

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 re-building the population through research, management and law enforcement during the 1960's, the wild harvest from 1972 through 2009 has produced over 810,000 wild skins with an estimated dockside value of \$241 million.

This wild harvest has averaged approximately 28,359 skins annually, worth around \$10.1 million dockside including meat during each of the past 5 years. The 2009 wild harvest of 9,126 raw skins was valued at over \$1.5 million including alligator meat. In 2008, farmers sold 286,245 skins, which averaged 4.3 feet (26.4 cm belly width) and were valued at over \$45.5 million.

The farm/ranch harvest from 1972 through 2008 produced 3.8 million skins with an estimated value of \$450 million. The world wide economic crisis in 2009 reduced price and demand for both wild and farm-raised alligators during the 2009-2010 fiscal year.



Washington D.C. Education

The AAC has long maintained an active and visible presence in Washington, DC, both on Capitol Hill and with the Administration. It remains the definitive voice for the Louisiana alligator industry and "go-to" source of information for Washington policymakers.

The dramatic downturn in the national and global economies that had such a major impact on the alligator industry also had an impact on AAC activities in Washington during the 2009-2010 fiscal year. Unlike last year, the AAC was not able to participate in the Washington, DC Mardi Gras where it had

Washington D.C. Education Continued

previously sponsored a booth and provided alligator meat for preparation by notable Louisiana Chefs. Members of the AAC were also unable to participate in their traditional Washington, DC 'Fly-In' to meet with the Louisiana Delegation. These activities are a very important component of AAC's efforts to educate, increase visibility and build relationships with the Louisiana Delegation and other key players in Washington. We hope to resume these activities in the next fiscal year.

Nevertheless, outreach and education activities remained a top priority for the AAC during the year particularly with several freshmen Congressmen on the Louisiana Delegation and the larger need to keep the entire Delegation informed of the unusual dynamics within the industry. As always, the AAC meets and communicates with the Louisiana Delegation on a regular basis, but we were very fortunate that Noel Kinler, Alligator Program Manager for the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries was able to step in and continue his characteristically expert participation in the Fly-In so that the AAC could maintain continuity in this important annual event. Consequently, the entire AAC agenda of issues and information was presented to each of the House and Senate Members of the Louisiana Delegation.

The AAC also continued its ongoing efforts to secure annual appropriations for Dr. Nevarez's alligator disease research at LSU in the FY10 and FY11 funding cycles. This outstanding research has been funded by Congress since FY 2005 in direct response to the AAC's efforts in close cooperation with the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries. This effort was expanded in the FY10 and FY11 cycles to seek appropriations to supplement alligator industry contributions towards the construction of a new alligator research facility on the LSU Campus. As is often the case, the FY10 appropriations process was slow to develop and, although earmarks for projects have become increasingly limited and difficult to secure under new Congressional rules and federal budget realities, we were very fortunate that the final FY 10 Agriculture Appropriations bill included level funding for continuing the alligator disease research program. Special thanks are due to Senator Landrieu and Congressman Melancon who were specifically credited in the Appropriations report for securing this critical funding.

The AAC also had a busy year on the legislative front by sponsoring in close coordination with the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries and in partnership with the Fur Advisory Council an initiative to establish a program to develop control methods for the exploding population of feral swine and to minimize damage these invasive species are



Education on the Hill

Washington D.C. Education Continued

having on some of the most productive alligator habitat in the State. The introduction of the “Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program Act of 2009” by Senators Landrieu and Vitter, represents a proactive effort that is in many ways patterned after the successful Louisiana nutria control program. Substantial progress was made in moving this bill through the legislative process during the year and the prognosis for enactment is excellent.

Alligator Meat Promotion



The Alligator Advisory Council worked closely with the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board to promote alligator meat. The Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board includes alligator in all of its marketing activities when promoting Louisiana Seafood as a whole. This includes all major



events, especially the Boston *Alligator Soirée*—2009 Seafood Show which is the largest seafood show in the country. This past year the Board completely overhauled www.LouisianaSeafood.com; the new site is designed to help all seafood producers including alligator producers facilitate sales. The Board also secured a Food Network piece using Louisiana alligator with Jakimos’.

The largest event featuring alligator was the 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 Panola 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

Alligator Meat Promotion Continued

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.

“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



School Presentation

The Fur Advisory Council and Alligator Advisory Council's education program coordinated with other educators around the state, and presented at schools, libraries, and public events. This year, we gave 31 school presentations, 13 library presentations, and 1 scout presentation. Events included La Fete De L'Ecologie, Ocean Commotion, Earth fest at the Audubon Zoo, National Trappers And Alligator Hunters Association Convention, “AgMagic” at the State Fair and Reading On The River. Quentin Morris, the main educational outreach person, attended the Trapper's College at the LDWF Education Center at Woodworth. He has begun to incorporate trapping principals into his presentations at the request of the Fur Advisory Council.

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

Most formal presentations are about an hour long and involve the following: First, several traps are shown to the class. These are as follows: three live-restraining double long-spring double foothold traps: one with rubberized jaws, another one with a gap in the jaws, and finally one that has plain jaws. The third trap is brought to the class set and then it is sprung for the audience. I also show a kill-type body-gripping trap, as well as a cable device type snare trap. A council representative explains how each trap works and why it is a humane way to take a furbearer. The students always seem to enjoy watching the set traps get sprung. Throughout the presentation, four important trapping points are discussed, one of which is that trapping is a highly regulated sport that has licensing requirements that are overseen by LDWF biologists. Pelts are displayed to the audience and the audience is provided various biological and/or ecological information about the type of animals from which the pelts were taken. Additionally, some key characteristics of each pelt are

General Education Continued

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.



Nutria Pelts

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. We have even 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.

Technical Representation

The alligator trade currently faces the most significant challenge for continued success since the original CITES down listing in 1979. The harsh public reaction in Europe to an animal welfare Swiss documentary on the snake and lizard trade back-splashed on the use of all exotic leathers including alligator.

The Swatch Group, owners of eight luxury brand watch companies with \$5.4 billion in annual sales considered a ban on all exotic leathers this year (similar to Overstock.com and Cole Haan, a Nike subsidiary). The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries hosted an effective trade delegation visit by the Swatch Group, Brasport, and HCP that explained the state's commitment to sustainable use programs that benefit commerce, conservation (wetlands) and communities

Technical Representation Continued

(local people). Louisiana's extensive science-based marsh management programs along with commitment to best management practices and animal welfare concerns impressed the Swatch Group. Since alligator is the preferred leather for about 90% of the luxury watchband business, this is the most important economic incentive for Louisiana's sustainable alligator program which has generated more than \$60 million a year.

The most important points shared with the Swatch Group provide a useful summary of the elements that distinguish the Louisiana alligator program as an internationally recognized model for sustainable use strategies.

1. The alligator was the first crocodylian to be down listed under the CITES Treaty (1979) and is the only species with a rangewide down listing (appendix II). This means the American Alligator population is not endangered or threatened and is only listed under CITES due to "similarity of appearance" (look-a-like provisions that comply with all tagging, permitting and other international trade controls).
2. Louisiana pioneered a sustainable use concept for the alligator intended to provide economic incentives to conserve the marsh (80% of coastal marshes are privately owned and many landowners today generate 50% of their surface revenue from the alligator), a strong incentive to protect wetlands.
3. Louisiana strategically benefits as many local people as possible through their sustained use programs. More than 6,000 families, mostly from rural, coastal areas, share in the alligator trade that has generated more than \$60 million a year—Important jobs and revenue for people hard hit this decade by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav, and Ike as well as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.



*Buddy Baker of LDWF,
Don MacLauchlan of
National Association of Fish
& Wildlife Agencies &
Don Ashley*

Technical Representation Continued

4. Louisiana strictly controls the alligator trade by licensing those who participate; establishing harvest and husbandry regulations; monitoring and inspecting facilities; requiring compliance with state, federal and international rules; tagging each skin and essentially certifying the trade is legal, sustainable and verifiable by individually inspecting each skin prior to export.
5. Louisiana retains full time veterinary services to ensure the health, welfare and best management practices for harvesting and husbandry.
6. Louisiana sponsors a world trade study in cooperation with UNEP/WCMC (World Conservation Monitoring Center) to independently assess the crocodilian trade each year and evaluate trade trends to help ensure all crocodilian trade is legal, sustainable and verifiable.
7. Louisiana conducts extensive research, management and enforcement programs through dedicated funding (mostly \$4 tag fee) of about \$1.2/yr. mil. Another \$300,000/yr. is allocated to CITES, technical representation, promotion, marketing and efforts to tell the "Marsh to Market Story".

Also important to note additional ways the classic leather trade could enhance Louisiana's efforts to increase sustainable benefits to wetlands and local people.

- Streamline and expedite CITES permitting by removing impediments and obstacles to legal trade;
- Reduce negative images, misleading or inaccurate propaganda and replace with a more positive and balanced message about sustainable use benefits to wetlands, wildlife and people;
- Initiate conservation education projects to better inform government, trade, interest groups and the public about sustainable benefits to commerce, conservation and communities.

The trend toward trade bans of manufactured products will continue by animal rights and welfare groups. The best counter strategy remains sound, science-based programs that benefit conservation (wetlands) and communities (local people). This is the "Marsh to Market" story that Louisiana pioneered and established as a global model for marsh management and community benefits based on economic incentives from renewable natural resources.

The most important technical representation issues include:

CITES Conference of the Parties

We attended the 15th CITES Conference of the Parties March 13-25 in Doha, Qatar. CITES has grown dramatically since my first attendance at the 2nd COP in 1979 with 175 member countries, 125 in attendance and an estimated 1500 delegates including NGO's, press, UNEP and Qatar government officials.

Our primary issues included small leather goods, Mexico Morelets down listing, Madagascar illegal trade, Egypt Nile down listing, Colombia trade initiatives, Personal Effects and CITES Business Roundtable. We also monitor the status of electronic permitting initiatives and the e-commerce concerns that are increasingly seen as conduits for illegal trade of finished products.

Technical Representation Continued

Important to note an analysis of fund raising on CITES issues by the top ten environmental and animal rights groups generated \$2 billion. Clearly the Protectionists interest are much better at raising funds from the public than sustainable use advocates and the impact on CITES issues is evident. We hold our own on crocodilian issues but have some advantage after 30 years experience in this forum and a species that lacks much emotional appeal with teeth dangerous to people and pets. Even sharing those unpopular traits with snakes still resulted in a CITES Decision to initiate a review of the Asian snake trade with a workshop, committee reports and COP 16 recommendations due by 2012.

And while industry trade bans aren't strictly a CITES matter the American Shoemaker Cole Haan (Nike subsidiary) also followed Overstock.com with a trade ban on exotic skins products including alligator and crocodile. This is a disturbing trend that will encourage PETA and other humane groups to increase pressure on other manufacturers to ban exotic leather products including alligator and crocodile. With all the other trade pressures on, Louisiana we can ill afford a shrinking product market when the need is for a more diversified trade, particularly if the wild harvest programs are to survive.

CITES Small Leather goods Exemptions and Universal Tagging

This single issue has enormous impact to the trade in general and Louisiana in particular. Because the alligator is widely regarded as the most legal, sustainable and verifiable crocodilian in trade, many manufacturers (particularly watchstraps) insist on alligator leather as added insurance against CITES permit problems or Customs confiscations.

This is envied by many producers and coveted by the leather trade as a great thing—that would be greater if they could extend the preference to all species, suppliers and range countries. Such is not possible through CITES because of varying rates of compliance, capacity or illegal trade concerns. Hence, the attempted “end run” to exempt and cut into Louisiana's 90% market share of the important watchstrap market. This is a very delicate and internationally sensitive issue because, on the face, opposition to exemptions could be interpreted as market protection. This is why we put on a full court international press (shuttle diplomacy) to explain why exemptions were a bad idea as a CITES precedent, increased threats to endangered crocodilians and undermined the successful sustainable use model of legal, sustainable and verifiable trade. While the issue is currently in hand after the March, 2010 CITES Treaty meeting in Qatar, this is far from over with tens of millions of dollars at stake, the opportunity to play more suppliers competitively against each other and weaken the focus on the high standard of legal, sustainable and verifiable trade pioneered by Louisiana and the alligator.

Unanimous support from the crocodilian trade and producing countries for Universal Tagging of all crocodilian skins was a significant and quietly achieved milestone. Universal tagging was the primary recommendation in the first IACTS Report (1984) and remains the most important requirement to monitor, manage and protect crocodilians.

Technical Representation Continued

CITES Compliance and Illegal Trade

Significant progress was made in Colombia, with new export requirements that reduced the trade to less than 600,000 a year rather than the peak reported in 2006 of almost a million skins, which was reduced in 2007 to 670,000 and in 2008 to 533,000. IACTS continues to be the most important project to monitor world trade in all crocodylian skins and helps deter some illegal trade through certainty of intensive review and analysis of world trade.

Progress was also made in Madagascar which is now subject to a CITES moratorium for exceeding export quotas and laundering of wild skins through farming operations. This is a disturbing trend of laundering illegally taken wild skins through farms (Colombia, Madagascar, etc.) which has increased concerns about inconsistent trade data for several African, Latin America and Southeast Asian countries. Will leave this here for now, but the implications for trade credibility and impact on other issues (i.e. small leather goods exemptions, California, etc.) should be clear.

Live trade in Siamese Crocodiles from Southeast Asia (Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam) continues to be a concern with good progress to alert CITES, CSG and other conservation organizations about this threat as well as hybridization issues with the Saltwater Crocodile (*C. porosus*). Increasing focus is being put on China to help resolve and clarify live or illegal trade issues in Southeast Asia.

CITES Business Roundtable

The growing recognition by CITES that the crocodylian trade is the best sustainable use model and is the most persuasive “Marsh to Market” Story to share with the press and public is a very significant accomplishment. With the increasing media coverage and CITES accolades comes more scrutiny. The trade shouldn’t be blinded by the shine from its own halo, because a savvy opponent has several weak points to pry on and as stated before, luxury brands may inadvertently help raise these stakes because a bit of “tarnish” to the crocodylian trade helps undermine the sustainable use model for all wildlife—which is the ultimate goal of animal rights and protectionist advocates.

IUCN Crocodile Specialist Group (CSG)

We convened a meeting of the CSG Industry Committee during the Lineapelli Leather Fair in Bologna, Italy. The purpose was to discuss impacts from the global recession, review “take the best and leave the rest” quality standards and consider other factors affecting crocodylian sustainable use programs. There was clear consensus to further reduce impediments to legal trade, particularly ways to expedite CITES permitting through pre-signed permits and electronic permitting. There was much less agreement on ways to increase demand for downgrade skins and little interest by tanners to discuss the issue which they attribute to a supply/demand market gap. We continue to encourage more industry cooperation to help ease the pressure on raw skin supplies (landowner, trappers & farmers), particularly wild harvest programs that provide broad benefits to Louisiana coastal communities.

Technical Representation Continued

Conclusions

While the alligator still accounts for most of the world classic trade, competing species, trade skin preferences and luxury brand strategies will change the dynamics even more the next 3 years. Louisiana is not the only game in town with new incentives to change the face of competition. Louisiana must remain vigilant, consistent and resilient to market and regulatory changes. Tech Rep tries to provide a pre-emptive strategy, which requires extensive contacts and communications to achieve international consensus when possible. Simply said—the risk of pulling back too far from this commitment is to lose influence, goodwill and perhaps wage more expensive defensive battles when major issues get out of hand.

The challenge for 2011 and beyond is to protect the integrity of sustainable use strategies, maintain credibility for trade that is legal, sustainable and verifiable and expand the audience for the Marsh to Market story, particularly consumers who ultimately provide the economic incentive to benefit wetlands and local people.



CITES Business Roundtable Session



2 0 0 9 - 2 0 1 0 E x p e n d i t u r e s

The Alligator Advisory Council operates from the Alligator Resource Funds.

Alligator Resource Funds	
Budgeted	\$300,000
Salaries	\$29,013
Related Benefits	\$9,391
Travel	\$0
Operating Services- <i>i.e. cell phone, internet service</i>	\$2,389
Supplies- <i>i.e. printing supplies, office supplies</i>	\$3,5989
Professional Services- <i>i.e. education contract, technical contract</i>	\$227,500
Total Alligator Resource Funds Budgeted	\$300,000
Alligator Resource Funds Expended	\$271,892

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