

Lake Ouachita Citizens Focus Committee



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

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD: Lake Ouachita Citizens Focus Committee Minutes

DATE: January 4, 2016

CALL TO ORDER: 6:00 p.m. by Dan Watson, Chairman

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers:

Bill Jackson, Supervisory Ranger, Lake Ouachita Field Office

Amy Shultz, Park Ranger, Lake Ouachita Field Office

Members Present:

Phillip Carr	Al Gathright	Janice Vaughn
Robert Cavanaugh	Arnold Habig	Dan Watson
George Dooley	Tammi Spurlin	Jerry Williams
Mike Drake	Rick Stokes	

Minutes: The minutes from the November 2 meeting were tabled until February meeting.

Announcements: Al G. provided an update on the current health condition of Jerry S. and current health condition treatment plans. Al went on to say that as he is able to obtain updates on Jerry's condition, he will continue to email those to all the members.

Arnie H. asked if there had been any changes or need to update the current LOCFC member roster. Dan W. stated he had not received any changes since he sent the last roster out for review.

Friends of Lake Ouachita (FOLO): Al G. stated the concrete slab for the pavilion at the Tompkins Bend Day Use Area had been installed, but the pavilion had not been erected at the site as of yet. Al went on to relate that the FOLO Board Members had not held any meetings, nor taken any further action since the November LOCFC meeting. Al shared the October FOLO Finance Report provided by the accountant. Al further related FOLO has a \$400.00 accounting bill outstanding, for services provided since the last financial statement, and funds to cover this bill will be taken out of the campground funding account. The October 2015 Quarterly Statement reported a balance of \$8,276.00 in the Trail Account; \$711.00 in the Miscellaneous Account and \$64,547.00 in the Campground Account.

The Board wants to consider LOCFC projects to be funded. Arnie H. expressed his concern in that the LOCFC members should be able to make recommendations on how FOLO funds should be spent and that expenses covering accountant fees should come from all the accounts and not just the Campground Account. Al explained that all the money in the accounts go for the betterment of the Lake Ouachita project as a whole and the FOLO Board Members take the ideas for projects to be funded from the LOCFC members. Bill J. stated that he couldn't recall of any projects, recommended by the LOCFC that had ever been turned down by FOLO. Bill J. went on to say that it was his understanding that the remaining funds in the Campground Account were to be used as "seed money" when FOLO was applying for additional grants for projects around the lake. Robert C. stated that some grants are, reimbursement grants, where you have to provide the money, up-front, and then the grant reimburses the money spent. Having money in the account will help when applying for these grants. Arnie inquired about how to search for additional grant opportunities. Bill J. stated he had previously sent a list of potential grants available, and procedures for requesting these grants, but that he would re-send this list to the committee members tomorrow.

Rick S. inquired about the \$800.00 bill that had been submitted to FOLO by the playground installation company and Al G. related he had not heard anything else from the company pertaining to the bill, that either the bill was dropped or taken care of by the equipment manufacturer, who failed to send the complete order to our location for the installer to install all of the equipment.

Lake Ouachita Vista Trail (LOViT): Al stated the Traildogs had installed sign posts along U.S. Forest Service Road #47, and will be installing directional signs on the posts. Al further related that the Walton Foundation was funding an International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) Specialist Crew to maintain the five Epic Trails located in Arkansas. The Traildogs have met with two members of the IMBA crew who were visiting the LOViT, to evaluate the trail, and Shangri-La Resort provided lodging for the crew during their stay. Park Ranger Mike Wade, Lake Ouachita Field Office, had provided LOViT access maps to the team members to identify the access points along the trail. The IMBA team met with Tom Ledbetter, U.S. Forest Service, about coordinating trail maintenance and acquiring appropriate permissions. The Corps already has an established National Agreement IMBA for trail maintenance. Al stated the team members utilized backpack blowers while they were on the trail to begin clearing the trail's path. When asked about the use of ATV's along the trail for access and carrying of equipment, Al stated he was not sure if they would be given permission to utilize ATV's while working on the trail. The World IMBA Conference is scheduled to be held in September 2016, in Bentonville, Arkansas, where upwards of 500 to 600 people will be in attendance. The primary focus of the IMBA Team will be on getting the trails in good condition prior to the conference. Robert C. said they are hoping that the IMBA work will include the installation of additional signage along the three Epic trails in Montgomery and Garland Counties. This is the first time a professional organization has given support to LOViT trail maintenance. Upon returning to work on the trail, three additional workers will be joining the team and will be soliciting volunteers from the community to help work on the trail as well. Robert C. believes this may be the first of more grants available in the future through the Walton Foundation for trails in the state.

Robert also shared that a group of Traildogs, along with Gloria Chrismer, retired U.S. Forest Service District Ranger, Mitzi Cole, U.S. Forest Service and Matthew Irwin, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, worked on making improvements in the Fulton Branch Recreation Area on the Ouachita

River. The group installed rock steps down to the river for easier access, planted grass seed and installed coconut matting on the riverbank to control erosion. Additional plans are to plant native species of trees and other native plants in the area as well.

Mission Statement: Dan W. shared the mission statement for LOCFC was accepted by the Corps. He will e-mail the new mission statement to committee members.

Usage of Drop Box: Dan W. further described the use of an internet-based file storage and sharing facility, "Drop Box", for the storage of LOCFC documents and the collaboration of joint projects to be used by the CFC members when working on common projects together.

Dan went on to explain that there is no intent to use the "Drop Box" exclusively, since many LOCFC documents are considered public and are made available on the Corps website. The advantage of this shared storage facility is to allow the members to be able to share, more collaboratively, the development of project documents and keeping related information for LOCFC work, that is not necessarily needed to be posted on a public site. A site to allow the LOCFC members to "brainstorm" ideas to be "fleshed out" through the process. Dan stated if it is not beneficial, then all we will have lost is a little time. Dan will send out more information and will initially share (read-only for a while) some of the LOCFC directories. If anyone has problems with the "Drop Box" facility (creating an account, accessing files/documents, etc.), feel free to get in touch with Dan.

Corps of Engineers Report: Amy S. shared information on advertising in the "Arkansas Wild" magazine, along with cost for the advertisements. Amy continued in saying that advertising in this magazine might be beneficial if LOCFC had an event coming up, such as a lakewide clean-up or special volunteer project, or to gain publicity for the recreation areas or the LOViT. Discussion among the committee members was whether there would be a benefit in advertising the LOCFC to make the committee more visible locally. Tammi S. said if there were events sponsored by LOCFC, then they could consider advertising them in these publications. Amy noted that some of the Corps projects in the Little Rock District did advertise in these magazines.

Arnie asked what was the status of the formation of a DeGray Lake Citizens Focus Committee. Bill J. related that the formation of the Citizens Focus Committee at DeGray Lake never materialized, and feelings were that due to the strong partnership of the Keep DeGray Lake Beautiful organization, there was no need to create a second group at DeGray. Bill J. went on to explain that a number of the lakes in Arkansas have created "friends" groups who provide assistance to the Corps in supporting efforts for improvement around the lakes. The "Friends of Beaver Lake" in Northwest Arkansas is an example of an active group who have provided assistance to the local Corps staff in promoting clean-up campaigns and water safety programming. The Beaver Lake "Friends" group had purchased material needed to construct the lake's lifejacket loaner stations around the lake at the swimming areas.

Bill J. related that the Lake Ouachita Field Office currently has only eight Park Rangers working currently. This is due to the fact that two Park Rangers have been deployed in support of the high water conditions along the Mississippi River, Park Ranger Dave Pennington retiring at the end of December and Derick Walker working a temporary developmental assignment at DeGray Lake 60 days.

Bill J. continued in stating that all attempts are being made to maintain at least three Park Rangers patrolling over the weekends, but work previously performed by the NRM Crew has, more or less, come to a halt due to the fact that the Field Office only has two Rangers working the NRM Crew during this time.

Arnie asked how much funding Lake Ouachita received from the new budget being passed. Bill J. stated that even though a budget for FY2016 had been passed, the Corps is still operating under a Continuing Resolution (CR), but he would ask Stacy S. what the funding for Ouachita was for FY2016 and report back to the committee members later.

Bill J. shared with the committee members that, as of January 1st, the Corps had implemented the new Use Fee Program Regulations and there were a number of changes in the way the Corps could collect and what fees would be collected under the new program. Bill J. went on to state that campsite fees would be changed to reflect the new requirements for the minimum costs for certain campsites in Class A-B-C-D campgrounds, for example, a tent site with services, formerly priced at \$12.00 per night, the minimum price now would be \$14.00 per night we are under a new user fee program. Also, a change in Day Use Fees, previously the fee to launch a boat at a designated boat ramp was \$4.00 per launch, now the price will be \$5.00 per launch. However, the annual pass program had changed where those with a discount card would no longer be required to purchase an annual pass, the cardholder will use their cards instead when using day use facilities at those Federal Agencies participating in the program, such as the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Federal Fish and Wildlife Service and the Corps. Bill J. continued in stating that the Corps' annual passes have increased in price from \$30.00 to \$40.00, and will increase in price in January 2017 to \$50.00. If after two years, the Corps has not sold enough annual passes, the Corps' annual pass program will be discontinued and the only day use pass available will be the \$80.00 "America the Beautiful Pass". Bill J. passed out hang-tags to the committee members who have the discount cards. Bill J. further explained that the Corps is now authorized to sell and issue the "America the Beautiful" passes and 100% of revenue generated from the sales will be returned to the projects where sold. These funds are authorized for a number of items to be covered, just about everything except for biological monitoring at the project. Bill J. stated he would e-mail the new camping fee information to the committee.

Bill further related that Ouachita has not heard anything on the reservation issues, whether the percentage of first-come, first-serve campsites would change after January or not. Bill J. went on to say that Dennis Norris, Chief of Operations, Mississippi River Division (MVD) had requested it to remain the same (35% reservable, 65% first-come, first-serve).

Bill J. related the electrical wiring is in the ground at the Joplin Campground, everything has power from the Fee Booth to the wastewater treatment plant, and the project should be completed within the next two weeks. Upon completing the Joplin Campground electrical work, the Corps will move to the Tompkins Bend Campground to complete the work on the wastewater treatment plant filtering system.

Al G. asked why the bathroom at the Denby Bay ADA trail had been closed. Bill J. stated he would find out and let the committee members know. Arnie asked about how to get more money back to the project from the increased fees being charged. Bill J. explained that all use fees collected at the project are

returned to the Treasury's "general fund" and under the current authorization, the Corps still is not authorized to retain the use fee revenues collected at the projects.

Projects:

Automated External Defibrillator (AED): Phillip C. stated that although he had researched grants for an AED purchase, most of the funding was for replacing the batteries. Bill J. explained that due to the recent policy established by the Vicksburg District concerning AED's and their use in the District, even with donated AED's, the Corps would not be able to accept the AED's obtained. Due to this fact and after additional discussion among the committee members, it was recommended that the AED project be removed from the list of items to be considered.

Fishing Tournament Weigh-In Stations: Rick S. recommended substituting the acquisition of a boat to help construct fish habitat around the lake, in place of, the weigh-in station. The fact that since visiting with Brett Hobbs, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, and he stating there was not a need for weigh-in station, due to the fact that most organizations, who sponsor fishing tournaments, have their own equipment and procedures to manage events, but there was a need for a habitat boat. Rick provided photos of a habitat boat being used at other lake projects, with an approximate cost of \$25,000. Rick also stated he had been looking for grants that LOCFC could apply for to support this project, but so far had not been successful. George D. suggested contacting Ranger Boats in Flippin, Arkansas or Express Boats, the local boat manufacturer, and see if they might have a boat to donate for such a project.

Recycling in the Campgrounds: Tammi S. related that the Corps had initiated a recycling program in the offices, Ouachita Project Management and Lake Ouachita Field Office, to recycle newspapers and cardboard accumulated in the office. Tammi went on to state that the committee could probably get cages to collect aluminum cans, but the problem is getting someone to collect the cans in a timely manner around the campgrounds. Mike D. related another problem at these collection points is that open used cans attract bees and other insects, so the cages will have to be separate from camping areas. One solution suggested was to ask campers to bag their own cans for recycling and having a designated location for the cans to be deposited.

Demolish Outdated Facilities at Crystal Springs: Rick S. stated he had talked with Jason M. about the disposal and Jason advised Rick that the items had been approved for disposal and GSA would be advertising the items for bids to be removed as scrap.

Non-Potable Water for Flush Toilets: Rick S. stated he had spoken with Stacy S. regarding a possible test at the Brady Mountain Boat Ramp restroom, but during the conversation, it was decided this location would not be a good test site. Bill J. mentioned that at Brady Mountain, the Corps produces the potable water for the recreation area and another site would be more of a benefit than at Brady Mountain. Bill J. recommended Cedar Fourche, Stephens Park, Twin Creek or Tompkins Bend Boat Ramp since all of these facilities are on municipal water instead. Rick S. related he has developed a breakdown of the costs for a non-potable water system to be installed and implementation still needed to be investigated.

Bill J. asked if there is still a need for additional ventilation in comfort stations located in other areas. Bill went on to ask if the problem had been isolated to just the comfort stations at Crystal

Springs. The facilities at Crystal were older and needed ventilation. During the recent renovation projects of the other facilities, the ceilings are being constructed as “cathedral” ceilings to alleviate the issues with moisture building up in the comfort stations. Janice V. and Tammi S. volunteered to take on a review of comfort stations and to come up with recommendations.

Campsite Revitalization: Bill J. stated he would continue using the spreadsheets provided by the committee members to evaluate which sites in the recreation areas are priority sites to be repaired. He would also continue evaluating which campsites could be converted to pull-through sites relatively easily, without a great deal of tree removal and dirt work being required.

Donation Boxes placed at Fee Booths and Other Places: George D. reported that he is still awaiting feedback and approval from the Corps regarding where the donation boxes could be placed in the recreation areas. George went on to state he had asked if the boxes could be attached to the fee booths or placed on a permanent pole out in the campgrounds. Bill J. stated he would ask Stacy and get an answer to the questions.

Fundraising Events on/ around Lake Ouachita: Tammi S. said that she would like to see fundraising events, such as a bike race on the LOViT, during times when the campgrounds might normally be closed, and she would like to see the Corps make campgrounds available for these events.

Arnie brought up the suggestion of placing donation cans at a number of locations around the lake, where lake patrons are likely to be, such as boat or sporting goods stores, etc.

Tammi suggested that LOCFC should look for more opportunities to reach out more to the communities around Lake Ouachita to let them know about the LOCFC, what it is and what it does. The goal being to get more individuals interested in helping with the LOCFC mission.

Some of the committee members brought up the fact that the Corps’ webpage is out of date and there is a need to update photos and information on the webpage. Amy S. related she will explore updating the items on the webpage and if there are suggestions or recommendations from the committee members, please send her the information to be considered.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 pm