

AAC Annual Report

ALLIGATOR ADVISORY COUNCIL

Louisiana's Alligator Industry

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Louisiana leads the U. S. in the production of alligator skins. After rebuilding the population through research, management and law enforcement during the 1960's, the wild harvest from 1972 through 2008 has produced over 800,000 wild skins with an estimated dockside value of \$212 million.

This wild harvest has averaged approximately 33,288 skins annually, worth around \$11.6 million dockside including meat during each of the past 5 years. The 2008 wild harvest of 35,620 raw skins was valued at over \$11.4 million including alligator meat. In 2007, farmers sold 302,680 skins, which averaged 4.04 feet (24.8 cm belly width) and were valued at over \$58 million. The farm/ranch harvest from 1972 through 2007 produced 3.5 million skins with an estimated value of \$399 million.



Washington D.C. Education

The newly reorganized AAC continued to be active in Washington, DC on several fronts despite a number of unusual political circumstances. Congressional legislative activity in the second half of 2008 was very limited due to the politics surrounding the Presidential and Congressional elections, and in the first half of 2009, Congressional activity was dominated by the transition to the new Administration's priorities including the economic crisis. Further, the Louisiana Congressional Delegation sustained further changes with Congressman Steve Scalise taking office in 2008 and Congressmen Joseph Cao, Bill Cassidy and John Fleming taking office in 2009.

Of particular note, AAC continued its ongoing efforts to secure annual appropriations for Dr. Nevarez's alligator disease research in the FY09 and FY10 cycles. This outstanding research has been funded for several years through a Cooperative Agreement between the USDA Animal & Plant Health Inspec-

Washington D.C. Education Continued

tion Service (APHIS) and the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries under the annual Agriculture (USDA) appropriations bill. This effort was expanded in the FY10 cycle to seek appropriations to supplement alligator industry contributions towards the construction of a new alligator research facility on the LSU Campus.

The FY09 appropriations process was substantially delayed and although earmarks such for projects have become increasingly limited and difficult to secure under new Congressional rules, an Omnibus Appropriations bill was adopted in March 2009 that included \$69,000 for continuing the alligator disease research. Senators Landrieu and Vitter and Congressman Melancon were specifically credited with making this appropriation request a success. With the support of AAC, LAFRA and LSU Chancellor Richardson, AAC' is seeking to continue and expand this program in the FY10 cycle.

Outreach and education has always been a priority activity of the AAC in Washington, DC and this activity has been even more important due to the dynamics within the LA Delegation. AAC activities in this arena include a variety of Member and staff meetings and briefings, preparation and presentation of various educational documents and even site visits to key in-State facilities and meetings. Similar efforts involve federal agencies such as the US Fish & Wildlife Service which regulated the trade in all CITES species including American alligator. This activity provides a critical opportunity to ensure that key decision-makers in Washington, DC are kept up to date of the state of the alligator industry and program, and are fully apprised of the range of issues and information important to the AAC and the LA Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Of particular note this year was AAC's participation in the Washington, DC "Louisiana Alive" Mardi Gras event hosted annually for the LA Delegation. AAC's high-visibility participation included a hospitality booth on the main floor of the event as well as the preparation of Louisiana alligator dishes by a celebrity chef. While in Washington, DC, AAC representatives also took the opportunity to personally meet and brief several key Members of the LA Delegation and representatives of the US Fish and Wildlife Service on a range of issues of concern.



Education on the Hill

Alligator Meat Promotion



The Alligator Advisory Council worked closely with the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board to promote alligator meat. Alligator meat was featured at Mardi Gras on the Hill in D.C. and at several seafood events. The largest event featuring alligator was the 2009 Louisiana Alligator Soirée

Students from the Louisiana Culinary Institute won first place at the 2009 Louisiana Alligator Soirée for their Louisiana alligator appetizer and entrée. The appetizer, “Marie Laveau a la Gator,” was Kataifi wrapped Louisiana alligator over goat cheese and green onion grits with clear Pannola pepper jelly sauce. The team’s winning Louisiana alligator entrée was “Gator Stuffed Quail.” The competition was held at the Louisiana Foodservice EXPO in the New Orleans Morial Convention Center on July 19.



Alligator Soirée—2009

The winning team included Louisiana Culinary Institute Dean of Education, Ross Headlee; Team Captain, Nathan Roose; Chef Pat Mahon, Cody Carroll, Samantha Neal, Jeremy Barlow and Julius Thompson.

The team of students from Delgado Community College placed second at the Soirée and Louisiana Technical College placed third. Each team had two hours to create an award winning Louisiana alligator appetizer and entrée for the judges. This year’s judges were Craig Rogers of Gulfscapes Magazine, Chef Nathan Gresham of Galatoire’s Bistro and Chef Tom Wolfe of Wolfe’s on Rampart. The emcee for the event was Chef Greg Reggio of Zea Rotisserie and Grill. The audience enjoyed a Louisiana alligator cooking demonstration and samples courtesy of Chef Duke LoCicero of Café Giovanni.



Alligator Soirée—2009

“We always really enjoy hosting this event” said Ewell Smith, executive director of the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board. “We look forward each year to what these talented culinary schools will create with Louisiana alligator meat, and they just keep coming back each year and outdoing themselves.”

General Education

The Fur Advisory Council and Alligator Advisory Council's education program coordinated with other around the state, and presented at schools, libraries, and public events. This year, we gave 20 schools presentations, 10 library presentations, and 5 scout presentations. Events included La Fete De L'Ecologie, Ocean Commotion, Earthfest at the Audubon Zoo, National Trappers And Alligator Hunters Convention, Bossier City Earth Day, OC Extravaganza and the Monroe Career Workshop.



We have successfully networked with people in various agencies including the Louisiana Seagrant Program, the Baton Rouge Zoo, the Barataria National Estuary Program, and Wetland Watchers. We also began working with local scout leaders and Garland Scout Ranch is in the process of developing a furbearer merit badge and an alligator merit badge based on criteria that we provided. The furbearer coloring book and educational lessons for grades 6-8 are now complete.

Children are very interested in fur bearing animals and alligators. Many of these children have hunting experience and some even have trapping experience.

Library Presentation

Most formal presentations are about an hour long and involve the following: First, a pelt is displayed to the audience and the audience is provided various biological and/or ecological information about the type of animal from which the pelt was taken. Additionally, some key characteristics of each pelt are pointed out that will help the audience members positively identify the animal if seen in the wild. Various concerns surrounding the animals are discussed, including beneficial and problematic behaviors. Usually, the last thing that is done with the furbearers is to discuss the similarities and differences in the structure of the skull of some of the furbearing animals. Concepts such as occlusion, along with the relationship between dentition and diet and muscle attachment sites are discussed.

An alligator presentation follows. First, in order to grab the audience's attention, a hatchling alligator is shown and the audience is given some brief facts about the hatchling. Next, depending on time availability and the age group, the discussion continues while holding either the hatchling or an alligator head. Either way, the topics of alligator life habits in the wild and some basics on alligator anatomy are covered.

Concepts such as nest building, maternal care, digestion, thermoregulation and threats to hatchlings are discussed. Finally, as the audience leaves the presentation area, children have the opportunity to pet the hatchling alligator on the tail and ask any question that they may have thought of during the course of the program. When the children are leaving, they are always happy if not inspired by what they saw and experienced during the presentation. We usually receive several, if not several tens of questions.

General Education Continued

We have had a number of children say that they wish to enter wildlife related careers and many teachers have told us that these presentations are very relevant to their lesson content.

At events, a booth is set up and the same items that are used in presentations are displayed. When patrons come to the booth, we always show them points of interest about alligators, furbearers, and the issues surrounding them.

Patrons, especially children, seem to be all smiles during their brief visit to the booth. We have created a new exercise whereby people look at a jar of bones and try to identify which furbearer these bones are from by comparing them to the skulls on the plaque. Both children and adults seem to enjoy this activity.



4-H Event—2008

Technical Representation

The alligator trade changed significantly the first decade of the new millennium, particularly the last three years for better and worse. The better was the achievement of more than 500,000 classic skins a year average (the historic trade peak in the 1960's) from 2001 to 2007. Caiman skin trade averaged 780,000 skins a year over the same period resulting in a combined crocodylian trade of 1.3 million skins a year with an estimated raw value more than \$120 million a year. The Louisiana alligator alone accounted for half that value reaching \$60 million a year by 2006 with a 50% market share of classic skins in trade (double the market share and more than ten times the volume than 1984 when the first Technical Representation Project, IACTS was completed).

Most of that value was captured by coastal Louisiana farmer, trapper and processor families that number more than 6,000 when helpers, skinners, and farm employees are considered. Landowners too benefited from the sustainable use programs with the alligator accounting for an average of 50% of all surface revenue.

The Marsh to Market success story and the economic incentives to help keep the marsh wet and wild seemed complete until significant world trade policy changes began in 2007 and the global financial crisis that followed changed the story to worse. The push for stricter quality standards coincided with the luxury brand takeovers of many tanneries. The objective was to acquire mostly perfect skins for the ultra exclusive fashion markets and stricter grading standards quickly resulted in increasing quantities of reject skins, particularly from the wild where the toothy alligator bites it way out of the egg, fights the rest of its life and lives on its belly. Even with farm raised skins which generally reach market size in one to three years (compared to 5 to 50 years in the wild) the slightest blemish became a defect to some luxury brands and downgrade raw skin inventories began building. The economic crisis further magnified the problem with declining

Technical Representation Continued

product sales and concurrent declines in hide and leather values. By the Fall 2009 season, values and income dropped precipitously to less than half of the trade peak just achieved, with wild harvest value and volume declining more than 75%, adversely affecting 2,500 trapper families along with supporting helpers, skimmers and processors.

While a “take the best and leave the rest” trade policy might be marginally justified under the pressure of reduced sales, high inventories and uncertain markets, a longer term commitment to such a policy will undermine the precepts of crocodilian sustained use management—particularly the broader benefits to conservation (wetlands) and communities (local people). These are complex international issues and some of the solutions for the alligator will be rooted in the development of alternative leather goods markets, particularly in the US where several mid to high range niche markets remain unexploited. But it is clear, a future crocodilian trade based on only a few preferred species and only the very best skins of those does not fulfill the conservation and community benefit mandates that were largely responsible for the decision to restore world trade in crocodilians. And a backlash from environmental and animal rights groups is almost a certainty if the current trade trends and policies continue after the economic recovery begins. Such is the “better and worse” backdrop for Louisiana’s pioneer alligator management programs.

The most important accomplishments this year were the California legislative initiative to extend the legal sale of alligator and other crocodilian products, the CITES Standing and Animal Committee meetings in Geneva, Switzerland that adopted favorable reports on Universal Tagging, small leather goods trade and personal effects, the completion of the first world trade study in crocodilian meat and initial efforts to enhance the export of alligator meat to the European Union and Pacific Rim.

California

The adoption of Senate Bill 1209 extends the California sunset for the sale of crocodilian products through 2015, a 6 year extension. The only other way to have passed this legislation was to limit the bill to alligator products, which Louisiana chose to forego in favor of open markets for all legal, sustainable and verifiable crocodilians in trade. California agreed provided a sunset clause of December 31, 2015 offered another opportunity to revisit the status of this trade in six years—particularly the issues of whether legal trade ultimately stimulates illegal trade and whether conservation and community benefits continue to be an integral part of sustainable use programs. IUCN Crocodile Specialist Group Chair Dr. Grahame Webb said the California initiative ... “is a truly remarkable effort of real conservation value, not just in the US but around the world.”

Universal Tagging and Small Leather Goods Trade

The CITES Standing Committee accepted the Working Group Report on these two issues which will be presented during the next Conference of the Parties (Doah, Qatar, March, 2010). Unanimous support for retaining the Universal Tagging provisions under CITES was a strong statement from both the trade and CITES Parties that sustained use of crocodilians begins with effective control which is based on tagging all crocodilian hides in trade, export permits, re-export certificates and annual reports from all countries involved in trade. The Working Group report also recommended streamlined permits through use of more electronic permitting and pre-signed systems. Even though exemptions were not recommended in the Standing Committee

T e c h n i c a l R e p r e s e n t a t i o n C o n t i n u e d

Report, two Parties took the floor during discussions in Geneva to emphasize that “exemptions” would have enforcement implications, make it more difficult to ensure legal origin, further endanger Appendix I crocodilians and set a poor precedent for CITES.

Personal Effects

This complex issue has become more complicated due to questions about stricter domestic measures, whether Resolution Conf. 13.7 (Rev. Cop 14) goes beyond the text of the Convention in its limitations on personal and household effects (also highlighting the subsequent shipment for repair dilemma) and whether any of the numerical limits for exempted specimens should be revised. On the numbers issues we continue to raise this concern with both CITES and the European Commission about counting pairs of products (shoes, cuff links, etc.) as two items resulting in unnecessary confiscation and consumer confusion.

Alligator Meat

The inaugural world trade Study of Crocodilian Meat was completed in 2009 in cooperation with the World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC) in Cambridge, England. The initial Study confirmed that global exports of crocodilian meat had reached 900 tons in 2006 and 2007, but alligator meat exports had declined from a peak of almost 500 tons in 1991 to about 50 tons in 2007. China, Hong Kong SAR and Taiwan currently import 82% of all the world’s crocodilian meat production and a Pacific Rim export strategy is important to Louisiana’s future trade position.

Much remains to be gained by streamlining and expediting CITES, better educating the public about sustainable use values, continuing to monitor world trade in crocodilian meat and reaffirming the trade’s commitment to conservation and community benefits from sustainable use.

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The Alligator Advisory Council operates from the Alligator Resource Funds.

Alligator Resource Funds	
Budgeted	\$300,000.00
Salaries	\$24,939.09
Related Benefits	\$7,799.45
Travel	\$2,698.36
Operating Services- <i>i.e. cell phone, internet service</i>	\$2,262.95
Supplies- <i>i.e. printing supplies, office supplies</i>	\$380.25
Professional Services- <i>i.e. education contract, technical contract</i>	\$227,500.00
Alligator Resource Funds Expended	\$265,580.10
Total FAAC Funds Budgeted	\$300,000.00
Total Expended	\$265,580.10

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