houma

Corp False River report release ?

Corps Henderson SEIS release ?

Corps Recreation SEIS release - December 2012 ?

Next meeting place and time

If the Blue Cross grant is approved, there will be a Board meeting on August 28, 2012, in the Audubon conference room, pending availability.

Otherwise, the September meeting will be held as scheduled.

adjourned at 8:50 PM

20120725 Atchafalaya Trace Commission Regular Meeting

Wednesday, July 25, 2012 • 10:00 AM

Capitol Park Welcome Center, 702 North River Road, Baton Rouge, LA

The Pledge of Allegiance was offered, the meeting called to order by J.A. Rummler, the agenda approved, and the March 28, 2012 Meeting Minutes approved.

Election of Officers

New officers elected by the Commissioners are:

Chair, J.A. Rummler

Vice-chair, Jennifer Ritter Guidry

Secretary, Patrick Gordon

Treasurer, Carrie Stansbury

Experience Atchafalaya Days**Debra Credeur**

The State Museum and WBR museum want to host exhibits and lectures.

The Commission voted to de-emphasize October for Experience Atchafalaya Days events but still make it Atchafalaya Month. Events will be planned for more appropriate times of the year for other events.

Projects Update**Debra Credeur**

Executive Director Credeur reviewed activities and events since the last meeting.

The St. Martin Parish Commissioner seat remains open; all other seats are filled.

The National Park Service Passport Program is active at the three Welcome Centers in the Area, as well as the three Jean Lafitte National Heritage Park Cultural Centers.

The Atchafalaya Welcome Center will undergo parking lot and restroom improvements for several months, beginning sometime after Mardi Gras. It may be shut down for part of that time. A Heritage Area Sign, suitable for visitor photo opportunities, will probably be installed on the property during that time, and the down time may provide a good opportunity to modify elements of the facility. A committee will be appointed by the Chair to recommend improvements to the visitor experience.

All Heritage Area road signs have now been installed.

The LA Bicentennial Cypress Tree project now has six trees identified on the Heritage Area web site. The project was launched with a ceremony at Jean Lafitte National Heritage Park Barataria Unit in June. Several Commissioners and the Executive Director attended.

The Bayou Teche Paddling Trail is completing their Trail Plan and Commissioner Jennifer Guidry is working with the group. The Draft Plan should be available for public comment around August 15, 2012.

LA Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) is initiating statewide Historic Bridge Study. The search for historic bridges will kick off with public presentations on August 8, 2012, at 7 PM at the DOTD building in Baton Rouge. Additional meetings will be held around the state. Information can be found at: http://www.dotd.la.gov/administration/public_info/projects/historicbridges/

Lt. Gov. Dardenne has appointed J.A Rummmler to the Civil War Sesquicentennial Task Force and he will provide the Commission a liaison to the planning activity.

The Heritage Area is engaged in discussions with Vicksburg, Natchez, and Cane River Historical Areas and Parks for cooperation on plans for Civil War commemorative events. More information about Civil War Sites can be found at: <http://louisianatravel.com/louisiana-civil-war-sites> and J.A. Rummmler will report back to the Commission with future developments from the Task Force.

The Heritage Area staff submitted comments to the US Army Corps of Engineers concerning the Draft Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System Project, Louisiana Master Plan. Suggestions were made for more cooperation between the Heritage Area and the Corps activities in the Floodway.

The Heritage Area staff is circulating a Water Tour/Exhibit Resource Inventory form to collect information on natural, historical, cultural and educational resources for possible inclusion into tours or exhibits around the Heritage Area. Commissioners and staff can provide forms to any interested parties.

Contact information can be found at http://www.atchafalaya.org/form_contacts.php

Other Business

A cypress seedling distribution program brought up again and a committee to address the issue was suggested.

J.A. Rummmler suggested that lights at the Atchafalaya Welcome Center be shielded so that visitors would be able to see the stars. The idea was referred to the Welcome Center Renovations committee.

The meeting adjourned around 12 noon.