

Alligator Advisory Council Meeting

February 4, 2014

LDWF

New Iberia, LA

Council Members Present

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

Council Members Absent

Al Marmande
Dwight Savoie

LDWF Present

Noel Kinler
Edmond Mouton
Buddy Baker
Tanya Sturman
Lance Campbell
Jeb Linscombe
Ryan King

Others Present

Dr. Robert Reigh
Javier Navarez
Serge Castagne
Mark Merchant
Mark Staton
Bill Holmes
Shane Stelly
Stephen Sagrera
Archie Domangne
Mark Shirley
Don Ashley
Frank Ellender
Ken Meeker
Andre Nebo
Ashley Miko

Chad Courville thanked Noel Kinler for his service to the industry and the Council.

Motion made by Mike to approve the minutes as amended from the October, 2013 meeting. Errol seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

RFP Consideration for Washington D.C. Project

Noel said that the Councils have contracted for years with Glenn Delaney in D.C. to educate legislation and to seek funding for research. He has worked a lot with the feral swine issue during the last couple of

years. The department is asking the Council to approve the RFP process for this project. Consideration for a contract will come later in the spring. This contract would keep us abreast of anything happening in Washington that could affect the Alligator Council. The Department was able to get the expedited CITES tag system into place so quickly because of the relationships built in the D.C. through this contract.

Motion made by Tim to approve the publishing of the RFP. Errol seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Mike and Errol agreed to sit on the RFP review committee.

CITES and California Penal Code Update- Don Ashley

Time magazine printed a chart of recovered species. Alligators were included in the list as increasing in population by 400%.

The Economist magazine printed a negative article. There are now 14 animal rights groups in Europe. One group was able to get legislation passed that prevents gold fish from being kept in gold fish bowls. The animal rights groups are becoming strongly political.

A bill will be filed in February. This bill will remove the sunset clause.

The animals committee for CITES will meet in April. There will be some quota discussions and trade ban discussions. The python issue will be on the agenda which would demand tagging of python skins.

We have been trying to move Fish and Wildlife Service to an electronic permitting system. There are some countries in Europe that are going completely paper-free. In order to remain competitive, Don feels like the U.S. needs to move to an electronic system. Fish and Wildlife has backed off of this pursuit. Chad asked why we lost momentum and if it is important to try to pick it up again. Nathan said that the master file system has really helped and that the modern world is going paperless. Don said that it is more beneficial to the customers in moving the final products faster. Buddy said that it is probably not a lack of agreement, but more likely different priorities of time management. Don said that it looks like the Amazonian countries and African countries will have the electronic system before the U.S.

Don and Javier talked about a committee dealing with humane euthanasia. At one point there was objection to shooting, but that language was removed. The main concern of this committee was snake, but it included all reptiles to some degree. There was a bill in Switzerland that would have prohibited importing reptiles into Switzerland that are not killed humanely. The bill failed by only one vote and it will probably be proposed again. The problem is carefully defining what is humane. We kill our alligators humanely, but how humane euthanasia will be defined in Swiss law remains unknown.

The CSG meeting is coming up in May. It is the scientific voice that is heard at CITES the most.

Tim asked about the California bill. Don said that there is no doubt that there will be a sponsor for the bill. If the bill fails then it would be technically illegal to trade in alligators after January 2015.

LSU Vet School Update- Dr. Nevarez

Dr. Nevarez explained recent research. The American Vet Medical Association (AVMA) has a panel that creates guidelines for euthanasia. They have a lot of guidelines for pets, but traditionally not for trade animals. The AVMA has recently created an electronic document that is for slaughter animals. Dr. Nevarez submitted the guidelines created for alligators and the AVMA has accepted them. This lends credibility to Louisiana's assertion to the humane treatment of farmed alligators.

Dr. Nevarez brought some printed information on the non-penetrating gun.

The Animal Slaughter Act regulates the slaughter of all other species, but alligators are not regulated by this act. Dr. Nevarez said that the alligator industry is left open to criticism from animal rights groups, because there are no legal regulations that enforce the guidelines.

Chad asked if Dr. Nevarez is looking at immobilizing animals in communal pens and if that was where the electronic immobilization research was heading. Dr. Nevarez replied that they needed to analyze the results of the single pen testing before they moved anywhere else.

Motion made by Mike to move the euthanasia regulation discussion up from item 8 in the agenda to item 6. Nathan seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Noel looked at what slaughter regulations for farm-raised alligators may look like. They would provide for legal methods of slaughter. The draft regulations include four methods and a clause allowing LDWF to approve other methods. Violations could lead to a class III offense. The draft includes definitions of slaughter and pithing. LDWF is seeking approval from the Council and from the Farmers Association to move this regulation to the Commission. It would be about a four month process to get it ratified through the Commission.

Dr. Nevarez said that he cannot continue to support the industry if any farmers are severing the spine rather than destroying the brain. Nathan said that creating these regulations makes Louisiana the leaders. Mark Shirley said that the proposed regulations would allow for other companies to provide tools that fit the method. Noel agreed and said clause E allows for the Department to include other methods as they come up and are evaluated.

Buddy Baker supports the regulations, but he also thinks that the voluntary compliance has been beneficial. He would feel comfortable supporting the Louisiana alligator industry whether it is voluntary or regulated.

Chad said that he would prefer to let the Farmers Association take a position prior to the Council. Tim agreed and said that he would leave it to the farmers to make a motion or not.

Motion made by Errol to approve bringing the proposed regulations to the Commission. Nathan seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

LSU Alligator Research Facility Update- Dr. Reigh

Dr. Reigh gave a report on how diet affects growth of alligator and air/water quality. Lower protein levels improved air and water quality. This indicates that the protein was not completely being used by the animal but was contributing to waste. They tested feeds with $\frac{3}{4}$ plant products by weight. The optimal ratio contained 45% protein with a proper balance of amino acids. This year they are looking for optimal feeding rates per size to prevent feed waste. In 2015 they will do a 10-month trial comparing plant-based diet to commercial control diet. They will build a database of suitable ingredients for alligator feed.

Noel said that the Department of Agriculture will test your feed and compare it to what is recommended.

Chad said that the farmers should weigh in on what is researched next. Dr. Reigh said that they've done that. He meets with the farmers regularly.

Alligator Program Update

Noel gave a quick update on egg collections and wild harvests. He said that they have had an excellent year. 498,285 eggs were collected. There will be about 52,000 alligators released in the next two months. There is a harvest potential of close to 400,000. There are about 663 thousand alligators on farms. This is up by 18% from last year. The average price is up from \$23.50 to \$29.00 per foot from last year. Income into ARF for this year is already 1.4 million dollars and should reach 2 million.

Other Business

Noel gave an update on the LPB program consideration. Alligator will be made into one of the segments that the Department has contracted for. LPB thought they could produce the series under the current contract, but they later realized that they were short on footage. LDWF extended the contract, which would allow for some nice footage in the spring. LPB decided that other considerations prevented them from extending the time. The Department will look closely at the segment before it airs. They will have an opportunity to determine if the segment meets department standards. After this segment runs, the Council may consider doing another contract for a segment that would benefit the perception of the industry.

Mark Staton talked about a captive breeding project. The research looks at the fatty acid in the female diet that would benefit healthy egg development. They did not see any difference in fertility or hatchability, but they think there may be some issues with data collection and record keeping. The fatty acid content of the eggs was significantly different. Next year they will use a bio-marker that will create a red yolk on eggs produced from one of the diets. This will allow for easier and clearer data collection.

Buddy questioned the housing of the alligators. Even with the biomarkers that would show if the female ate the feed with the biomarker, how could they determine if the female ate both diets? Mark said that they would throw out the data from the alligators in between the feeding zones.

Nathan said that he knows the project isn't perfect, but they are doing the best they can. He thinks the Council should support it, if they have the money. Noel commented from the agency perspective. The agency had pointed out some concerns with unknown variables. The only difference this year is the introduction of the marker, which has never been used in alligators. There is a significant deviation to the scientific method here. There are too many variables. The agency would not bring this project to the Council to request funding, because it does not adhere to the scientific method.

Mark Shirley asked if farmers would start breeding in the future if this were successful. Nathan said if the egg prices were high, then they would. Noel said that the Department had run the gamut of this research at Rockefeller and it didn't prove to be successful. He said that the cost of maintaining the breeders would be higher than buying the eggs. Nathan disagreed.

Nathan suggested that Mark Staton bring the request for funding to the Farmer's Association. Gerald said that the farmers would support this.

Motion made by Nathan to approve \$7,500 for further breeding diet research. Mike seconded. Motion carried with one member, Tim Allen, opposing.

The CSG will meet in Lake Charles during the last week in May. Buddy said that the Department is participating by hosting tours at Rockefeller and providing talks. Chad asked where it would be held. It will be at McNeese State University.

Motion made by Mike to support the CSG meeting with a \$5,000 sponsorship. Errol seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Chad welcomed Edmond to the alligator program.

Chad said that Noel's party will be at 11 a.m. on Thursday.

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