

# 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 2012 has produced over 870,000 wild skins. The alligator industry, including the wild harvest, egg collection and farm raised alligators, has generated over \$893,000,000 in economic benefit to the state of Louisiana.



This wild harvest has averaged approximately 27,490 skins annually, worth around \$7.6 million dockside including meat during the past 5 years. The 2012 wild harvest of 33,979 alligators was valued at over \$11.5 million including alligator meat. In 2011, farmers sold 244,551 skins, which averaged 26.26 cm belly width and were valued at over \$51 million. Since 1986 the Louisiana Alligator ranching program has collected over 7.5 million eggs and returned over 860,000 healthy alligators back to the wild.

Despite the world wide economic crisis in 2009, which initially reduced the price and demand for alligators, the value of genuine Louisiana alligators has continued to recover and is approaching 2008 values.



## Washington D.C. Education

Notwithstanding decades of demonstrated success in the US and globally, the need to defend the model of sustainable use wildlife management remains today, even within our own government. This model is, of course, the foundation of Louisiana's long history of successfully managing its fur and alligator resources with immeasurable benefit to countless species of fish and wildlife that share their habitat and provide industry and recreation so important to the economy and people of Louisiana. Given that this win-win success story has been repeated all over the country and all over the world, one might expect any opposition to have disappeared long ago. This is not always the case.

At the 2013 Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in Thailand, a team of State wildlife managers found themselves fighting against a proposal that would threaten the sustainable use program for Polar Bears that has been vital to the culture and economy of the Inuit communities of the Arctic region. This team of state agency wildlife managers works collectively through the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), an umbrella organization which pools the resources of the 50 state fish and wildlife agencies to work towards causes that promote common state agency goals. The AFWA CITES team includes a state agency representative from each of the four regional wildlife agency associations in the country. Louisiana is represented through the Southeastern region whose representative is an employee of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. In representing the interest of the 50 state wildlife agencies the AFWA CITES team stays vigilant on proposals with potential to undermine sustainable use wildlife management programs throughout the world.

The proposal to end the sustainable use of polar bears by the Inuits (many of which are US citizens) was strongly supported by the Humane Society of the US (HSUS) and other animal rights activists. Defending the sustainable-use of Polar Bears at CITES and within the US Government has become synonymous with defending the very model of sustainable-use worldwide. Thanks to AFWA's CITES team working with some of the biggest names in sustainable use wildlife conservation including Safari Club International, World Wildlife Fund, Traffic and the IUCN Polar Bear Specialist Group, the proposal was soundly defeated.

It appears that despite the failed attempt that threatened the sustainable-use model at CITES, already 21 Members of the US House of Representatives have



***Education on the Hill***

sponsored House Resolution 220 which includes provisions encouraging CITES “to adopt stronger protections for Polar Bears, bluefin tuna, and other endangered species” at the next CITES meeting in 2016. We can only assume that the polar bear proposal will resurface. It’s a pivotal battle for sustainable use. In Louisiana, we have watched the polar bear issue closely because of the significance to our sustainable use programs for CITES listed species such as alligator, bobcat and river otter.

The AAC and FAC have a long history of working in close cooperation with the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies on the really big issues that either threaten or advance our interests. Defending the sustainable use model on all fronts is certainly one of them. We are not only working to make sure this legislation is never enacted but also to thwart efforts by the animal right community to use it as a centerpiece of a public relations campaign that will provide both a rallying point for their cause to launch yet another attack on sustainable use at the next CITES meeting in 2016.

## T e c h n i c a l   R e p r e s e n t a t i o n

A major accomplishment in 2013 through the LAAC Technical Representation Projects included the adoption of an expedited CITES export Permit Process (Masterfile System) that substantially reduces issuance times. Several Louisiana alligator farmers provided a significant boost to the FWS discussions in late 2012 because of permit issuance delays and frequently inconsistent processing times. LDWF immediately followed up with a series of FWS contacts including a New Orleans port meeting with state, regional and Washington FWS representatives as well as industry and Congressional representatives to outline concerns and solutions. The alligator Masterfile System, implemented by FWS in early 2013, is an account-based system for alligator farmers with partially completed export permits issued for up to 6 months that only require the attachment of a tag number manifest to begin the export process. The Masterfile System substantially saves times and reduces permit costs for alligator farmers making frequent international shipments.

In cooperation with the American Watch Association (AWA) a follow up initiative with FWS also resulted in a Masterfile System for manufactured products which included both exports and re-exports. The re-export issue for luxury brands (particularly watchbands which are 90% alligator) is important because it enables them to more efficiently utilize the US as a distribution center to Canada and Latin America. Re-export certificates that often took several weeks or longer to issue are now pre-approved and are valid for re-export as long as proof of original import clearance is provided.

The next steps with FWS and CITES is to propose a pilot electronic permitting (and reporting) system similar to those developed in Switzerland, United Kingdom, France and a growing list of CITES Parties. A presentation was made to the major luxury brands in Washington, D.C. in May on the Louisiana Alligator Program which also included a panel from FWS, the president of the Swiss Watchmakers Association (Federation Hologore) and head of Swiss Management Authority as Chair of the CITES Working Group on Electronic Permitting. For the alligator to continue to sustain more

## Technical Representation Continued



*Mathias Loertscher, Head of Swiss Management Authority on marsh tour*

than 50% of the world market share of classic leather it is imperative the U.S. CITES permit process be expedited to remain internationally competitive. A completely “paperless” electronic permit system will be tested in 2014 between Switzerland and France. Discussions with FWS and Switzerland continue to consider a pilot project in the US that facilitates the electronic transfer of required CITES documents for validation including the original import permit which would further fast track re-export permits of manufactured products.

The importance of electronic permitting systems was again underscored during the CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP) in Bangkok, Thailand this year. The list of species covered under the CITES Treaty (now with 178 member nations) continues to increase (most notably 6 shark and 3 ray species added during the March, CoP). Important related topics from Bangkok CITES CoP was the announcement by Japan that it would officially recognize the Personal Effects Resolution, which allows travelers to carry up to 4 alligator or crocodile finished products in transit without acquiring any CITES permitting. That leaves only China as a major importing and exporting country that does not recognize Personal Effects (this Resolution was adopted by CITES in 2002 in Chile as part of the LAAC priorities that year). A “white paper” on Personal Effects was sent to the Chinese Management Authority at their request this year following a visit to Louisiana last year and they have agreed to officially review the topic before the next CoP (South Africa, 2016).

Two other important outputs from the 2013 CITES Conference was the absence of a second attempt to pass a small-leathergoods exemption (which would have established a poor CITES precedent and increased incentives for illegal trade in Appendix I crocodylian species) and an international effort to address the continuing concerns over python trade traceability, sustainability and humane killing guidelines. Both Animal Rights Groups and the general public tend to lump all reptile trades (and their problems) together so it is important the python trade addresses the issues of traceability and sustainability (particularly impacts from illegal trade) as well as adoption of better Humane Killing Guidelines recommended by the Swiss-led expert panel. These guidelines have been submitted to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) for consideration as the international standard for Humane Killing of Reptiles. The Swiss Chair of the panel was impressed with the Louisiana Humane Killing techniques, research into animal welfare concerns and commitment by both the range state and industry to reasonably address these kinds of concern. He toured the marsh, two alligator farms and met with LDWF to discuss a range of issues this year.

The videographer from the Swiss national TV program that previously aired the controversial python film did not comply with numerous requests by both LDWF and alligator farmers for reasonable time to address their requests for documentary film coverage, which resulted in a negative airing in Switzerland. The program content was not well received by any of the CITES authorities or other experts in the European Union and was described by one authority as “yellow journalism”. The Swiss national TV attempt to undermine the positive marsh to market story of the Louisiana alligator program was not picked up by any other European media outlets and did not result in any known public reaction. The experience should be a wake-up call that more effort needs to be made in conservation education that better explains the sustainable benefits to commerce (economic incentives), conservation (wetlands) and communities (local people and cultures).

The California sunset clause allowing the sale of alligator and other crocodilian products will be up for renewal or permanent adoption in 2014. One concern is whether Animal Rights groups might try to use the California legislative hearings as a forum for publicity and fundraising by raising as many negative stories associated with other reptiles in trade as possible. The LAAC through the Technical Representation projects is developing a strategy to counter any such attempts and successfully continue the sale of manufactured alligator or other legal crocodilian products as was previously accomplished in 2006 and 2009.

The publication this year of the 2012 IACTS Report (International Alligator/Crocodile Trade Study) marks the 30th anniversary of this trade monitoring tool which was initiated by Louisiana in 1982. The IACTS report is well-respected worldwide as an authoritative source on the export and import of all crocodilians in trade as well as a trade monitoring tool that helps document inconsistent or potentially illegal trade in crocodilian skins. The IACTS report provides the basis for trade discussions during the IUCN Crocodile Specialist Group meetings (Sri Lanka, May, 2013) and in CITES Working Group meetings on issues of Personal Effects, Small Leathergoods, Electronic Permitting and a range of other international issues.

Important to note the original recommendation for the Universal tagging of all crocodilians in trade was made in the first IACTS report (1984) which was adopted by all range country crocodilian downlistings until 1994 when CITES adopted a comprehensive Resolution requiring all further crocodilian proposals include a compulsory tagging requirement. This remains the foundation of a crocodilian trade that is legal, sustainable and verifiable (traceable and independently monitored).

*CITES Conference, Bangkok*



## LSU School of Human Ecology

The Council contracted with the LSU School of Human Ecology to promote grade 3 alligator skins. There is an exhibition room in Louisiana State University's School of Human Ecology which displays grade 3 alligator garments and products executed for this grant. The room is intended to provide a space where visitors and interested parties can view the projects created through the Marsh to Market grant.

Chuanlan Liu traveled back to China in Summer 2012 and promoted grade 3 alligator hides during her teaching and tours to Shanghai and Guangdong province. One major manufacturer with the master license to produce Ford Jeans, children's wear, luggage, shoes, fashion and sports accessories showed a strong interest in using grade 3 alligator hides to develop his product lines. Dr. Liu also discussed with the associate dean of the Beijing Institute of Clothing Technology (BIFT) the potential to collaborate on promoting grade 3 alligator hides. The conversation was very constructive and people in BIFT showed a strong interest in working on this win-win project.

Lisa McRoberts traveled to Hawaii and promoted grade 3 alligator hides to designers and to the International Textiles and Apparel Association of educators in Oahu. She pitched the idea of developing an alligator design competition. Further discussions were held regarding the feasibility of entering the alligator into a category for the International Textiles and Apparel Association 2013. She also met with designers, luxury boutique owners, buyers and members of the Hawaiian press to promote grade 3 alligator skins.

McRoberts also conducted market research in Europe. She met with leather industry professionals in Munich and Berlin and conducted market analysis, contacted and promoted grade 3 alligator skins to designers, manufacturers, and retailers.

Anthony Ryan Auld, winner of Project Runway, Season 2, was afforded grade 3 alligator to design Joanna Cole, then editor of Marie Claire magazine in New York, an outfit for a fashion event.

Several requests for grade 3 skins were handled by McRoberts including a request from fashion designer Laurence King for his spring collection to be shown in a New Orleans Fashion Show and put into production as well as a request from Ohio State University.

Grade 3 alligator hide design, patterning and construction was demonstrated in a New Orleans Fashion Week workshop. The focus of garment construction was on bustier development.

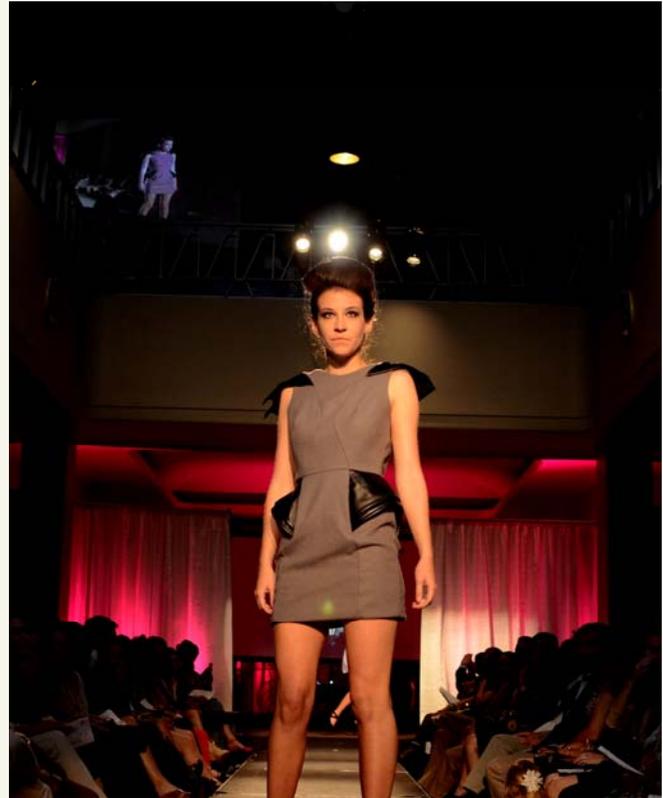
*Student alligator design at Fashion Week*



Undergraduate and graduate students received instruction on the use of the leather industrial sewing machines. Undergraduate senior design students completed the construction of their alligator garments and collections. Students toured the Reptile Tannery of Louisiana and participated in a grading demonstration.

Marsh on the Catwalk Alligator Competition was held as a part of the Hemline Fashion Show at Lyceum Dean. Three winners were announced and an article ran in *The Advocate*.

Photographic data captured during a swamp tour on a foggy day looked like John Drysdale artwork. Seven photos were developed into a new Drysdale-like scene using Adobe suite for the silk lining print. Muslins were draped and proofs were tested for reversibility. The coat with detachable sleeves and collar was tailored with front silk piping inset, front grade 3 alligator panel and silk lining. The Wolf size 8 coat reverses to a dress.



*Student design*

## 2012 - 2013 Expenditures

The Alligator Advisory Council operates from the Alligator Resource Funds.

<b>Alligator Resource Funds</b>	
<b>Budgeted</b>	<b>\$309,460.00</b>
Salaries	\$28,689.60
Related Benefits	\$12,093.14
Travel	\$64.00
Operating Services- <i>i.e. cell phone, internet service</i>	\$360.05
Supplies- <i>i.e. printing supplies, office supplies</i>	\$261.80
Professional Services- <i>i.e. , technical contract</i>	\$185,450.00
Other Services– LSU and A & M College	\$41,284.00
Acquisitions	\$0
<b>Alligator Resource Funds Expended</b>	<b>\$268,252.59</b>

## A A C M e m b e r s

### Landowner Representatives

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