

Lake Ouachita Citizens Focus Committee



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

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD: Lake Ouachita Citizens Focus Committee Minutes

DATE: November 3, 2014

CALL TO ORDER: 6:00 p.m. by Rick Stokes, Chairman

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers:

Stacy Sigman, Resource Manager, Lake Ouachita Field Office
Bill Jackson, Supervisory Ranger, Lake Ouachita Field Office
Jason Mothershed, Facility Manager, Lake Ouachita Field Office
Amy Shultz, Park Ranger, Lake Ouachita Field Office

Members Present:

Bill Barnes	George Dooley	Larry Raney	Janice Vaughn
Phillip Carr	Al Gathright	Jerry Shields	Howard Wright
Robert Cavanaugh	Arnold Habig	Rick Stokes	

Special Guests Present:

Stuart Wooldridge- Biologist, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Brett Hobbs- Biologist, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Chris Racey- Assistant Chief of Fisheries, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Kelley Mahan- Pathologist, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Lee Howard- Superintendent, Lake Ouachita State Park
Lori Simmons- Arkansas Department of Health
Ashley Whitlow- Arkansas Department of Health
Corrie Poston- Arkansas Department of Health
Kerry Krell- Arkansas Department of Health

Announcements: Rick S. informed the committee members that Brenda Meeks, Operations Project Manager, Ouachita Project Management Office, had announced that she would be retiring after working 42 years for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Rick went on to ask the committee members to be thinking of a good retirement gift that the committee could present to her at the retirement party.

Minutes: Bill J. requested that the minutes for the October 6, 2014 meeting be tabled until the January meeting. The request was granted and the minutes will be discussed during the January meeting.

Special Guest Presentation-Fish and Wildlife: Stuart Wooldridge, Biologist, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, provided a briefing to the committee members and special guests regarding the *Fish Consumption Advisory* that had been issued for Lake Ouachita recently. Mr. Wooldridge shared that Mercury occurs naturally in soils around the Lake Ouachita shoreline and is found in the atmosphere as well, but once a build up is found in aquatic environments, anaerobic organisms can cause methylation of Mercury. Methyl Mercury then bio-accumulates in the tissues of fish. Once the fish are tested and one part per million of Methyl Mercury is found in the tissues of the fish, the Arkansas Department of Health will issue a *Fish Consumption Advisory* for that body of water. Mr. Wooldridge went on to say that there are currently twenty *Fish Consumption Advisory* warnings issued in the state of Arkansas. Rick S. inquired if mercury ever dissipated. Mr. Wooldridge replied that in some cases, the Mercury levels do drop in a body of water, as in the case of Lake Monticello in southern Arkansas that was recently removed from the *Fish Consumption Advisory* listing. Once the parts per million of Methyl Mercury fall below the exceeded limit, the advisory is lifted.

Mr. Chris Racey, Assistant Chief of Fisheries, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, related that in 2012, the area biologist had been conducting fish tissue sampling in Lake Catherine and decided to test fish from Lake Ouachita as a base control group. During the initial testing of the fish tissues from fish in Lake Ouachita, they were surprised to learn that the fish tissue from Lake Ouachita had a higher concentration of Mercury than the fish tested in Lake Catherine. Mr. Racey went on to say once the discovery had been made, the biologist continued to test fish found in Lake Ouachita, thus leading to the advisory being issued for the lake.

The committee members asked several questions concerning the potential issues that could be posed for individuals who eat a great amount of fish from Lake Ouachita. The guests from the Arkansas Department of Health provided answers to the committee member's questions. Bill J. requested that in the future, the Lake Ouachita Field Office be notified of issues being found at the lake, before it is presented to the media, allowing the Corps not to be blindsided by the announcement being made and then making attempts to answer questions from members of the public concerning the advisory. Rick S. thanked all the guests for attending the meeting and sharing their expertise concerning the issue.

Friends of Lake Ouachita (FOLO): Rick S. shared with the committee members that he had recently had a conference call with Colonel John Cross, Commander, Vicksburg District and Dennis Norris, Chief of Operations, Mississippi Valley Division concerning the outcome of the FOLO use fee audit. Rick continued in saying that neither Colonel Cross nor Mr. Norris could provide him any additional information concerning the direction of the audit. In addition, FOLO has decided they will spend the funds on projects or materials for Crystal Springs and Tompkins Bend Recreation Areas, based on the fact that it has been 15 months since the request had been made to initiate an audit on the use fee funds, but yet, the Corps still has not provided any information on the outcome of the audit.

Stacy S. stated the Vicksburg District has guidance on a Contributions Plan, however, if the amount being contributed is above a certain dollar amount, then the Lake Ouachita Field Office would be required to obtain approval through the District Office before being able to accept the funds.

Stacy further shared he thought the dollar threshold was set at anything exceeding \$100,000.00, per contribution, per group, per year. Anything above this \$100,000.00 limit must be approved at a higher level, but he would verify this before the next meeting. Rick S. requested Stacy check this amount as soon as possible. Jerry S. said FOLO needs to know what the parameters are before they can plan what materials to purchase/projects to fund.

Al G. shared Dan W. could not attend the meeting tonight, but he had provided a report concerning the proposed project list the Way Forward Committee had worked up for the LOCFC committee members to consider. During the October meeting, Dan had requested that each LOCFC member review the list and see what projects they would like pursue and see if it can be accomplished at Lake Ouachita. Janice V. stated she had e-mailed her comments and suggestions to the committee members for consideration. Arnie H. related he had also sent his comments to be considered as well.

Sub-Committee Reports:

LOViT: Jerry S. reported that the trail dedication ceremony, held on October 28, 2014, was well attended with 65-70 people attending. Jerry also related the Corps of Engineers had done a wonderful job setting up the pavilion for the event and that the entrance portal/arbor at the Avery Trailhead, along with the large rocks and crosswalks were key in showcasing the trail areas around the Dam Area. Jerry went on to say that there was a great representation of the numerous groups who had contributed to the construction of the trail, with representatives such as Colonel John Cross, Commander, Vicksburg District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Mr. Norman Wagner, Ouachita National Forest, U.S. Forest Service; Mr. Joe David Rice, Arkansas Parks and Tourism; Mr. Jeff Crow, Deputy Director for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and Mr. Steve Schneider, International Mountain Bike Association. Each representative took a few moments to speak before the crowd gathered and praised all the hard work and cooperation between the various partnership groups.

As part of the dedication ceremony, Mr. Schneider of the International Mountain Bike Association presented the Epic Trail Award to Jerry for the work performed by the Trail Dogs. In addition, Jerry was presented the Trails Advocate of the Year Award by Mr. Norman Wagner, Ouachita National Forest, U.S. Forest Service.

Jerry continued in saying that the Womble Ranger District, Ouachita National Forest, U.S. Forest Service had re-opened the Hickory Nutt Recreation Area, on top of Hickory Nutt Mountain, for overnight camping. The area had been previously closed due to funding issues and had remained open for day use only. Robert C. shared with the committee he had accompanied two tourists from Italy on recent trip along the LOViT trail for the purpose of them writing a magazine article about the LOViT and what all it has to offer.

Way Forward Projects:

In the absence of Dan W., Rick S. presented the proposed projects the Way Forward Committee had developed, of which had been emailed to all the members for their review to make suggestions, recommendations and to volunteer to assist in seeking ways to make the improvements at Lake Ouachita.

Arnie H. made a motion to table the discussion on the proposed projects until FOLO made a decision on whether to spend the use fee funds collected at Crystal Springs and Tompkins Bend Recreation Areas. Rick stated he would like to discuss with Brenda M. and Stacy S. what the Corps has projected on their project work plans for these two areas, thus not duplicating the proposed actions for the areas.

Janice V. shared that if a problem can be identified, a solution developed to correct the problem, and it is within the authorities of the Corps, then this would help alleviate some of the other proposed work projects on the proposed list provided to the LOCFC committee members. If these discussions were possible with the Corps, then this would prevent the committee members from pursuing something that would be a “dead end”. Arnie asked if the FOLO Board Members could identify the projects they wish to pursue, then e-mail to the LOCFC committee members asking for their suggestions and recommendations. Arnie made a motion, Larry R. seconded the motion, to have FOLO proceed in expending the use fees collected in the Crystal Springs and Tompkins Bend Recreation Areas, but also, ask the Corps what they plan to complete from the Way Forward Committee’s proposed projects. Also, Arnie requested that the Corps’ list be sent to the LOCFC committee members, requesting their input on what should be accomplished as well. The motion was unanimously approved by the committee members. Rick S. requested LOCFC members to periodically check their e-mail for LOCFC information and updates.

Comments:

Arnie H. shared the Ouachita River Valley Association (ORVA) newsletter that had been published with information about the LOCFC and LOViT; a number of good photos were used in the article for the newsletter.

FOLO Financial Report:

Month	August 31, 2014	September 30, 2014	October 31, 2014
Cash-Trail Account	\$2,804.00	\$3,324.00	\$4,098.00
Cash – Miscellaneous	\$461.00	\$461.00	\$461.00
Cash-Crystal Springs	\$156,239.00	\$156,164.00	\$155,964.00
Cash-Tompkins Bend	\$56,675.00	\$56,600.00	\$56,400.00
Total Assets:	\$216,179.00	\$216,549.00	\$216,923.00

Adjournment: Meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m.