

Lake Ouachita Citizens Focus Committee



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

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD: Lake Ouachita Citizens Focus Committee Minutes

DATE: June 6, 2016

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

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers:

Stacy Sigman, Resource Manager, Lake Ouachita Field Office

Bill Jackson, Supervisory Ranger, Lake Ouachita Field Office

Members Present:

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| Tom Butler | Mike Drake | Janice Vaughn |
| Robert Cavanaugh | Al Gathright | Dan Watson |
| George Dooley | Arnie Habig | Howard Wright |

Announcements: Dan W. shared with the committee members that he had received an email from Tammi Spurlin that she would be resigning from the committee due to increased personal commitments at the time.

Dan continued in stating with Tammi resigning, there is now a vacancy on the committee to be filled. Mike D. reminded the committee members that his uncle, Larry Drake, had expressed interest in joining the committee and he would re-send his resume to Stacy Sigman to be considered for the vacancy. Dan asked the committee members if they knew of any other potential candidates who have expressed interest in joining the committee.

Dan reminded the committee members that the absenteeism policy stated that once a member missed three meetings, the member would receive a letter from the Chairman concerning their absences from attending the meetings. Dan went on to share that both Bill Barnes and Phil Carr had missed three meetings. During the discussions among the committee members, it was brought up that Phil Carr had been granted excused absences from the meetings since February due to being required to assist with his family's business. It was also discussed that Bill Barnes had been granted excused absences due to his

attendance at various Department of Tourism functions in which he continues to serve as a Board Member and representative of the Lake Ouachita area.

After continued discussed, it was decided by the committee members that due to their contributions, support and value in serving as members of the committee, there would be no further action taken on the absenteeism issues.

Dan W. reminded the committee members of the “Drop Box” availability and that not all of the committee members have accepted the invitation to join the program. Dan went on to say that he would leave the program open for now and if the committee members see there is worth to maintaining the program, he will continue to recommend its use for storage of LOCFC correspondence and documents.

Minutes: The minutes from the May 2, 2016, meeting were distributed with the updates and corrections suggested by Arnie H. Robert C. made a motion to approve the meeting minutes and the motion was seconded by Mike D. The amended meeting minutes were approved by the committee members.

Nominations for Chair and Vice-Chair Positions: Dan W. reminded the committee members that the June meeting is the timeframe in which the committee make nominations to fill the Chair and Vice-Chair positions of the LOCFC. The nominations are made during the June meeting and then the committee members vote for the individuals during the July meeting.

Dan opened the floor for nominations for the positions. A number of the committee members recommended Dan continue as the Chair and Al G. continue as the Vice-Chair. Tom B. and George D. were both asked if they would consider being nominated for either of the positions, but both declined stated outside commitments would not allow them to devote the time to the positions they felt would be warranted. Dan and Al both agreed that they would accept the continuance of the positions, if elected by the committee members. Dan continued in stating that the nomination period would remain open until the next meeting.

Ouachita River Valley Association (ORVA) 2016 Conference: Arnie H. related to the committee members that he would not be attending the 2016 conference after reviewing the agenda. Arnie continued in stating that after reviewing the agenda and seeing that there is a lack of items concerning recreation to be discussed through the conference, he concluded there was very little value in his attendance. Arnie went on to say he had sent Bill Hobgood, ORVA Executive Director, a note stating he would not be attending this year’s conference. Arnie related that Mr. Hobgood informed him the 2017 Conference would include recreation as part of their agenda and that the 2017 Conference will be held in Hot Springs. Arnie continued in stating he plans to remain a member of the ORVA and will be attending the conference being held in Hot Springs. Robert C. recommended that the Friends of Lake Ouachita (FOLO) continue their membership with the ORVA by paying the \$50.00 membership fee. Al G. related he would make the recommendation to the FOLO Board Members at the next FOLO meeting.

FOLO Update: Al G. informed the committee members that Dan W. will work on the FOLO FaceBook page to see about activating the “Donate” button for members of the public to donate to the Friends of Lake Ouachita site and support the various projects FOLO is working with the Corps on for the betterment of the lake.

Al continued in stating that the annual non-profit report to the Arkansas Attorney General, as part of the organization's 501 3C, non-profit organizational status, requirements needs to be submitted and that it is currently in the process of being submitted.

Al related that FOLO has received some recent donations and additional plaques were being ordered for the memorial benches. Al continued in stating that just about all the memorial benches, on-hand, have been dedicated to those who have sponsored them and that just about all of the locations, previously identified, have been taken.

Dan related that he will link the "to be constructed" FOLO website to the Corps LOCFC website.

Lake Ouachita Vista Trail (LOViT): Robert C. shared the USFS, Texas Conservation Corps was expected to arrive today, Monday, June 6, 2016, to begin work on the trail. Tom Ledbetter, U.S. Forest Service, would be providing updates to the Trail Dogs on the progress of the team in reworking the trail's surface tread in the area on top of Bear Mountain where the U.S. Forest Service had created a fireline during a recent fire in the area. The Texas Crew will be working in the area for the next 10 days to 2 weeks. Robert continued in stating that the Texas Crew would be constructing water bars on the Bear Mountain and Little Bear Mountain sections of trail to help prevent erosion of the trail's tread.

The International Mountain Bikers Association (IMBA) trail crew has been working on clearing brush and low hanging limbs from along the trail. The IMBA workers are expected to work on the trail for the next week.

The Trail Dogs plan to host a picnic and an outing on the lake for the Texas Crew and IMBA Trail Crew during their stay in the area as an expression of appreciation for their hard work on the trail.

Robert continued in stating that plans continue to be established for the re-routing of a portion of the trail along the Section 2 area, Tompkins Bend to Mountain Harbor Road, to avoid the constant flooding of the trail during high water periods. In looking over the area being considered for the re-route, it appears that a majority of the trail will be on the U.S. Forest Service and not the Corps. Plans are to wait until the fall timeframe to start working on the re-routed area of the trail. Robert stated that this area may require an Environmental Assessment and he would be talking with Tom Ledbetter, U.S. Forest Service, to find out if this would be required.

Robert shared with the committee members that due to the increased interest in mountain biking in the area, there has been a renewed push from the Mount Ida Chamber of Commerce and Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce to promote what is available to mountain bikers in the area. There is a desire to work through the Arkansas Tourism Department to help promote area hotels, restaurants, special interest areas and other outdoor adventure businesses available to the public. George D. related that he would meet with Steve Arrison, Hot Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau, to see what can be done to help promote the area bike trails.

During recent meetings with Steve Schneider, IMBA, he had asked some of the committee members if they thought the Hot Springs area businesses would be interested in sponsoring an “Epic Trails Ride”, to promote the mountain biking opportunities in the area.

Robert shared that he and Dan W. had been working on the 4th leg of the trail in clearing some downed trees from the trail’s path. Robert continued in sharing that he had learned there were a few dead pine trees reported along the trail’s path in the Avery Trailhead area as well.

New Bench Locations in the Campgrounds: Janice V. informed the committee members that she had identified a number of areas around the lake where park benches could be installed for the public to use. She had purchased pink flagging and placed the flagging in the areas for the Corps. Janice went on to share that she had faxed a copy of the campground maps where she had placed the flagging, so when the new park benches have been purchased, the Corps would be able to install them at those locations. Janice went on to say that during the Memorial Day Holiday weekend, some of her flags had been removed by members of the public, not knowing what they were, they had simply picked them up.

Stacy S. related that the six park benches currently on-hand would be installed at Tompkins Bend as soon as the Holiday rush was over and RBS was able to get their crews scheduled to complete the installation.

Corps of Engineers Report: Stacy S. shared that the Tompkins Bend Day Use Area was complete, with the park benches being the only items remaining. Stacy went on to say that there will continue to be some minor improvements to the area, such as attempts to get grass to grow in the open play areas and as funding is available, additional drainage issues will be addressed as well. Stacy continued in stating that there had been a number of positive compliments made to the Rangers and Fee Collector at Tompkins about the Day Use area and the facilities available. It has been observed that a number of the families in the campground have been utilizing the playgrounds and swing sets during their camping visit as well.

A number of committee members thanked Bill J. for sending the Memorial Day Holiday Report to them and keeping them informed of what had occurred during the holiday weekend. Tom B. asked how the Corps manages the parking in the campgrounds over the Holiday weekend and Bill J. stated that during the holiday weekends, the primary mission of the Park Rangers is to keep the roadways clear so emergency vehicles can get through the campgrounds, if needed. Currently there are just not enough parking areas in the campgrounds and with the doubling-up of campers on the campsites, this creates a problem because the registered campers and their guests cannot park at their campsites on the “hardened” surfaces, gravel or asphalt surfaces. Bill went on saying that as crews can be scheduled and time available, additional parking areas will be constructed in all the recreation areas to accommodate the vehicles.

Stacy S. went on to explain that in the new budgeting process, increasing parking spaces in the recreation areas, actually grants positive credit to support the Corps budget build process. The Corps budget process uses the parking spaces as a “day use value” in which there is a constant turnover in availability for visitors to the areas. Unfortunately, the visitation to the project’s islands are not being captured. Plans are to construct additional parking areas in remote locations, in accordance with the new

visitation program, to establish a “standard” visitation number for those areas identified. This will help in capturing those visitors to these remote areas and those who are camping on the islands. The standard formula allows a designated set of “visits” counted per parking space without having to maintain a traffic counter at these locations.

Stacy S. went on to share that even though the project installed traffic counters at each of the campground fee booths, under the new visitation program, only the information obtained through the National Recreation Reservation Service (NRRS) on campers registering through the system is the visitation count obtained. Plans are to remove all the traffic counters from these locations to reduce the required maintenance of these counters.

Project Progress Reports:

Demolish Out-of-date facilities at Crystal Springs: Stacy S. stated that the plans are to have the project’s heavy equipment operator to demolish the wastewater treatment plant and get it removed from the area in the fall.

Create an area campground map: Arnie H. related that he will present the area campground map proposal to the Way Forward Committee once it has been re-established, but went on to say that he’s not been able to complete a cost analysis yet for the project.

Additional Ventilation in Comfort Stations: Stacy S. stated there may have been some misunderstanding about when the super fans would be installed during the last meeting. He went to apologize if this was the case, but also stating that the fans would be installed as the work schedule would allow the O&M staff to work on them while in the recreation areas.

Campsite Revitalization: Dan W. asked if there had been any additional work in getting the spreadsheet completed and made available to the committee members. Dan continued in stating that a number of the committee members had related they were unable to open the spreadsheet and there appeared to be information missing. Bill J. related that there had not been any additional working in trying to correct the spreadsheet, but would continue to follow up on the document. Dan did remind the committee members that this was an internal working document and not for public distribution.

Donation Boxes: George D. presented the proposed donation boxes signs and requested approval for the pursuit in getting the signs installed with the wording that Jerry S. had proposed. Arnie H. made a motion and the motion was seconded by Robert C. to present to FOLO to use funding available to purchase the signs needed for the donation boxes. George related he would follow up with the FOLO board members on the approval and get the signs printed and donation boxes installed.

Fundraising Events: Tom B. related that he had not met with the “Trash Bash” committee members yet, but there is to be a meeting held in June. Tom went on to state that there should be a joint effort to promote the clean-up program on both Ouachita and Hamilton as part of the program.

Campground Surveys: Arnie H. renewed his recommendation to perform a “visitor comment survey” in the recreation areas to seek comments from the campground users on their feelings of what should be addressed for the improvements of the facilities. Arnie went on to state a program similar had been very successful in the Alabama State Parks that he had experienced.

Arnie continued in reminding the committee members that the last time a survey was conducted was 2009 and that there’s been a number of improvements made since that time by the Corps. Arnie expressed his concerns in that there is a need to better understand what the campers are wanting in the campgrounds during their visits and perhaps the users age may have a factor in the design of the campground facilities being made available should be taken into consideration.

Arnie related that when the last survey was conducted, the survey material was approved by the Corps before the distribution was made by the LOCFC members when interacting with the public. Stacy S. related to the committee members that the Corps is currently under a mandate, from the Headquarters Office, that all surveys of the visitors in Corps recreation areas are “on-hold” until the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has approved the wording in the Corps’ Customer Committee Cards distributed to the public. The actual wording of the memorandum for Headquarters states, “comment card surveys are suspended until survey content has been approved by OMB”.

Bill J. related that we do have “customer comment/suggestion sheets” at each of the fee booths to allow the campers to provide feedback to the Corps. Arnie H. asked what is the difference in the Corps’ comment/suggestion sheets and surveys. Bill just related that the comments sheets are a way that the campers can provide their comments to the Corps.

Corps’ Recreation Strategic Plan: Arnie H. inquired about the Corps Recreation Strategic Plan and where the Corps currently may be in implementing the plans identified in their plan established in 2011. Have there been any accomplishments from the plan, or have there been new 5-year goals and objectives established since the plan was published? Stacy S. related that while the Corps has established a strategic plan for the Corps recreation program and that recreation is a viable part of the Corps’ missions now, funding continues to drive what can and what cannot be accomplished. While the best plans can be established, if funding is not available, those plans must be pushed down and more critical elements addressed, such as the increasing back-log maintenance and infrastructure capabilities that all the projects are facing these days.

While plans to enhance recreation opportunities at all the Corps facilities is a top priority, what we, the Corps currently have in place must be addressed first. Those critical elements such as health and welfare of the visiting public, treatment of water and wastewater of the visiting public must be addressed and identified as a priority before enhancement and increased facilities be made available to visiting public. Funding priorities must be shifted from enhancement of high visited recreation areas, to addressing the basics of even low visited recreation areas that can take the visitation pressures from the high visited recreation areas. Stacy concluded in stating “funding drives the bus”, plans must be made with a shorter range to have more of an effect to visiting public.

Stacy S. and Bill J. went on to explain that the Corps has realized that it can no longer provide recreation opportunities through-out the project, but must address issues in a more business sense, identifying

locations that require a great deal of time and money to provide the service, but have low visitation numbers, and payback for the Government. Areas such as Lena Landing Campground, while it is a needed and requested service by the public, the cost was just too prohibitive for the Corps to continue the services, so, a partnership was identified in which the adjacent concessionaire, North Shores Resort and Marina, were able to include the Lena Landing Campground into their lease area to maintain as a campground would still provide the recreation opportunities for members of the public, but yet, the operation and maintenance would not be responsibility of the Corps. Since North Shores Resort and Marina accepted the campground area at Lena, they have been able to make significant improvements to the facilities and allowing larger campers to utilize the facilities.

Comments: Arnie H. related he is waiting to hear from Jerry W. concerning the letters recently received from the U.S. Forest Service concerning work activities in the Lake Ouachita Watershed area.

Stacy S. related that he and Jerry S. had met to discuss the relocation of the LOViT trail cross near Avery and the need to install a guardrail along the roadway. Stacy continued in stating that along the roadway, there is a small narrow gap in some areas that the installation of a guardrail could make the location more hazardous that it is currently.

Dan W. reminded the committee members that the meeting would be deferred to July 11, 2016 due to the July 4, 2016 Holiday on Monday for July.

Adjournment: Janice V. made a motion that the meeting adjourn, the motion was seconded by Mike D., meeting adjourned at 7:45 P.M.