

## Alligator Advisory Council Meeting

August 3, 2016

LDWF

Baton Rouge, LA

### Council Members Present

Ronald Guy  
Randy Moertle  
Vic Blanchard  
Dwight Savoie  
Mike Benge  
Barry Wall  
Gerald Savoie  
Al Marmande

### Council Members Absent

Errol Falgout

### LDWF Present

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

### Others Present

Pam Ashley  
Noel Kinler  
Mark Shirley, LSU  
Tim Allen  
Archie Domangue  
Chad Courville  
Cole Courville  
Greg Linscombe  
Dr. Michael Kaller  
Capt. Brent Bourgeois  
Nathan Fabra, Searcy Seafood  
Andre Neto  
John Currier  
Kenneth Dupont  
Nathan Wall, Walls Gator Farm  
Ted Joanen, Miami Corporation  
Serge Castagne

Motion made by Ronald to approve the minutes from the April meeting. Vic seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion made by Al to nominate last year's officers again: Mike Benge as chairman and Dwight Savoie as vice chairman. Ronald seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

### Survival Analyses: Mike Kaller

Mike Kaller explained how survival analyses work and situations in which such analyses are useful. They looked at release and return data from 1991-2014 from Vermillion, Amoco White Lake, and Miami land corporations. They considered weather in different years. The first year that animals are released, they experience a lot of mortality. They looked at data after the first year. He explained various types of

survival models and which situations they are most useful for. The catch curve is good for long-lived animals for example. The prediction of the catch curve was similar to observation in alligator populations. Although initially harvested, the largest released female alligators quickly matured to breeding age, where harvest is not targeted. Female alligators survive better in wetter years and they survive better when released larger. These estimates are very similar to estimates done in the 1980s. Mike Kaller recommends that we continue using the catch curve approach in the future. Randy asked about the age variation of breeding females from the wild versus the farm released alligators. Ted Joanen said that farm release alligators reach breeding age about six years whereas wild alligators take ten years; it is because they grow much more quickly the first year on the farm. Gerald asked if the increase or decrease of the return rate would increase that final number. Mike Kaller said that he could run those models for another report. If larger alligators were released the curve would change by some degree. There were benefits to reaching 40 and 55 inches, but there were not any benefits above 60 inches.

Gerald Savoie wants to know if the numbers of returns which are put back in the wild are larger than the numbers being born in the wild. Buddy said that we cannot know what percentage of the nests that we are not harvesting.

#### **Farm Return Rate- Edmond Mouton**

Edmond showed egg collection numbers going back to 1986. He went over the goals for the department related to the release program. He showed a graph of the number of alligators released over time. He went over success indicators for populations. He went over each indicator and reviewed the results. For example, nest surveys have been stable with good nest production. There was a 22% increase in nest population this past year. He showed a line graph with nest counts since 1986; there were big dips corresponding with hurricanes. He showed percentages of return rates over time. There is a steady increase in percent of large re-traps over time. The department is recommending that we reduce the return rate from 12% to 10%. Chad asked when this would be implemented. Edmond said that if they can get it through the Commission process then they would implement it in the 2017 contracts. The process may delay it until the 2018 contracts. Gerald asked if you see a female ruining a nest should she be taken out. Jeb and Ruth both agreed that it wouldn't hurt to remove her, and another female will not take her place until she is gone.

**Motion made by Al to reduce the return rate from 12% to 10% for the 2017 contract season. Randy seconded. Motion carried unanimously.**

**Motion made by Ronald to amend the agenda to bring Pamela Ashley up to address the Council. Al seconded. Motion carried unanimously.**

#### **Pamela Ashley**

The IACTS report shows that alligator is more than 50% of the trade. Pam has been approved to be an observer at CITES, and she hopes that there is not discrimination against a woman getting an RFP. She presented a packet of 16 letters supporting her participation at CITES. She hopes that there is a way to

get her there. Pamela said that she is on some working groups such as the CSG Industry Committee and the Snake and Python working group. She says that she needs to be there and that the Council needs to send her. It is a very busy two weeks at CITES.

### **Egg Ranching- Ruth Elsey**

Ruth reminded the farmers to get their reports in.

### **Feeding Wild Alligators- Ronald Guy**

Ronald said that people ask him a lot about regulations of feeding alligators. If we could stop the feeding of wild alligators, then alligators will stop looking at little kids expecting a hot dog. This is a particular concern after the little boy was killed in Florida. In 2007 Ruth and Noel worked on some language for a bill. It passed in the Senate but failed in the house. There are several cities that have codes. There are also several parishes with ordinances against feeding alligators. Florida and Texas have statutes against feeding alligators. Edmond spoke to the legal staff. If the council wants to move forward, they should make a resolution asking the department to look into it. A question from the audience asked if the proposed regulation would affect private property; it makes sense to make a statute against feeding on public property. Ronald said that the concerns are on public lands. Randy suggested letting the Department discuss it and bring a recommendation with how to move ahead with this issue and with what language if they recommend legislation. Al suggested adding some language about increasing some awareness.

Motion made by Randy to ask the Department to investigate and bring back options of how to proceed. Vic seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

### **Regulation Change Update – Edmond Mouton**

The new regulations are online and in the provided brochures. The updates include farm housing spacing and harvest/slaughter methods. The BMPs have also been updated. He presented both documents to the Council. The AVMA guidelines now include humane slaughter for alligators and those guidelines are available online. Dr. Nevarez worked with the Department to get alligator included in the AVMA.

### **Web Tag Retention – Ruth Elsey**

Ruth went through the various methods of tagging that were tried and tested over time. She showed some data from a study done in Texas in 2014. The research included the length of time that it takes to insert the tag, the costs of the tag, and the retention rate of the tags. She showed the history of what Louisiana has used and how they increased the size of the tags over time. The larger tags are easier to read and have a better retention rate. She showed the retention rate of tags statewide and within a couple of parishes. The longest re-trap with a tag was over 20 years. The tags cost Louisiana \$187 for 1,000 tags. The Department spends about \$15,000 on tags annually. Since some tags show up on stomach contents it demonstrates that cannibalism among alligators is a big mortality factor. She recommended that farmers release alligators in good juvenile habitat and spread them out over a large

space. Gerald questioned if tagging is still worth the trouble. It costs in both labor and in tag costs. Ruth said that she thought it was important to continue doing it. Chad said that we should distinguish between notching and tagging. Chad said that he is 100% in favor of continuing the notching. Ruth said that as a scientist, they always want more data. Chad said as a landowner he doesn't need the web tagging for his business. Gerald asked Serge what he thought about the information that we are getting from the tags. Chad said that the information we got from the tags was important in the beginning, but now we have 25 years' worth of data. Buddy said that a lot of questions have been answered, but as a science based agency, we will always get new questions. \$15,000 is a relatively small price to pay to keep this data current. Gerald said that the \$15,000 cost does not include staff and travel. Ted said that the poor tag retention did not provide good information on travel; it just shows growth. Ted said that we have 25 years of that data. Edmond said that the tag data was an important piece of Dr. Kaller's data used for the models he presented this morning. Edmond suggested that the Department will want to look at the model again in several years to monitor the 10% release data and until that new model is generated we need to keep the tags. Serge said from a tanner point of view the tag is an image issue. Their clients want to know how the program works. The benefits for the image are large. The tags make a good impression. The cost of the tagging program is well worth the value in image.

#### **Technical Representation Discussion- Buddy Baker**

The Council asked for proposals for technical representations. The RFP was subsequently canceled due to non-responsiveness of the proposals. Buddy recommended that the Council and staff take a fresh look at each component of the scope of service that was part of the RFP to determine the best way forward for meeting the long term needs of the Council and the industry. Several questions were asked about decisions within the RFP Committee. Jan Kellett from LDF's Office of Contract Review said that by rule, committee proceedings are confidential. Dwight asked if the council could issue a contract for up to \$50,000 without an RFP in order to send Pamela Ashley to the CITES COP. Edmond said that a contract would have to go through the Department and through the Office of State Procurement and couldn't be processed before the COP. Ted said that the State needs technical representation at the CITES meeting. Buddy said that he will be there and will represent the Council's interest on crocodylian issues. Randy said that the Department should make recommendations for a new RFP. **Dwight moved to ask the Department to come up with a new RFP. Randy seconded. Motion carried unanimously.**

#### **Other Business**

Randy asked for an acronym list to help with reading reports.

Gerald asked if the Ranchers and Farmers Association could send representation to the September CITES meeting and how much it would cost to get Pamela there. Pamela said that she was hesitant to say, because she felt like she was in competition with the Department now. After some consideration, she said her business class flight alone was \$9,000 and that \$35,000 total would cover it.

Tanya pointed out the documents that she printed from Mark Staton.

**Motion made by Vic to adjourn. Gerald seconded. Motion carried unanimously.**