

## Alligator Advisory Council Meeting

April 13, 2016

LDWF

Lafayette, LA

### Council Members Present

Ronald Guy  
Randy Moertle  
Errol Falgout  
Vic Blanchard  
Dwight Savoie  
Mike Bengé  
Barry Wall  
Gerald Savoie

### Council Members Absent

Al Marmande

### Others Present

Don Ashley  
Pam Ashley  
Noel Kinler  
Mark Shirley, LSU  
Tim Allen  
Archie Domangue  
Chad Courville  
Cole Courville  
Lisa McRoberts  
Nathan Wall, Walls Gator Farm  
Ted Joanen, Miami Corporation  
Serge Castagne

### LDWF Present

Buddy Baker  
Edmond Mouton  
Tanya Sturman  
Amity Bass  
Jeb Linscombe  
Mike Dupuis  
Ruth Elsey  
Angela Guidry

Motion made by Vic to approve the minutes from the October meeting. Dwight seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

### Enforcement Update

Mitch Darby spoke to the council about alligator enforcement issues. The major violation that agents run into does not come from licensed hunters. It comes from people who take alligators out of season. People report that they take the alligators because they consider alligators a threat to their children or pets. The second largest violation is taking alligators without a license. Last year there was a spike in violations. LDWF enforcement attributes the spike to the popularity of alligator hunting due to reality tv shows. Many people are ignorant of the laws. He gave an anecdote of a woman who went into a sports shop and asked for alligator hooks, because her eight year old son wanted to catch an alligator in the little canal near their place; she didn't know that it was illegal. Violations by licensed hunters are much less frequent. In the past year, for example, there were 91 instances of alligators being taken out of

season and only 19 instances of legal hunters not tagging the alligators immediately. Ronald asked if the agents watched social media for illegal activity. Mitch said that they did, and that they can use social media videos and photos to make their case. Randy said that he watched for signs of violations on his own property; he asked if other landowners were reporting suspicions. Mitch said that landowners are good about watching out for activity on their property. Mitch said that he would like hunters to tag their alligator poles or lines, and he would like to see this regulated. This sort of tagging would allow enforcement to easily verify if the hunter had permission to hunt on the property.

### **Introductions- Edmond Mouton**

Edmond mentioned that Bob Love had retired. Buddy Baker has been promoted to Bob's old position, and Amity Bass has moved into Buddy's old position. The council members each introduced themselves and the area of the industry that they represent on the council.

### **LSU School of Human Ecology- Dr. McRoberts**

In 1998 LSU collaborated for the first time with the alligator council in sewing alligator products. Dr. McRoberts' goal is to educate students primarily at LSU but also nationally and internationally on how to work with alligator leather. Dr. Liu, Dr. McRoberts' associate, has taken the program to China and works with the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology. Their primary goal is to work with grade 3 skins and find ways to either work around the flaws or to embrace them. Dr. McRoberts presented both a paper and an alligator garment at national conferences during the past year. Dr. McRoberts showed a Power Point presentation, which included photos of pieces designed by students in the U.S. and in China. An international exchange student created some garments using small triangular alligator leather scraps. Dr. McRoberts showed several pieces done by students using small pieces for adornment. She completed a project which demonstrates zero waste design where every piece of the alligator skin is used. She documented the creation of one garment step by step.

Buddy asked if they felt like there should be a greater focus on trim and accessories over full garments. Dr. McRoberts replied that trim, accessories, and full garments can all be productive. She noted that fashion is cyclical and that the focus varies year to year. Buddy also asked about the connection between runway shows and what people actually buy and wear. Dr. McRoberts said that there are a few high end fashion shows where the garments are over the top, but that many runway shows feature ready-to-wear lines.

### **Alligator Program Updates, Budget, and Regulation Changes- Edmond Mouton**

Edmond said that the numbers are increasing. Alligator farm inventory is increasing. 55.9% of the inventory is hatchlings. The department has approval to hire temporary staff to assist with alligator releases. Tag issues are also increasing for the wild season. The price this year is a little lower. Meat prices are a little lower as well. There are more resident hunters this year, but the non-residents licenses have decreased a little. The alligator management program expenditures were a little less this past year. Edmond showed slides with graphs and bar charts illustrating the trends. Each council member was also provided with a bound booklet of Edmond's entire presentation. The Alligator Resource Funds started

the fiscal year with \$2,950,586. The income so far this year has been \$1,620,440. There will be additional income before the fiscal year closes. Edmond also showed the expenditures to date for the Alligator Resource Funds. He showed a breakdown of the income from severance taxes, tag fees, licenses, permits, shipping label fees, lottery, WMA egg harvest, and interest. He also broke down the expenditures on salaries, travel, operating services and supplies, professional services, and so forth.

Edmond explained that the regulation changes were necessary due to an evolving industry. He showed the published regulations and highlighted all of the verbiage that has been removed. They also added some slaughter regulations. Three legal methods for slaughter were outlined. Edmond also showed some language that was added to the Best Management Practices document. The document was prepared by LDWF and the Louisiana State University, School of Veterinary Medicine and was endorsed by the Louisiana Alligator Farmers and Ranchers Association. Edmond explained step by step the process that the regulations changes went through with ample opportunity for public comment and industry review. Farmers have been asked to sign a form stating that they have received the BMPs.

### **RFP Technical Representative Update – Edmond Mouton**

Edmond said that the contract for Don Ashley ends in June. The RFP has been in process for almost a year. It is still at Office of Contract Review. Buddy said that with the state budget crisis, each agency has embedded in it an individual to review staff and contracts. This individual has instructed the Department to reduce and eliminate contracts. Buddy said that he understands that the AAC is using dedicated funds, but it is possible that the funds could be undedicated. Also, the state can still remove 5% of the funds. Buddy said that one way that the council can show its compliance is by going from a three year contract to a one year contract with an option to renew for an additional two years. Mike asked when the RFP could be published. Edmond said that it may still be another month or two. Edmond suggested that the council go ahead and appoint some members for the RFP review committee. Mike explained the RFP review process. Vic, Errol, and Dwight volunteered.

Gerald said that the more the Alligator Resource Funds (ARF) build up, the more enticing they look to the state government. It's not right for the industry members to pay a \$4 tag fee and for any of it to go to general funds. Gerald said that he doesn't see how the contractors can do what they are doing for less. Besides if we decrease contracts and allow more money to sit in the fund, then the state government looks at it more closely. Buddy went back to the 6 year spread sheet showing the Alligator Resource Funds income and expenses. The last four years the alligator program has spent less than it has taken in, but several years before that it spent more than it brought in. Things fluctuate a little, and it is important to keep some funds built up to cover the lean years. Buddy pointed out that there is money in the fund generated by the department. Buddy said that a lot of these funds are already dedicated to building an alligator facility to replace the one that had been destroyed by hurricanes. The funds that will cover the facility are coming from WMAs. Gerald thought that the WMA funds in the ARF make the funds vulnerable, because now the ARF is not just funds from industry members but are also from the Department. Noel Kinler disagreed and said that the new funds were positive. He said that the ways in which the ARF are used have not changed. Mike asked how seriously that state government was looking at the ARF. Buddy said that the council should be vigilant, but it is not time to act. Chad

suggested that the Council could communicate with the natural resource committee chairs and educate them on the alligator program. Edmond said that we send them an annual report each year from the Department, and Tanya mentioned that we also send them an annual report from the Council. Chad said that they probably won't read the reports unless they are hand delivered. Mike said that he would be happy to make that trip with someone.

#### **Washington D.C. Education RFP – Edmond Mouton**

Edmond said that the current contract ends in June 2017. The RFP process is taking longer, so we would like to get started on it early. This contract is split between the FAC and the AAC. The FAC has voted to move ahead with issuing an RFP. We are asking the AAC to allow us to begin work on the RFP at this time.

Gerald moved to begin the RFP process for the Washington DC contract. Barry seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

#### **Washington DC Trip- Buddy Baker**

Buddy mentioned that in the past, some LDWF staff and AAC members have gone to D.C. to meet with Glenn Delaney and Louisiana representatives and their support staff. We are under a travel freeze now, but Buddy suggested that the Council consider making this trip again, if we can get an exemption to travel. Mike asked when Buddy would like to travel. Buddy said June or July, depending on the travel freeze. Mike said that he would like to go. Noel said that it is worth the time and effort. Barry said that he would be interested in going, but he couldn't do it in June or July. Buddy said that he would like to send one or two staff members. Mike said that he would like to have two AAC members go. We can decide later and see who is available. Nathan suggested that since both Council members who are interested in going are willing to pay their own way, they could do it in May before the alligator season gets so busy regardless of the travel freeze.

Errol moved to approve travel for two AAC members and two LDWF staff. Vic seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

#### **Presentation of Plaques – Mike Bengé**

Mike presented plaques to Chad Courville and Tim Allen for their service to the AAC. Both gentlemen were AAC members from the time the AAC was created in 2008 until mid-2015.

#### **Other Business**

Gerald Savoie asked to see data on the rate of returns, how the return tags hold up, and the costs of tagging releases, as well as the cost of data analysis. Gerald said that eliminating the tagging would cut costs and speed up the return process. Buddy said that having LDWF staff working the returns is important to documenting the management of the program. The return program is the defense of the program. Gerald agreed and said that we need the return program. He knows that the return alligators are laying eggs. Gerald isn't questioning the returns; he's questioning the tagging.

Dr. McRoberts said that she is willing to work on accessories. She thought the Council wanted her to come up with new ideas. Accessories are important, but that they are already being created and sold. Errol asked Dr. McRoberts where she thought we could get the biggest bang for the buck on moving grade three hides. He said if it is in accessories, then we need to look at expanding the accessories market. Gerald suggested that she talk to the tanners, because they know what people want and where the grade three skins are moving. Gerald said that Mexico is doing a lot with the lower end skins. Randy said that saddles and gun holsters would be popular accessories out of alligator leather. He said that there are leather makers all over Texas. The market for lower grade alligator skins is not in Europe. The market is here and in Mexico. Pam Ashley mentioned the Leather Industry of America Fair. Pam said new and interesting products might include things like guitar straps marketed to young people as sustainable, green products.

Ronald Guy mentioned the letter from the Louisiana Trapper and Alligator Hunters Association. The alligator videos that the Department shows are old and need to be updated. Ronald said that there needs to be more education on how to take care of alligators from the time they are caught through the processing. Many of the alligators are coming in with very preventable damage. Tanya explained that the LTAHA is proposing a joint project with the AAC, the LTAHA, and the Department. The LTAHA is buying a camera and is asking that approved videos eventually go on the Council website.

Ronald told the Council about an event he recently presented at Becoming an Outdoors Woman. He demonstrated alligator processing at the event. He gave away the AAC cups and the old Marsh to Market booklet. Buddy mentioned that Bob Love found several cases of the Marsh to Market book. Buddy suggested that Tanya mail a copy to each Council member. Tanya and Edmond commented that both the data and the photographs in the book are pretty dated. Buddy asked if the booklets still have value, and Don Ashley talked about the value he still sees in them. There seems to be an agreement that an updated document would be preferable when the budget allows for such a project.

Motion made by Randy to adjourn. Ronald seconded. Motion carried unanimously.