

AAC Annual Report

ALLIGATOR ADVISORY COUNCIL

Louisiana's Alligator Industry

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Louisiana leads the U. S. in the production of alligator skins. After rebuilding the population through research, management and law enforcement during the 1960's, the wild harvest from 1972 through 2011 has produced over 868,000 wild skins with an estimated dockside value of \$253 million.

This wild harvest has averaged approximately 27,700 skins annually, worth around \$8.1 million dockside including meat during the past 5 years. The 2011 wild harvest of 32,325 alligators was valued at over \$7.4 million including alligator meat. In 2010, farmers sold nearly 162,000 skins, which averaged 4.42 feet (27.5 cm belly width) and were valued at over \$31 million.

The farm/ranch harvest from 1972 through 2010 produced 4.26 million skins with an estimated value of \$528 million. The world wide economic crisis in 2009 reduced price and demand for both wild and farm-raised alligators last fiscal year. During FY 2011-12, price and demand have slowly recovered.



Washington D.C. Education

Severe budgetary realities, fundamental changes in Congressional spending policies coupled with partisan election-year politics have defined the environment for the Alligator Advisory Committee (AAC) in Washington, DC for the past year; a challenging situation likely to continue through at least the November 2012 elections. The AAC has responded to this challenge with a more innovative approach as it continues to press its legislative and regulatory agenda on behalf of the Louisiana alligator industry and management program on Capitol Hill and within the Administration.

As reported last year, Congress has abandoned the traditional process of funding state-specific initiatives such as the Louisiana alligator disease research program through appropriations legislation. It has also adopted a policy which requires the identification of a specific budget offset (spending reduction or revenue increase) in order to consider any legislation that even authorizes programmatic spending such as for nutria and feral swine damage control. In fact, some Members of Congress have refused to even cosponsor any authorization bills that do not include a specific budget offset. This has put AAC's legislative agenda along with literally thousands of other authorization bills before the House and Senate in a state of uncertain limbo. While the AAC is blessed with a remarkably supportive Louisiana Delegation in both the House and Senate, this situation has presented a real challenge to our good friends on the Hill.

Nevertheless, Louisiana's Senators Mary Landrieu and David Vitter managed to move both the S. 893; the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program Act of 2011, and S. 899; the Nutria Eradication and Control Act of 2011 nutria through the Committee on Environment and Public Works and be placed on the full Senate Calendar for consideration under General Orders (see Senate Reports 112-137 and 112-94, respectively). There, the future of these bills remains uncertain until perhaps the 'Lame Duck' session of Congress after the November elections when the political climate may improve. Similarly, companion bills, championed by Louisiana Congressman Charles Boustany in the House (H.R. 1828 and H.R. 1829, respectively) and cosponsored by Louisiana Congressmen Rodney Alexander and Bill Cassidy also remain a hostage in the House Committee on Natural Resources to these new, inflexible fiscal policies.

Undeterred, the AAC is pursuing a number of innovative strategies to navigate around these fiscal and political obstacles to the funding of alligator disease research and to advancing the nutria and feral swine bills. In particular, Senator Landrieu and her staff, in some cases partnering with Congressman Boustany's office, are to be commended for their exhaustive efforts to work with the ACC in pursuing virtually every legislative opportunity including appropriations bills, Farm bills-- even a sportsmen's program bill, and to directly press officials at both the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and at the US Fish and Wildlife Service at times even at the Cabinet level to steer funds to these programs in Louisiana. At

Washington D.C. Education Continued

least some success has come from these efforts to date with the allocation of funding to five National Wildlife Refuges in Louisiana to support feral swine control activities. The AAC will continue to pursue this approach through this and the next session of Congress.



Education on the Hill

Technical Representation

The Alligator Advisory Council contracted with Ashley and Associates to provide technical representation at national and international meetings. Louisiana's expertise in these meetings has kept the state at the forefront of conservation and trade issues. The state of Louisiana has been a role model for other countries and the alligator industry has been a role model for other species.

The alligator trade is rapidly recovering from the global economic crisis and is poised to exceed the \$70 million in raw value a year, which had been previously achieved by Louisiana in early 2008. A number of trade and market factors provided the foundation for this exceptional recovery, but the primary basis beyond the luxury market recovery, was the internationally recognized Louisiana alligator model that ensures trade is legal, sustainable and verifiable (traceability and independent trade monitoring) with well-recognized benefits to commerce (economic incentives), conservation (wetlands) and communities (local people and cultures). These points are the cornerstones of the Louisiana program and have guided its development for more than 35 years.

The measure of technical representation support to Louisiana alligator programs must first take into account the considerable individual investments by farmers and the unwavering engagement of private landowners (who own 80% of the coastal marsh) to provide eggs, wild skins and stand by the estimated 6,000 trapper families who benefit from the alligator's value. The alligator's economic incentives go beyond the 50% of private lands surface revenues it generates. It helps build an interdependent constituency for the marsh and helps sustain a culture, tradition and heritage that is the fabric that makes Louisiana, Louisiana.

The day to day monitoring, participating and serving on 6 CITES Working Groups, chairing the IUCN Crocodile Specialists Group (CSG) Industry Committee, coordinat-

Technical Representation Continued

ing the annual world trade study on crocodylians (IACTS), serving on the United Nations Sustainable Sourcing Working Group, advising the Sustainable Luxury Working Group and networking with a myriad of state, federal and international organizations, largely goes unnoticed, until there is a problem.

A big problem surfaced in 2011, sparked by a Swiss documentary film exposing the insensitive, inhumane and partly illegal Indonesian snake trade. The visceral public response across Europe went straight to the heads of luxury brands, some who contemplated a ban on the use of all exotic leathers. The controversy escalated through 2012 with a luxury brand scramble to review and audit supply chains to ensure they were legal, sustainable, traceable, verifiable and humane. Simultaneously the CITES Treaty, stung by documentation of illegal trade, laundering and other compliance violations, responded with new working groups on the snake trade, captive-bred and ranched specimens, humane killing techniques and promised reviews through 2016 by their key Executive Committees.

The spark was snakes, but the backlash was to all reptiles in trade, some that are continuing weak links in the chain. The Louisiana alligator not only survived such intense scrutiny, but further enhanced their international benchmark as the best sustainable use model in the world. So when the market recovery began, demand for alligator specifically soared even higher. The point is Louisiana was ready for inspection with almost 4 decades of commitment to research, management, enforcement, compliance protocols and consistent technical engagement with CITES, IUCN, USFWS, trade and conservation groups. The silver lining in all this is the Louisiana alligator enhanced its brand as the most legal, sustainable and verifiable in world trade.

Such success attracts a crowd and to maintain economic sustainability, grow the market toward \$100 million a year, continue a 50% classic leather world market share, remain competitive in world markets and achieve more public awareness of sustainable use benefits,



the next 5 years will be the most important since the program's inception in 1975. This annual report will summarize the activities that helped achieve some of these accomplishments, but more importantly, will outline a strategy to help take it to the next level—certifiable trade that expedites legal trade, mitigates illegal or unsustainable trade, better informs regulatory agencies, further engages the international CITES trade treaty, begins a more pro-active conservation

Don Ashley serving on a CITES panel.

education agenda and provides a base for more vertical integration (value-added) of the most valuable leather in the world.

The numbers from the 2012 International Alligator/Crocodile Trade Study (IACTS, thru 2010 data) compiled in conjunction with the World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC) in Cambridge, England reflect a strong industry. The alligator recovered to 369,731 skins exported in 2010 which is 57% of total world classic trade. This puts alligator exports over the previous decade at 323,000 avg. annually of the 577,000 avg. classics per year over the same period, or 56% sustained for 10 years. Important to note, total classics in trade exceeded the historical peak of half a million skins a year by 15% average for the past decade, confirming increased and sustained new demand.

The global exports of crocodylian meat increased about ten percent from 2009 to 2010 to about 500 tons, which remains well below the peaks of about 900 tons in 2006 and 2007. The recent dramatic increase in US alligator meat values may encourage more exports, particularly of caiman meat which recorded no exports from 2008 to 2010. The continued lack of adequate import guidelines, labeling requirements and quality standards for imported crocodylian meat may have negative impacts on US markets if strong demand continues.

While the current markets for crocodylian skins, meat and finished products are the best since 2008, the decades of research, management and institutional framework that helped restore world trade in crocodylians are often overlooked. It is important to provide this historical perspective to new or recently engaged players in the trade (particularly luxury brands) because CITES downlistings for crocodylians were not specifically for commerce, but as a tool to increase the value of species, habitats and shared benefits with local people. Louisiana remains a model in this respect, but industry, trade groups and other range states need to do more to develop dedicated funding sources that ensures more credible sustainable programs.



Buddy Baker, Don Ashley, and Don McLaughlin at a CITES meeting.

LSU School of Human Ecology

The Alligator Council worked with LSU School of Human Ecology to promote global consumer adoption of alligator leather products through increasing awareness of grade three alligator hides by designers and manufacturers. Dr. McRoberts traveled to New York and promoted grade 3 alligator hides to educators at Parson's New School of Design and to the International Textiles and Apparel Association of Educators in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Grade 3 alligator hides were promoted to Siquorney Morrison, a pattern maker and millinery designer employed by Goorin. The national hat company based in San Francisco liked Morrison's alligator hat line so much that they incorporated the exclusive line in their North Beach, CA store and expanded to their Manhattan and New Orleans locations.

Dr. McRoberts developed and presented a proposal to the first lady, Mrs. Jindal, promoting the incorporation of grade 3 alligator hides into her inaugural suit. Although she decided against the use of the belt for the inauguration, she seemed eager to adopt a patent black alligator clutch and belt into her wardrobe. Dr. McRoberts met with accessory designer, Jill Unis, to oversee and direct clutch and belt execution.

Dr. Lui incorporated the project into a senior class, advanced topic in apparel merchandising. A course project was designed to encourage students to explore market potentials for products made of Louisiana locally produced grade 3 alligator hides. Student research showed that the top potential product categories for developing products using grade 3 alligator hides are fashion accessories, sports accessories, and home furnishings.

Dr. McRoberts completed the alligator demonstration DVD and copied it for distribution. She negotiated and confirmed the development of a new "Eco-gator" category at the Fashion Group International's Dallas Career Day Competition 2012. This professional fashion show is the largest in the country and was comprised of 37 universities and/or schools representing approximately 12 states and 1,058 student participants. Each participating university and/or school received two grade 3 alligator skins and a demonstration DVD. She was invited to conduct workshops at Parson's and SCAD demonstrating alligator design incorporation, and construction in the future.

Dr. McRoberts traveled to Beijing, China with Dr. Chuanlan Liu to present grade 3 alligator research at the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology (BIFT) - International Textiles and Apparel Association (ITAA) Joint Symposium. The presentation paper, "From Marsh to Market: A Case Study of Creative Strategy for Streamlining

Student alligator designs at Fashion



Funding, Research, and Teaching: Promoting grade 3 Alligator Skins" will be published as a chapter in the international symposium book. Researchers at the presentation demonstrated enthusiasm and interest in the project.

On Friday, April 13, 2012, sixteen contestants from eight different fashion universities and/or schools participated in the FGI Dallas Career Day Eco-gator category Competition promoting the use of grade 3 alligator skins. Observations demonstrated that the DVD was efficient in demonstrating cutting layout and construction methods. However, at least half of the competition participants could have benefited from additional design input for more advanced incorporation of alligator leather. This supported future instruction of alligator design and construction workshops. At least half of the designs were very marketable and aesthetically pleasing. The top three design students were selected and awarded monetary prizes totaling \$1,000.

Senior merchandising and apparel design students in Dr. Liu's entrepreneurship course have conducted market studies identifying market segments, and consumer motivation to purchase grade 3 alligator products. The students formed thirteen teams to develop a business plan. Each team's business plan included at least one product category or product line made of Louisiana grade 3 alligator skins. Those creative lines included fashion accessories for men, sports accessories, gifts for tourists, and home furnishing and décor. Through market research and business plan development, students promoted the grade 3 alligator hides through online and offline word of mouth.



First place eco-gator design

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The Alligator Advisory Council operates from the Alligator Resource Funds.

Alligator Resource Funds	
Budgeted	\$307,753.00
Salaries	\$30,024.00
Related Benefits	\$11,230.08
Travel	\$117.34
Operating Services- <i>i.e. cell phone, internet service</i>	\$824.74
Supplies- <i>i.e. printing supplies, office supplies</i>	\$758.27
Professional Services- <i>i.e. , technical contract</i>	\$185,400.00
Other Services– LSU	\$50,000.00
Acquisitions	\$2,082.86
Alligator Resource Funds Expended	\$280,437.29

A A C M e m b e r s

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