

# 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 2010 has produced over 836,000 wild skins with an estimated dockside value of \$246 million.

This wild harvest has averaged approximately 27,200 skins annually, worth around \$9 million dockside including meat during each of the past 5 years. The 2010 wild harvest of 26,449 alligators was valued at over \$5.3 million including alligator meat. In 2009, farmers sold 301,000 skins, which averaged 4.6 feet (28.6 cm belly width) and were valued at over \$47 million.

The farm/ranch harvest from 1972 through 2009 produced 4.1 million skins with an estimated value of \$497 million. The world wide economic crisis in 2009 reduced price and demand for both wild and farm-raised alligators during the current fiscal year.



## Washington D.C. Education

The Alligator Advisory Council (AAC) has long maintained an active and visible presence in Washington, DC, both on Capitol Hill and with the Administration. It remains the definitive voice for the Louisiana alligator industry and “go-to” source of information for Washington policymakers.

The dramatic downturn in the national and global economies that had such a major impact on the alligator industry also had an impact on AAC activities in Washington during the 2009-2010 fiscal year. Unlike last year, the AAC was not able to participate in the Washington, DC Mardi Gras where it had previously sponsored a booth and provided alligator meat for preparation by notable Louisiana Chefs. Members of the AAC were also unable to participate in their traditional Washington, DC ‘Fly-In’ to meet with the Louisiana Delegation. These activities are a very important component of AAC’s efforts to educate, increase visibility and build relationships with the Louisiana Delegation and other key players in Washington. The Council hopes to resume these activities in the next fiscal year.

Nevertheless, outreach and education activities remained a top priority for the AAC during the year particularly with several freshmen Congressmen on the Louisiana Delegation and the larger need to keep the entire Delegation informed of the unusual dynamics within the industry. As always, the AAC meets and communicates with the Louisiana Delegation on a regular basis, but it was very fortunate that Noel Kinler, Alligator Program manager for the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries was able to step in and continue his characteristically expert participation in the Fly-In so that the AAC could maintain continuity in this important annual event. Consequently, the entire AAC agenda of issues and information was presented to each of the House and Senate Members of the Louisiana Delegation.

The AAC also continued its ongoing efforts to secure annual appropriations for Dr. Nevarez’s alligator disease research at LSU in the FY10 and FY11 funding cycles. This outstanding research has been funded by Congress since FY 2005 in direct response to the ACC’s efforts in close cooperation with the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries. This effort was expanded in the FY10 and FY11 cycles to seek appropriations to supplement alligator industry contributions towards the construction of a new alligator research facility on the LSU Campus. As is often the case, the FY10 appropriations process was slow to move and, although earmarks for such projects have become increasingly limited and difficult to secure under new Congressional rules and federal budget realities, the Council was very fortunate that the final FY 10 Agriculture Appropriations bill included level funding for continuing the alligator disease research program. Special thanks are due to Senator Landrieu and Congressman Melancon who were specifically credited in the Appropriations report for securing this critical funding.

## Washington D.C. Education Continued

The AAC also had a busy year on the legislative front by sponsoring in close coordination with the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries and in partnership with the Fur Advisory Council an initiative to establish a program to develop control methods for the exploding population of feral swine and to minimize damage these invasive species are having on some of the most productive alligator habitat in the State. The introduction of the “Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program Act of 2009” by Senators Landrieu and Vitter, represents a proactive effort that is in many ways patterned after the successful Louisiana nutria control program. Substantial progress was made in moving this bill through the legislative process during the year and the prognosis for enactment is excellent.



*Education on the Hill*

## General Education



*School Presentation*

alligators and that a presentation held the students' attention completely. "It was very informative and interesting."

Most formal presentations are about an hour long. Topics include biology and the history of the alligator management program and how alligator farms contribute to the stable wild population.

Free lessons plans are available on the Council's website, [www.alligatorfur.com](http://www.alligatorfur.com). Teachers also received CDs filled with educational materials at educational programs.

From July 2010 to November 2011, the Alligator Advisory Council's education program coordinated with other educators around the state and presented at schools, libraries, and public events. This year the Council attended 11 school presentations, nine library presentations, and two scout presentations.

The Louisiana Science Teacher's Association is a big event for the Council and serves as an opportunity to put educational materials in the hands of teachers, who will use them in the classroom. Public events included National Hunting and Fishing Day and "AgMagic" at the Sate Fair. School days at the Louisiana State Fair brings busloads of students through at a pace that is conducive for mini wildlife presentations.

Children consistently expressed interest in the content of the presentations and always wanted to know more. For example, one teacher even wrote that the students were captivated by the subject of

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

The Alligator Advisory Council contracted with Ashley and Associates to provide technical representation on the national and international levels. The alligator maintained a 54% market share of the classic leather trade in 2009 based on the 2011 International Alligator Crocodile Trade Study (IACTS Report). IACTS remains a key component of Louisiana Technical Representation projects, compiling an annual trade study of all crocodilian species in trade in cooperation with the World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC) in Cambridge, England.

IACTS data is based on Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) annual reports required of the 172 signatory countries to the CITES Treaty, which regulates international trade of all wildlife and plant species that could be impacted by trade. The alligator and some other crocodilian species remain a CITES model of sustainable use, based on trade that is legal, sustainable and annually verifiable (IACTS Report).

Over the last decade (2000-2009) the average annual exports of alligator skins were 310,000 skins a year, or about 56% of the total classic leather market. This is a significant accomplishment considering the alligator only accounted for 31,000 total skins exported in 1986 resulting in a tenfold increase over the last 25 years. Both farm and wild alligator skin prices are recovering from the 2008 global financial crisis and total economic value to Louisiana will soon return to at least \$60 million a year achieved before the economic downturn.

The potential is for increased value considering an average of about 600,000 classic skins were in trade from 2003-2007, with a peak of 708,000 skins in 2006, compared with a ten year average (2000-2009) of 556,000 classic a year. The keys to future growth and increased value include:

- Streamline and expedite CITES permitting and shipment clearance procedures to remove impediments to legal trade;
- Reduce negative images, misleading or inaccurate propaganda and replace with a more positive and balanced message about sustainable use benefits to wetlands, wildlife and people and;
- Initiate conservation education projects to better inform government, trade, interest groups and the public about sustainable benefits to commerce, conservation and communities.

Alligator Advisory Council representatives attended a meeting in Washington DC with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and LDWF representatives to discuss ways to streamline and expedite the CITES permit and clearance process as well as mitigate negative airport displays (Atlanta). USFWS was encouraging that a "Masterfile" permit system could be considered for alligator farm skin exports by pre-registering farms, confirming compliance with state requirements (license, inspection, annual reporting, etc.).

## Technical Representation Continued

Once inventory stock is verified, pre-signed CITES export permits can be issued for 6 months at a cost of \$5 each instead of \$125 for individual shipment application.

USFWS Law Enforcement division has also agreed to review the content and substance of the Atlanta Airport display which displays confiscated crocodilian products along with ivory, rhino horn, spotted cats and sea turtle products. The point is the USFWS "Buyer Beware" message against purchasing wildlife products can easily be misinterpreted by a hurried traveler as "Don't Buy", particularly when inaccurate text claims most crocodile and caiman are illegal. One solution would be to correct the misleading text and replace with specific geographic warnings for areas like West Africa where the majority of confiscated items originate from a single endangered species, the Dwarf Crocodile listed as CITES Appendix I prohibiting international trade. Another suggestion is to also include a positive sustainable use display explaining the Marsh to Market success story of the American Alligator with benefits to wetlands, wildlife and people. The impacts from negative and misleading messages on future consumers of alligator and other wildlife products should not be underestimated and a more comprehensive conservation education initiative should be implemented.



*Negative Use Display  
at Atlantic Airport*

### CITES

The CITES Standing Committee meeting in Geneva, Switzerland was the most active in several years concerning issues of expediting the legal trade and streamlining the CITES permitting process through electronic permitting protocols. The CITES e-permitting Working Group was standing room only with more than 75 attendees (including the Sec. General) rather than the usual core of 15 or so regular members. Interest was spurred by the Sec. General and the announcement that Switzerland's pilot bi-lateral agreement with the United Kingdom was successful and the program would be expanded

## Technical Representation Continued

in the next month to include France, which would integrate Custom's data, codes and guidelines for the first time in an almost real-time permitting and reporting database. This was possible through an innovative linkage between UK and France databases enhanced by a "remote server" developed by the World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC) called EPIX (Electronic Permitting Information Exchange). This system not only incorporates all of the international protocols and standardized codes that includes World Customs Organization (WCO) requirements with the e-freight initiative of the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the United Nations Electronic Commerce and Business initiative (UN/CEFACT) and other e-trade initiatives in the Czech Republic, Thailand, Brazil and others.

The WCMC remote server capability (EPIX) would allow even developing countries to access and utilize the e-permitting process. The eight South American countries bordering the Amazon are developing a compatible e-permit system and Brazil announced it intends to be fully electronic, including signature if required, and will provide the technology to all Latin American countries interested.

The US unfortunately lags behind these e-permitting initiatives which could be a key building block for expedited shipment clearance procedures through the intended "clearinghouse" for permit data, conduits to connect national systems and Customs as well as port inspections access. The average CITES import/export process requires 27 people, 40 documents and 300 copies according to a UN study and their representative to the WG supported e-permitting as a way to universally check documents, check the goods for compliance, improve security and efficiency of trade.

Council representatives met individually with the head of the US CITES delegation, Chair of the WG (Switzerland) and Secretariat to urge more participation by the US in a process that clearly reduces paper, time, clearance protocols and inefficiency. The CITES Secretariat will send a representative to Washington, DC and Switzerland is briefing the US Permit Office on their "single window" system for standardized shipment information compliant with all transit-related regulatory requirements, linked through EPIX with all participating CITES permitting authorities.

### **Personal Effects**

This CITES Resolution 13.7 was first adopted in 2002 as a way to remove obstacles for travelers who purchased or carried Appendix II personal products in or out of signatory countries. The alligator and other crocodilians championed this exemption based on model sustainable use programs, but it was expanded at the Secretariat's request to help solve thorny issues with small quantities of caviar (sturgeon), rainsticks, queen conch shells, etc. Hence the cautionary limits of four crocodilian products with lesser quantities of other species. CITES rarely supports any exemptions to the Treaty because of perceived loopholes for illegal trade and the current PE resolution has become more confusing with the issues of sport hunting trophies and inconsistent import/export requirements by signatory countries (stricter domestic measures).

## Technical Representation Continued

The relevance to trade is travelers who are confused, intimidated or harassed at Customs are discouraged from purchasing or carrying products that are not only legal, but provide the economic incentives that drive sustainable use benefits for conservation and communities. We've had considerable success with these issues at CITES because of the alligator's track record, but much more needs to be done, particularly the issue of "common carrier" shipment.

The existing resolution requires the product to accompany the person (worn or baggage) or be part of a household move. A recent example by a Swatch representative visiting Louisiana illustrates a remaining impediment to trade. He was on a two-week US business trip and tried to purchase 3 pairs of expensive Lucchese alligator boots. He either had to wear or pack them, because shipment back to Geneva required an export permit (usually a week or longer to acquire). The boots remain in Texas and a \$7000 sale was lost, to the detriment of trade and conservation economic incentives. A solution to common carrier personal effects shipments is needed and Council representatives met with FWS representatives to suggest an import/export "green lane" through designated ports that offered the opportunity for FWS inspection, but exempted the permit requirements. This process would also facilitate repair and return of expensive luxury brand handbags or other leathersgoods. Another related issue is "stricter domestic measures" with many CITES Parties (most notably 27 EU countries) requiring duplicative import permits for many commercial shipments and some personal effects re-exports. These topics should be included on the FWS policy level briefings to further engage enforcement personnel and the EU toward pro-active solutions for legal trade.

### **Captive-bred, Ranching and Source Codes**

The widespread use and increasing abuse of captive-bred (CB) designations for CITES permits was brought to a head in Geneva, primarily by the strong, emotional public response to Asian snake trade documentaries that aired in Switzerland and the EU in 2010/2011. But the problem extends much further than the snake trade as some CITES Parties increasingly forbid wild caught (W) imports, encouraging false documentation, which facilitates outright laundering of wild specimens through the relatively few legitimate captive-breeding operations that exist. Six SC delegates took the Plenary floor to urge a new WG to address this complicated issue and an equal number of non-governmental observers (NGO's) followed with strong support beyond permit source code designations by raising the issues of laundering and non-detriment findings, which is a primary mission of CITES.

### **Snake Trade**

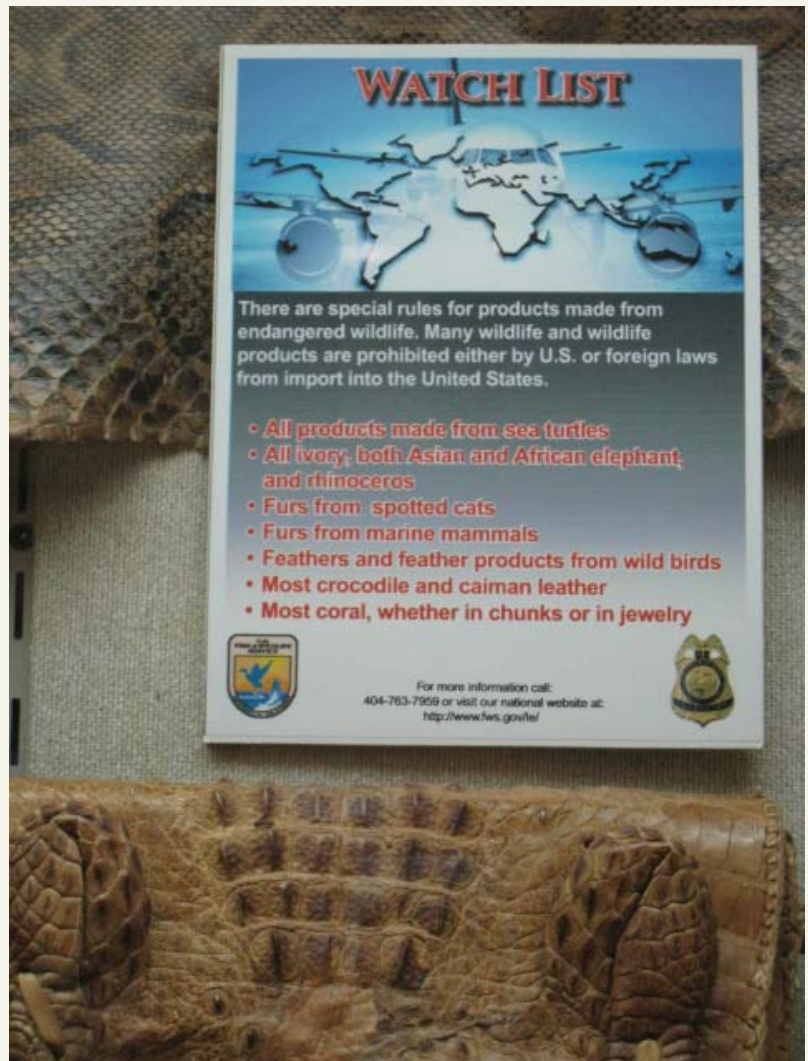
CITES Standing Committee was also very active on the controversial issues raised concerning the southeast Asian snake trade and allegations of widespread inhumane treatment. The controversy was prompted by a pair of Swiss TV documentaries that filmed very graphic killing and skinning scenes that resulted in substantial public response against the trade in Europe. High profile animal rights groups like PETA (People for Ethical Treatment of Animals) and Humane Societies International in-

## Technical Representation Continued

creased pressure on retail stores, notably Tiffany's in New York, that withdrew all snakeskin products from the flagship store as well as the company website offerings. PETA also increased efforts to target high profile stars like Victoria Beckham and others for their use of exotic leather products, including alligator.

In the past 12 months shoe company Cole Hahn (Nike subsidiary) and Overstock.com have both stopped selling exotic leather products including alligator. And Swatch, was a near miss with the Swiss based company continuing to use alligator after a favorable review of Louisiana's program, but resists the use of other exotic leathers until better compliance and sourcing guidelines are established.

Clearly the weakest links in the reptile trade can result in serious backlashes to even model programs, including Louisiana. The general public and international politicians rarely make distinctions between reptile leathers, which makes the proposed "ban bill" in the Swiss Parliament and a reported similar initiative through the European Union Parliament worrisome developments. The alligator and Louisiana must distinguish its model program from most others in the reptile trade. A better pre-emptive strategy is needed to offset the agendas of animal rights activists that should begin with a concerted effort to better inform government, trade, interests groups and the public about sustainable benefits to commerce, conservation and communities.



*Crocodilian Leather on Display at the Atlantic Airport*

## LSU School of Human Ecology

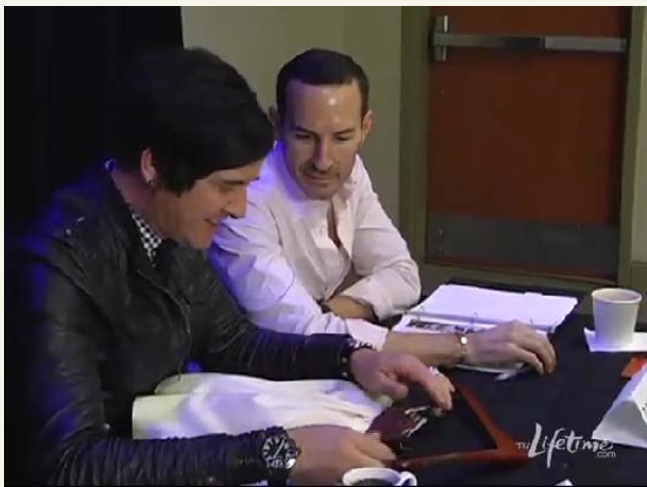
The Alligator Advisory Council contracted with the LSU School of Human Ecology to promote the use of lower grade alligator skins. Alligator promotional instruction was developed and incorporated into two courses. Research and market analyses were conducted to prohibit the production of existing products. An instructional video was developed for educating designers how to design, lay out and construct garments/products made of grade 3 alligator skins.

Students in both courses were introduced to the background of the alligator industry in Louisiana, from “marsh to market” concept emphasizing the tremendous financial losses suffered by a community that has resiliently endured multiple hurricanes and now, the most catastrophic oil spill in history. Students were measured on social responsibility before their participation in the alligator project as a baseline.

The undergraduate students were introduced to alligator skins in the classroom to increase awareness. Senior level design students, designed, and began construction on their fashion forward garments using grade 3 alligator skins that would appeal to mainstream consumers. The graduate students conducted research on existing leather and alligator products, and explored new uses for grade 3 alligator skins. Then they performed independent market analyses regarding their initial creative design concepts. There were class discussions regarding the various approaches towards increasing the marketability of these products. Graduate students were instructed on techniques for the development of their products.

Fashion show preparations were conducted. Initial preparation included venue selection, recruitment of models, hair and make-up volunteers, and technical services including lighting, stage and sound selection. Various planning meetings were held for the determination of the theme, speed and music of the show. Jurors were selected including a representative from the press (the Advocate), a fashion illustrator that previously worked in New York, and a costumer and founder of NOLA Fashion Week. The invitation was designed, executed and sent out.

Discussions between the lead investigator and Fashion Group International's Dallas Career Day chair were initiated for the incorporation of an alligator category in the 2012 Dallas Career Day Competition. This year's participation included 11 states and 31 universities. Participation will expose the use of grade 3 alligator skins to thousands of design and merchandising students on a national basis.



*Anthony Ryan Auld shows alligator designs on Project Runway, a Lifetime Show.*



## 2 0 0 1 0 - 2 0 1 1   E x p e n d i t u r e s

The Alligator Advisory Council operates from the Alligator Resource Funds.

<b>Alligator Resource Funds</b>	
<b>Budgeted</b>	<b>\$300,000.00</b>
Salaries	\$28,689.60
Related Benefits	\$10,164.44
Travel	\$0
Operating Services- <i>i.e. cell phone, internet service</i>	\$1,631.32
Supplies- <i>i.e. printing supplies, office supplies</i>	\$795.83
Professional Services- <i>i.e. education contract, technical contract</i>	\$190,500.00
Other Services– LSU	\$25,000.00
<b>Total Alligator Resource Funds Budgeted</b>	<b>\$300,000.00</b>
<b>Alligator Resource Funds Expended</b>	<b>\$256,781.19</b>

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