

Lake Ouachita Citizens Focus Committee



**1424 Blakely Dam Road
Royal, Arkansas 71964**

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD: Lake Ouachita Citizens Focus Committee Minutes

DATE: June 3, 2013

CALL TO ORDER: 6:00 p.m. by Arnie Habig

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers:

Rick Dwyer, Deputy Project Manager, Lake Ouachita Project Office

Bill Jackson, Park Ranger, Lake Ouachita Field Office

Amy Shultz, Park Ranger, Lake Ouachita Field Office

Members Present:

Bill Barnes	George Dooley	Jerry Shields	Dan Watson
Tom Butler	Al Gathright	Walt Sitter	Jerry Williams
Robert Cavanaugh	Arnold Habig	Rick Stokes	Howard Wright

Special Guest: Dave Doty

Minutes in Review: The minutes for May were approved as written.

Comments: Proposed letters of appreciation were passed around for the committee members to review and make recommendations. The letters are being sent to the Arkansas Wildlife Federation for their donation of trees for the fish habitat improvement project and New Age Distributing for contributing soft drinks for the Lake Ouachita Cleanup. The final draft was given to Bill J. to be sent to recipients.

Dave D. shared Crystal Springs and Tompkins Bend campgrounds were closed Sunday due to the high water conditions caused by the heavy rainfall from the recent severe storms that passed through the Lake Ouachita Watershed Area. Bill J. stated Entergy began releasing water through Rammel and Carpenter Dams to allow Blakely Mountain Dam to begin releasing water through the flood tunnel as soon as possible. The most current lake elevation projections have the lake rising to elevation 588.00 feet mean sea level on the high water plan. Arnie H. inquired how much damage flood waters do to campgrounds. Bill J. stated that the 2011 high water conditions

did a great deal of damage to the campground facilities and this was the reason Lake Ouachita received supplemental funding in 2012. The Corps will document the damage and will submit cost estimates for the repairs if requested. Bill B. asked if the new group campsites in Crystal Springs were flooded. Bill J. stated that although the group camps were all out of the water, the electric box on campsite D1 was close to water line, and the group camps will be added to the high water plan and closed when water reaches the electrical box. Al G. related the campgrounds were very busy over Memorial Day weekend, and Bill J. shared the visitation estimates were up 26 % in the Vicksburg District for the Memorial Day weekend. Arnie H. inquired about the length of time the campgrounds would be closed. Bill J. stated as the water recedes, campgrounds will be evaluated and sections of campgrounds will be opened as water level allows. A rough estimate would be that the campgrounds would be closed for about seven days of closure.

Arnie H. asked about the possibility of FOLO entering into a cooperative management agreement in the management of additional recreation areas. Al G. stated that FOLO and the Corps have had some discussions about the possibility, however, at this time, FOLO has not formally requested additional recreation areas to add to the cooperative management agreement already established.

Dave D. stated FOLO did not wish to take on any additional campgrounds until they were sure the reservation percentage current being used would remain at the 35% reservable and 65% non-reservable. Rick D. stated the current waiver, from the standard Corps percentage rate of 65% reservable/35% first-come first-serve, will expire in December 2015. Dave D. related FOLO has the right not to use the National Recreation Reservation Service (NRRS), thus being able to establish their own reservation system and determine how many campsites would be reservable.

However, NRRS provide services that may be difficult for FOLO to set up, such as accepting credit cards for payment, computerized reservation system and the public already being familiar with using the NRRS system to make their reservations. The current issue is that reservable campsites are typically rented only on the weekends, Thursday-Friday-Saturday nights, then the prime campsites are empty through the week. Dave D. further commented that some lakes are going to non-site specific reservations. Rick D. related Kirby Landing, Lake Greeson, was able to set up their reservations this way, simply because all the campsites are typically similar in size, therefore, may accommodate most all camping units on those campsites. Bill J. stated that since the campsite reservation percentage was changed at Lake Ouachita, to the 35% reservable percentage, fewer prime campsites are sitting empty through the week. Rick S. stated, since having more first-come first-serve campsites available, there has been an increase in camping fees collected. Bill B. inquired if NRRS receives a percentage of the funds collected for the non-reservable campsites. Bill J. stated, since the Corps is using the NRRS data system, NRRS does receive a smaller percentage for the non-reservable campsites versus the reservable campsites.

The Corps is paying for the use of the financial database for the fees collected in the recreation areas. Bill J. went on to relate that in 2010, Lake Ouachita changed the ending date for NRRS to take reservations to September 8th of each year to reduce the use of the NRRS reservation data system and enable the Corps to retain the campground use fees. Beginning September 9th, the

campground fees are still collected by the contract fee collectors until September 30th, volunteers and Park Rangers patrolling the campgrounds. Tompkins Bend and Crystal Springs campground fees are collected by FOLO contract fee collectors and volunteers. Those fees are then retained by FOLO with no fees being retained by NRRS. Prior to 2010, the reservations were still being taken until September 30th of each year.

Campground Coordinator Job Description: Rick S. passed out a draft working copy of the proposed job description for the position of Campground Coordinator. The job description entails the work that Dave D. has been performing since the establishment of the cooperative management agreement for Crystal Springs Recreation Area. Arnie H. stated he would like to see the entire job description before making comments. Rick S. stated he hopes to be finished by mid-late July and get a draft working copy to Dave D. for his comments and suggested revisions.

Rick S. distributed the updated proposed Crystal Springs and Tompkins Bend project list of items being proposed for each area. Arnie H. remarked that the NRRS distribution cycle report is very confusing and in his review and basic understanding of the reports, it appears there are mistakes in the system according to the spreadsheets. Tom B. asked if he is requesting an audit of NRRS, and also inquired if the Corps ever audits NRRS. Rick D. stated the Corps conducts audits every two weeks of what the contract fee collectors report through their collection reports. These audits are to ensure what is being collected is being reported properly. Last summer, a few glitches in the system were found at DeGray Lake, but this was due to human error. Dave D. stated that auditing NRRS would not be possible due to the magnitude of service they are providing to the various agencies utilizing NRRS for their campsite reservation program.

Sub-Committee Reports:

Lake Ouachita Vista Trail: Jerry S. stated the Trail Dogs had been working on tree removal from the recent storm damage on the trail. Jerry S. further shared the update on the grant that had been applied for through the Arkansas Department of Highway and Transportation. Jerry S. had received notification that the grant had been approved for \$74,000.00 to complete the final leg of the LOViT trail from Brady Mountain Road to Blakely Mountain Dam. In the grant request, they had requested \$79,000.00, which was slightly more than had been estimated to complete the final leg, the \$74,000.00 approved will cover the expense of the final construction and completion of the LOViT.

Al G. and Jerry S. attended the grant meeting to see what they had to do to receive the funds. Jerry S. shared they will be required to advertise in the local newspapers, for a minimum of two weeks, and must receive at least two bids. The first bid has already been received and is well within the amount of the approved grant. Any remaining funds left over from the grant will be used to purchase signs and construct parking areas at the trailheads along the trail.

Jerry S. went on to share that the Arkansas Parks and Tourism Department's photographers and film crews will be filming sections of the LOViT to help promote the trail and use the photos and film footage in their promotions of Arkansas' recreational opportunities here in the state for the next five years. Jerry S. further shared they had spent time scouting for locations to film and the

Trail Dogs had to obtain special permission through the US Forest Service to use all-terrain vehicles in the area to transport the film crew to the locations selected.

Aquatic Vegetation: Bill J. stated there had been no additional work or updates from the May report. Tom B. asked about the exclusion cage project and how the plants were doing. Bill J. related that as soon as the water recedes enough to where they can be seen, he'll have Rangers get photos to share with the committee. In talking with Johnny C., as soon as the water recede to fall/winter conditions, the nursery beds of *Valsenaria* are ready to be transplanted, they have grown to a height of approximately four feet in the nursery beds.

Fisheries: Bill J. related there were no updates to provide concerning fisheries.

Campgrounds: Arnie H. shared with the committee that he had been able to access WiFi service while he was camped at Brady Mountain campground recently. He went on to say that the service was provided by Clearlake WiFi Service at a charge of \$5.00/ for a 24- hour period of usage. Arnie H. continued in stating that if a private company installed WiFi, FOLO could possibly collect a portion of the fees charged in the area.

Arnie H. requested clarification of the Lake Ouachita "Length of Stay Policy". Arnie H. asked if the Corps could change the price of the underutilized campsites in the campgrounds. Rick S. stated the campsite fees are set at the beginning of the recreation season, based on services available in the area and location of the campsite. FOLO may make changes to the campsites fees, reducing the fees for the underutilized campsites, but through the cooperative management with the Corps, past practice has been to follow what the Corps has already established for the campgrounds.

Arnie H. asked what resources are required to request additional campgrounds as part of the cooperative management agreement. He went on to recommend FOLO develop a strategic plan, establishing goals and objectives in the management of the campgrounds already under agreement and those being considered for inclusion into the agreement. Arnie H. continue in relating that his concern is that when the current FOLO board members leave, those remaining will not be familiar with the overall plan of operation and the goals set for management of those areas under the agreement. Rick S. suggested he and Arnie H. work together to develop a strategic plan for FOLO. Tom B. asked for the annual revenue per campground. Jerry S. stated FOLO already has that information. Tom B. suggested keeping the strategic plan simple. Bill B. stated as FOLO grows and expands to take on other campgrounds, they will learn from experience and mistakes.

Campfire Interpretive Programs: Jerry S. stated the volunteers who were planning to give the programs will be gone during the summer months, therefore the campfire interpretive programs will be postponed until next year.

Comments: Lake Ouachita Newspaper Project- Jerry S. stated they decided not to pursue this at this time. Arnie H. informed the committee that Rick S. will be attending the Ouachita River Valley Association (ORVA) conference, representing FOLO and will provide a 15-minute

presentation concerning FOLO and what has been accomplished through their partnerships with the Corps at Lake Ouachita. The ORVA conference will be August 27-28, 2013 in Camden, Arkansas this year. Al G. requested the FOLO board members meet after the LOCFC meeting concluded.

FOLO Financial Reports as of:

Assets		
Month	April 30, 2013	May 31, 2013
Cash-Trail Account	\$6,390.00	\$6296.00
Cash – Miscellaneous	\$618.00	\$718.00
Cash-Crystal Springs	\$116,254.00	\$112,893.00
Cash-Tompkins Bend	\$37,768.00	\$31,602.00
Total Assets:	\$ 161,030.00	\$151.509.00

Adjournment: 7:45 p.m.

DRAFT