

Alligator Advisory Council Meeting

November 30, 2016

LDWF- New Iberia Office

Council Members Present

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

Others Present

Noel Kinler
Ted Joanen
Chad Courville
John Currier

Council Members Absent

Al Marmande

LDWF Present

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

Motion made by Errol Falgout to approve the minutes from the November 2 meeting. Vic Blanchard seconded. Motion carried. Dwight Savoie voted against.

Discussion of Technical Representation of the Louisiana Alligator Industry (Staff Proposal is attached at the end of the minutes).

Task 1 – International Alligator/Crocodile Trade Study (IACS)

Buddy Baker presented the agency proposal for how to address the scopes of work under the previous contract for technical representation of the Louisiana alligator industry. Mr. Baker reported that LDWF has tried to determine which tasks the Department could perform in-house and which tasks needed the expertise of a contractor. The Department suggests that the technical representation aspect could be

integrated into the Department. Mr. Baker said that Crocodilian Specialist Group (CSG) members had indicated that they were disappointed that the Department had left everything up to a contractor and disengaged. The recommendation is for staff to be involved even if it's in conjunction with a contractor.

Mr. Baker introduced Duncan Kemp from legal.

Mike Benge suggested that the Council discuss the issues task by task.

Gerald Savoie said that he talked to two CSG members this week. They said that LDWF staff should attend the meetings, but that the industry should have an independent contractor as well.

Task one was the International Alligator and Crocodilian Trade Study (IACS) report. Buddy Baker said that World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) had indicated that they would be willing to contract directly with the State. This contract could be kept to \$11,000.

Ted Joanen said that Japan and Papua New Guinea have not reported CITES in years which creates data gaps. Mr. Joanen reported that Ashley and Associates were able to use their contacts to fill these data gaps. He suggested that a contractor could analyze this report and put it into the hands of agencies that could address problems indicated by the report.

Randy Moertle expressed concern that the Department may not be able to stay consistently engaged due to political changes. Chad Courville said that a contractor can shed light on other programs to make it a level playing field, but it may not seem appropriate for one government agency to point a finger at another government.

Buddy Baker said that WCMC was chosen to produce the IACS report because they are completely impartial and they have access to Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) data. Other groups and agencies use that report and analyze the data, and those groups are able to confront other countries such as Colombia. Mr. Baker explained that the Department did not have to be the one to call out noncompliant countries. He further explained that there have always been data gaps. The report has great value even with the data gaps. Mr. Baker said that Don Ashley had worked closely with John Caldwell with WCMC in the original development of the IACS report to determine how the data would be presented and analyzed. John Caldwell indicated that in recent years the report was prepared by WCMC with Don Ashley reading over it at the editing stage.

Ted Joanen said that a contractor has the freedom to travel, to write, and to speak his mind. Randy Moertle agreed that a private contractor can speak freely whereas a government employee cannot speak freely. Chad Courville thinks that there is a benefit to insulating the Department from directly funding a world-wide industry report.

Buddy Baker said that since Ashley and Associates was a contractor for the State and paid for by the State that he felt that the international community still viewed the report as being an LDWF funded report but that because WCMC is an independent, unbiased organization that the report is viewed as unbiased as well. The data speaks for itself, even though Louisiana pays for it. He does not feel that having a contractor in the middle changes that perception or insulates the State. Mr. Baker further

explained that the Agency is accountable for wise expenditures of funds and must avoid excessive subcontracting fees. He suggested that the Council contract with WCMC for one year and compare the new report to previous reports.

Buddy Baker recommended that the Council contract with WCMC now, because the IACTS report is already late. The Department can talk to others in the industry on an international level, and determine if added services are needed in conjunction with the report and what the added tasks would be.

Mike Benge suggested that the Council has three options: skip the CITES report this year, contract directly with WCMC and compare it with those reports done through a contractor, or contract with someone to work with WCMC and provide further analysis.

Errol Falgout asked for a small break so that he could consult with some farmers.

Motion made by Gerald Savoie to accept the Department's recommendation to contract with WCMC directly for the IACTS report this year. Errol Falgout seconded. Motion carried.

Task 2 – National and International Alligator Policy Advisor

Buddy Baker explained that he would like to get staff involved with CITES and CSG. The CSG leadership is getting up in age and they have begun to promote and train younger leaders. CSG invited LDWF to include a staff person into the CSG Young Leaders Program. LDWF would like Jeb Linscombe to join that team and to begin traveling to CITES meetings on behalf of Louisiana. The Department would also like to start looking for a good contractor to pick up some tasks in the near future, but the current recommendation is to start developing staff expertise.

Gerald Savoie reiterated that he would like to see an outside contractor represent the industry even if the Department has staff to dedicate to this task. He also thinks that the same contractor should do all of the tasks, because he will develop a broad expertise in these overlapping areas.

Jeb Linscombe explained that staff travel will not come out of the Council budget; it will come out of the Department budget. Buddy Baker suggested that if the Council desires for LDWF staff to fully engage in CITES and CSG that they consider sending a letter of support for international travel to the agency leadership. Vic Blanchard and Randy Moertle both agreed that the Department should move ahead with training staff.

Vic Blanchard said that he would still like to see the Department develop an RFP to cover these tasks. Dwight Savoie agreed that an RFP should be developed that would cover all of these tasks. Gerald Savoie said that there are qualified people out there who didn't bid on the previous RFPs out of respect for Don Ashley. Mr. Savoie believes that if the Department posts an RFP, that new proposals would come.

Task 3 – Repeal of the California Statute Prohibiting Sale of Crocodilian Products in the State

Buddy Baker explained that the sunset clause will expire in January 2020. The agency has testified, but the agency does not lobby. The Department recommends contracting for this task. Glenn Delaney recommended that the Department look for a local contractor in California.

Task 4 Animal Welfare and Sustainable Sourcing

The Department recommends that the two subtasks in this task be moved to task 2 and task 5 respectively.

Task 5 - Conservation Education

Buddy Baker recommended that the Council assign a team to look at this task to develop it further. He would also like to see Mark Staton and Chris Plott weigh in on this. Mr. Baker recommends that task 5 be a separate contract or RFP. Errol Falgout asked if this would be a good place to include some of the tasks that Lisa McRoberts has done. Dwight Savoie agreed with Mr. Falgout and suggested that a marketing firm could handle this task. Gerald Savoie explained that the tanneries are already promoting their skins. The problem in Louisiana is how to move the wild skins. We need to focus marketing on wild harvested alligators. Mr. Savoie said that without the wild alligator harvest, we wouldn't have eggs and nuisance alligators would become a bigger problem. The Council needs to support the wild industry with marketing.

Mike Benge summarized stating that the Council would like to see an RFP for tasks 1, 2 and 3. Buddy Baker said that he thinks task 3 should be separate, because this task requires someone with political expertise, which entails a different skill set than a technical representative. Mr. Baker agreed to have Department staff draft RFPs.

Public Comment

There was a discussion about the bylaws and voting rules. Buddy Baker said that the administration had instructed him that legally he has a vote. Mr. Baker stated further that he feels that in many cases it would be a conflict of interest to vote on LDWF recommendations to Council and that he will likely abstain from voting in those cases.

Duncan Kemp offered that LDWF's Legal Section will make recommendations on how the Council should change their bylaws so that they do not conflict with state law.

Dwight Savoie requested a copy of public meeting laws. Tanya Sturman agreed to get that sent out.

Motion made by Mike Benge to adjourn. Barry Wall seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Staff Proposal for Technical Representation, Legislative Outreach, Marketing, and Education

In May of 2016 the Alligator Advisory Council (AAC) announced a Request For Proposals (RFP) for Technical Representation. Two proposals were received. On July 6, 2016 the AAC's RFP evaluation committee met and found both proposers "non-responsive", meaning that they did not have expertise on staff to adequately handle the contract. Council Chairman Mike Bengé requested that LDWF Alligator Program staff research options for handling the various tasks within the scope of work for the RFP. The following is LDWF staff's recommendations based on our research and conversations with colleagues both domestic and international.

Task 1 – International Alligator/Crocodile Trade Study (IACS)

The IACS study has been contracted in recent years at the rate of \$40,000 per year. The work has been subcontracted to the United Nations Environment Programme -World Conservation Monitoring Center (UNEP-WCMC) in Cambridge, England for \$10,700. WCMC is willing to directly contract the work with LDWF at the same rate (\$10,700). We recommend that LDWF staff assume responsibility for contracting the IACS Report thereby eliminating overhead costs for an immediate savings.

Task 2 – National and International Alligator Policy Advisor

Historically the monitoring of national and international issues and representation of the Louisiana alligator industry at the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature - Crocodile Specialist Group (IUCN -CSG) meetings was conducted by agency personnel. Eventually the AAC contracted the representation and over time diminished staff attendance and involvement at these venues led to developing near total reliance on a contractor for representation at international meetings. Simultaneous representation at CITES of a less specific nature has been provided by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA). Buddy Baker, working for the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and later for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries represented the interest of the southeastern states through the AFWA CITES Team. Ruth Elsey continues to represent LDWF on the CSG and is co-chair of the CSG's North American Regional Steering Committee though her involvement is conducted remotely for the most part and without attendance at biannual CSG Conferences.

Over the past two months staff has had numerous conversations with organizations associated with CITES and with crocodilian management world-wide. There appears unanimity of opinion that for Louisiana to represent their best interest as it relates to market ability and market share, the agency must engage staff in international meetings such as CITES and CSG whether or not LDWF engages a contract technical advisor. Many felt that LDWF has been delinquent in not being present and in developing a dependency on a single contractor. Based on these conversations it also appears that some

of the work that our past contractor has so capably conducted to support world-wide crocodilian markets will necessarily be picked up by other leaders in crocodilian management around the world.

At present and for the past year and a half Buddy Baker has necessarily shifted his responsibilities on the AFWA CITES Team to focus on representation of the Louisiana alligator industry at CITES meetings including the Animals Committee, Standing Committee, the Conference of the Parties and in negotiations with the US Delegation. Moving forward there will need to be additional attention to this through additional staff involvement or through a contractor.

Recently the Technical Advisor contract has been let at \$140,000 per year. It's estimated that if an additional staff person is trained to the task it will cost approximately \$4,000 to \$10,000 per year in travel expenses to attend all relevant CITES and CSG meetings depending upon the meeting cycle. Buddy Baker will continue to travel to CITES meetings and will assist in representation of the alligator industry and will assist with training of an additional staff person who will focus on crocodilian issues. Buddy's travel expenses are covered through a travel grant administered by AFWA. So, he will continue to travel at no expense to the Council.

The CSG is currently led by older professionals who are approaching retirement or who are already retired. Recognizing, as we also have, that there has been little successional training they have recently established a "Future Leaders" program. The program is designed to assist young future leaders in understanding CSG goals and in navigating the CITES Treaty and other international crocodilian issues. The CSG leadership has agreed to accept a LDWF staff person into the program.

The CSG leadership suggests further that LDWF should have several staff engaged in the various working groups of CSG as opposed to a single staff representative. We suggest that a minimum of two staff persons engage. Most of the work of the CSG is conducted intersessionally without travel. In-person meetings are relegated to a CSG conference every other year and to meetings associated with CITES. The estimated cost of travel for each additional staff person to attend CSG meetings is approximately \$4,000 every other year.

Our recommendation is to assign this task to the LDWF Alligator Program staff. The estimated total cost would average approximately \$7,000 - \$9,000 per year depending upon the number of staff engaged. We suggest that the Council assign this duty to staff for a period of time sufficient to evaluate the need for additional contracted representation.

Task 3 – Repeal of the California Statute Prohibiting Sale of Crocodilian Products in the State

The sunset clause which postpones the prohibition will expire in January 2020. Beginning in early 2018 we will need to engage in outreach concerning this effort. We have not been successful in removing American Alligator products from this statute but we have twice achieved a postponement of the prohibition. We will need an aggressive approach next cycle for a permanent fix as opposed to another postponement. We suggest that the task of advocacy on this issue be contracted.

Task 4 Animal Welfare and Sustainable Sourcing

This Task is somewhat general and it overlaps largely with Task 2: Technical representation and Task 5: Conservation Education. The recent cost of this task was \$25,000. We suggest that it be integrated into Tasks 2 and 5.

Task 5 - Conservation Education

This task was added in 2016 as result of a desire by AAC to renew efforts directed toward education and marketing, including topics such as outreach for animal welfare and sustainable sourcing issues. Staff agrees that there is need for both local and international marketing of American alligator products. We recommend a “Branding Program” specifically for Louisiana alligator hides and products. We feel that there needs to be a renewal of efforts to retell the “Marsh to Market” story of sustainable use of Louisiana alligator management. With potential contractual savings in other areas this task could be expanded by Council. We recommend that this task be contracted to a professional marketing individual or firm. Another option would be to post a position and hire a marketing professional within the LDWF Alligator Management Program.

Summary

We recommend that Tasks 1 and 2 be coordinated by Agency staff. Initially the goal will be to conduct these tasks with existing man power such that the only direct cost to the Marketing and Education Fund would be travel related expenses. This will result in a significant savings to the Councils budget of \$350,000. This will leave more funding for the Council to explore new programs directed at education, marketing or research.

Task 4 can be incorporated into the implementation of Tasks 2 and 5.

We recommend contracting Tasks 3 and 5.