

Alligator Advisory Council Meeting

May 6, 2014

LDWF

New Iberia, LA

Council Members Present

Ronald Guy
Chad Courville
Errol Falgout
Tim Allen
Nathan Wall
Mike Bengé
Gerald Savoie
Al Marmande
Dwight Savoie

LDWF Present

Ruth Elsey
Buddy Baker
Bob Love
Edmond Mouton
Tanya Sturman
Lance Campbell
Jeb Linscombe
Ryan King

Council Members Absent

Others Present

Frank Ellender
Archie Domangue
Tony Howard
Marco Demory
Andre Neto
James Trahan
Quentin Morris
Ted Joanen
Serge Castagne

Motion made by Mike to approve the minutes as amended from the February meeting. Dwight seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

LSU Statistical Study- Consideration

Edmond reviewed the statistical study and the alligator survivor model. The study would move from analytical based thinking to biological based thinking with the new team. They would take the data already derived and reanalyze it. The primary question is estimating the survival of farm released alligators. The proposal is for a three year contract.

Chad asked if this was Alligator Resource money or Council money. Edmond said that it is not from Council funding, but the Department likes to consult the Council about alligator research.

Tim asked if the former project was worthless. Edmond said that it was an analytical study done by a team that does not understand the biology well. Tim asked if the return rate was determined by this

study. Edmond said that it was not. Tim is concerned that the return rate is not based on scientific data. Buddy agreed and said that we need a period of consistency in return rates in order to analysis data to determine the best return rate. Edmond said that we need more biological information so that we can make better decisions. This team will be provided with all of the past data as well. Buddy said that the alligator is an unusual species because it's a long lived species with a high reproductive rate, which means that there must be a high mortality rate. Ted Joanen said that the population is stable and in good shape, and that this study should make us feel better about what we are doing.

Chad asked what we were going to do with the information. He wants to know if we are depending on this study for validation of our return rate. He wanted to know what else we are doing to evaluate our program. Buddy said that the harvest rates and nest counts are considered. Buddy said that a statistical model lets us know if we are in the ballpark. It will not give a definitive answer. Buddy also warned against using antidotal information.

Chad asked the Department to give the Council an update of the data and trends that they are following and analyzing yearly.

Motion made by Tim to approve funding the study. Dwight seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Nathan said that he'd like to look at returning larger alligators, because they have better survival rates.

CSG Meeting- Update

Edmond said that many of the biologists from the Department will be giving talks at the meeting. Biologists from several surrounding states will give talks on alligator populations in their states. Edmond will give a talk on alligator management. There will be a talk on crocodile farming strategies. The meetings run from Monday to Friday. Saturday there will be a field trip to Rockefeller.

Shooting Methods- Discussion

Edmond said that they don't use shotguns on alligators because it devalues the meat. The meat price is at an all-time high. The ammunition for 22 caliber is available, but it takes a little more effort to get it. Edmond went over the history of the regulation change that banned shotgun use. There were a couple of surveys of hunters and over 60% were in favor of the regulation.

Other Business

Errol said that he serves as a representative of the alligator farmers. He sold his alligators and is no longer farming, but he is maintaining his license. Tim said Errol had a lifetime worth of experience and knowledge that is valuable to the Council. Mike said that technically that would be a call of the Alligator Farmers Association to make. Gerald said that he would like to speak for the farmers and he'd like to see Errol stay. Errol said he is willing to complete his term.

Frank reminded the Council about Financial Disclosures.

Gerald said that he watched Swamp People this weekend and that it is poor representation of the industry. He asked if the Department could find out who these tags belong to and if the Department could threaten to take their tags away.

Edmond said that PBS will be running the alligator documentary that the Department was involved in.

Chad said he'd like to address pursuing alligators with treble hooks and shooting free swimming alligators. Gerald suggested a rule that says if you're not a nuisance hunter then you can't have a treble hook in your boat. Gerald said that we should not tolerate the abuse of an alligator in the state. Chad said that there is nothing wrong with the Department writing a letter saying that we have observed inappropriate handling of an alligator. Buddy cautioned against changing regulations. Dwight said that he didn't think that landowners are aware of the Department's opinion of these hunting techniques. He thinks that landowners would support the Department.

Chad said he would like to encourage the Department to write letters to anyone that is observed mishandling alligators and not following the guidelines set out in the Alligator Management Program or BMP document. Examples include personal observations by Department staff, on television, and/or on the internet. Errol said he would like to add that to the next agenda. Chad said he'd like to also add discussion of treble hooks and shooting free swimming alligators to the next agenda.

Chad shared some information sent by Don Ashley on the California legislation. They are meeting with some resistance from the Humane Society of the United States on moving the sunset close to ten years. Chad mentioned that there might be a need for additional Department presence at the hearings and asked if the Department was prepared to send a representative even if there was a last minute call. Bob said that at this time the Department did not intend to send anyone back to California. Chad said that if this was an issue of travel restrictions then Don or the Department needed to be on top of this issue and that if necessary the Council could consider helping with travel cost if Department presence was necessary at the hearing.

Buddy said that they met with Craig about electronic permitting. There is a hold up with enforcement. Buddy will pursue another meeting in the near future.

Buddy said the permitting with snakes was successfully isolated from the crocodylian species. Buddy said Don did a great job with working the hallways to secure that separation.

Chad said that Glenn's value is with having him on the ground in D.C. Chad would like to communicate to him that we are satisfied with his efforts. Buddy said that he can communicate that to him. Chad said that every report he sends should say that every Louisiana delegate is aware of what is going on with the alligator industry. Chad said that given the level of support the USFWS has given to the alligator industry, including being the sponsor of some inappropriate airport displays, he doesn't want our D.C. representative to spend a lot of time garnering funding for their efforts and would rather not hear about what Glenn is doing for Fish and Wildlife Service in his report to the Council.

Ronald said he'd like to hear from enforcement again. Chad said we should get them in for the next meeting.

Motion made by Mike to adjourn. Tim seconded. Motion carried unanimously.