

# Lake Ouachita Citizens Focus Committee



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

**MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD:** Lake Ouachita Citizens Focus Committee Minutes

**DATE:** August 3, 2015

**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  
Jason Mothershed, Facility Manager, Lake Ouachita Field Office  
Joe Bailey, Park Ranger, Lake Ouachita Field Office  
Bill Jackson, Supervisory Ranger, Lake Ouachita Field Office

**Members Present:**

Bill Barnes	Al Gathright	Janice Vaughn
Tom Butler	Arnie Habig	Dan Watson
George Dooley	Tami Spurlin	Jerry Williams
Mike Drake	Rick Stokes	

**Minutes:** The minutes from the June 1, 2015 and July 6, 2015 meetings were discussed, motions were made for each date and approval of the meetings minutes, as written, were approved by the committee members.

**Announcements:** Rick S. related that he had been contacted by Phil C. to advise him he, Phil, would not be able to attend the monthly meetings until later in the Fall or Winter timeframe due to work commitments. Al G. related that it is his understanding that Phil has been asked to spend more time working in the family business and the committee would be losing a valuable resource if Phil were to leave the committee. Tom B. made a motion to offer Phil an exception, excused absence during this time, enabling him to remain a member of the Focus Committee, but allowing him to meet his work requirements as well. The motion was seconded by Janice V. Janice also asked Rick how many members make up the Lake Ouachita Citizens Focus Committee (LOCFC) and if there were provisions to allow alternates to be members and attend the LOCFC meetings? Rick stated the LOCFC is made up of 15 members and no, there are no provisions to establish alternates to serve as members of the committee.

Arnie H. shared with the committee members that Phil had been a member previously, but resigned due to work commitments before, then when a vacancy came available and his workload allowed, he applied and was selected to serve on the committee again. Arnie went on to relate that if Phil could read the monthly meeting minutes and pass along suggestions and ideas to other committee members, he could remain active without attending the monthly meetings, until his work commitments slow down and allow him to attend the meetings.

Tom B. modified his motion to allow Phil to be excused from the monthly meetings to November 2015, the committee members voted and the motion passed, granting Phil excused absences until November 2015.

**Friends of Lake Ouachita (FOLO):** Rick S. related to the committee members that he had received no further updates concerning the FOLO/Department of Justice (DOJ) case, Ms. Alicia Hunt, the attorney representing DOJ, did relate that she felt one of the proposals, as presented, would be accepted by her Director. Rick went on to say that his desires are to receive something by the end of the week concerning the proposed outcome. Arnie H. inquired if the LOCFC had sent something to the DOJ, in which Al G. stated the LOCFC made a recommendation to the FOLO Board members, who, in turn, sent the proposals to DOJ for a solution to the issue. Rick went on to say that he had received a reply that “mirrored” exactly what was sent, except for the items that had already been installed by FOLO.

Tom B. was pleased to hear that Ms. Hunt was communicating with Rick and expressed his support in keeping the communication lines open between the committee members and Rick concerning the issues. Tom went on to state it is his thoughts that FOLO will not be able to keep the funds collected, but will be required to return all funding, as requested. Rick went on to say that the appearance is that a solution is coming soon, with the document being sent back to FOLO for review.

**Lake Ouachita Vista Trail (LOViT):** Al G. provided an update on the LOViT in Jerry S.’s absence; Al G. related that a number of trail maintenance projects continued to be accomplished, with underbrushing, trail sign replacement and tree removal being the most time consuming projects being completed.

Bill B. inquired as to whether there are still some trail bench sites available for individuals to sponsor a bench along the trail’s route. Al continued in stating that there is one more bench to be installed that was sponsored and another one that was damaged by one of the recent storms passing through the Lake Ouachita area. Al went on to say that Jerry S. has a complete list of the benches and their locations. Park Ranger Mike Wade completed the mapping of the trail, with the bench locations being placed on a map by their GPS coordinates.

The Lake Ouachita Field Office O&M staff completed the LOViT Spur at Spillway Recreation Area to allow those using the trail to link to the recreation areas where restroom facilities and additional trailhead parking areas are located. This portion has been “roughed out” and volunteers will follow up in preparing the trail’s surface. Tad Cooper, Echo Canyon Marina and Resort Manager, requested Al and Jerry provide an informational presentation for the marina occupants, to detail how they can get involved in supporting the LOViT near the concession’s location at Spillway.

Arnie H. related that he had visited the Blue Cross/Blue Shield Insurance website to see if there was information concerning potential grants that could be used for trail maintenance or construction under their exercise programs, but he continued in stating he could not find anything that could be used to provided assistance with the trail.

Al went on to share that the U.S. Forest Service has been really supportive in providing the needed hand-tools to perform the maintenance tasks along the trail, but also, Tom B. had donated the brush cutter, making the removal of vegetation along the trail much easier as well.

Arnie inquired if some of the funding FOLO still had in its account could be used to purchase equipment for trail construction and maintenance, then possibly lease the equipment to others for trail construction at various locations as well.

Al continued in stating a meeting has been set up with Tom Ledbetter, U.S. Forest Service, to discuss the trail and where the U.S. Forest Service would like to see the trail to continue. Some earlier discussions, concerning the LOViT trail route, would take it to the Lake Ouachita State Park on the east end of Lake Ouachita and to Twin Creek Recreation Area on the west end of the lake. Rick S. shared that it is his understanding that one of the issues for the western portion of the LOViT would be a need to cross over a portion of the Lake Ouachita Shores concession lease area, which may require an amendment to their lease to allow the trail's route to pass through the area. Bill B. inquired if it would be possible for Lake Ouachita Shores to allow the trail to pass through their lease area and help maintain the trail's surface within their lease area? Rick related that would be something that Mr. and Mrs. Warman would be required to agree with and an agreement drawn up relating what their responsibilities would be to maintain the trail. Rick continued in saying that this would allow the LOViT to extend to Denby Point Recreation Area, but the continuation on to Twin Creek may be difficult, due to the amount of privately owned land between Denby Point and Twin Creek Recreation Areas.

**Congressional Information:** Rick S. shared with the Committee that there had been no further correspondence received differently from the previous month concerning the FOLO issues.

**Way Forward Committee:** Dan W. provided an update the Way Forward Committee's revision of the proposed list of items for the betterment of the project.

Arnie H. asked who determines which campsites are set up in the reservation system at Lake Ouachita. Stacy S. answered in saying the Lake Ouachita Staff determine what campsites will be designated to be reserved each reservation season. Arnie continued in asking if it would be possible for members of the LOCFC to be involved in the selection process to determine the campsites to be set up in the reservation system, most especially with the percentage of campsites returning to the previous number of campsites to be reserved on January 1, 2016.

Stacy related that Dennis Norris, Chief of Operations, Mississippi Valley Division, will be retiring in January 2016 and he has stated his goal before retirement is to ensure the percentage of campsites in the reservation system will remain 35% reservable and 65% first-come, first-serve before his retirement date. If the request is denied, the percentage will return to 65% reservable and the Lake Ouachita Staff

will determine what campsites will be made available for reserving. Rick S. shared that members of the LOCFC could make recommendations to the Lake Ouachita Staff, based on their camping experience in the campgrounds.

Stacy S. continued in stating that all three lakes in our area, Ouachita, DeGray and Greeson, have received numerous complaints and comments about the reservation program through social media. Some campers appreciate the reservation program, while others express their strong displeasure in their experiences in attempting to reserve a campsite. Janice V. stated that one of the biggest issues for campers is seeing the prime campsites remaining vacant through the week, only to have someone occupy the campsite Friday and Saturday nights. Stacy shared that the reservation program continues to be evaluated.

Arnie related that it has been his observations that individuals will arrive at the campground on Monday, set their camping equipment up on a campsite, register and pay for the campsite, then leave, failing to occupy the campsite until the weekend, Thursday through Saturday nights. Tammi S. suggested the Corps explore raising the prices of specific campsites over the weekends.

Rick S. inquired about the Campsite Evaluation Sub-Committee and the status of the evaluations. Janice V. provided an update on the status of the evaluations that have been completed and plans to complete the additional campsites. Janice continued in stating that Al G., Mike D., Arnie H. and herself had been busy evaluating the campsites in Denby Point, Brady Mountain, Tompkins Bend and Twin Creek Campgrounds. The only campgrounds remaining would be Crystal Springs and Joplin Campgrounds to complete the evaluation process. The evaluation sheets have been given to Bill J. who will have the information entered into a spreadsheet that can be used to determine campsite conditions and start planning to make improvements to the ones that are most critical or ones that can be updated relatively easy and quickly.

Arnie H. inquired as to when the campgrounds would be evaluated, Janice V. continued in stating that the project she had volunteered for was to evaluate individual campsites, not the entire campground. Arnie asked Janice if she had determined a deadline for the Corps to make the improvements to the campsites, in which Janice replied that was not part of her activities, the Corps needed the campsites evaluated to determine what needed to be done and where, then the Corps can set the projected deadlines when funding and personnel are available to complete the necessary work tasks to make the improvements to the campsites. This led to more discussion about determining deadlines and feedback to be provided by the Corps and following up on what had been accomplished, based on the evaluations that had been completed. Bill J. interjected and related that under the current circumstances, funding and personnel issues, all the Corps needs right now is the evaluation of the individual campsites to determine what must be done, what would like to be done and what can be done. Funding and personnel available are the resources that are lacking currently to get “what needs to be done” in the campgrounds.

**Annual Cleanup:** Bill J. related that the “Campground Workday” would be September 26, 2015 at Joplin Campground and that a list of projects would be put together asking volunteers to complete in the campground. Information for the event would be placed on the Lake Ouachita media sites and through newspaper releases to make the public aware of the event.

**Comments:** Arnie H. shared with the committee members that he continues to receive letters from the U.S. Forest Service concerning activities in the Lake Ouachita Watershed area. He continued in asking if there was anything in these letters that the LOCFC may need to follow up on or have concerns. Jerry W. related that he reviews those same letters upon receiving them and he has not noticed anything of concern, but if he did, he would bring it to the attention of the LOCFC.

Rick S. shared with the committee members that Arnie H. had reminded him the LOCFC selections of a Chair and Vice-Chair were to be held in July, but it was overlooked, so, Rick opened the floor for nominations for Chairperson for the LOCFC. Rick D. nominated Rick S., but Rick stated his agreement was that he would occupy the Chair position for one year and it is now two months overdue. Arnie H. nominated Dan W., Rick S. seconded the motion, nominations were closed and committee members voted, selecting Dan W. as the new Chairperson of the LOCFC. Rick S. passed the leadership to Dan, who opened the floor for Vice-Chair nominations, Rick S. nominated Al G., George D. seconded the motion, nominations were closed and committee members voted, selecting Al G. to serve as the Vice-Chairman for the LOCFC.

Committee members were reminded the September LOCFC meeting would be held one week later due to the Labor Day Holiday on the first Monday of the month. September LOCFC meeting to be held on September 14, 2015.

Rick S. shared that he would not be able to attend the Ouachita River Valley Association conference being held at the Hot Springs Convention Center and Lake Ouachita Field Office on August 27-28, 2015. Arnie H. related that he would be attending and Tammi S. volunteered to attend in Rick's place.

**Adjournment:** Meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.