

Alligator Advisory Council Meeting

February 4, 2015

LDWF

New Iberia, LA

Council Members Present

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

Council Members Absent

LDWF Present

Buddy Baker
Edmond Mouton
Tanya Sturman
Bob Love
Jeb Linscombe
Rut Elsey

Others Present

Don Ashley
Pam Ashley
Noel Kinler
Mark Shirley
Mike Dupis
Dwayne LeJeune
Frank Ellender
Javier Nevarez
Ross Messer
Tommy Bengé, Jr.
Archie Domangue
Jerge Castagne
Gerome Caraguel
Ted Joanen

Motion made by Tim to approve the minutes as amended from the October meeting. Nathan seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

LSU School of Vet Research- Update

Dr. Nevarez gave an update on humane slaughter. He recently attended and presented at a veterinary conference geared to slaughter issues. There were hundreds of people there, and there was a whole section on fisheries and euthanizing fish. The feedback was positive, and the alligator industry is ahead of the curve with fishery related research. He would like to see some compliance within the alligator

industry. He made a lot of good contacts within the veterinarian industry, and he says that this issue is becoming very prominent within this industry. The AMA report will include an alligator slaughter report and will be published this year. This report will contain recommendations, not regulations for the alligator industry. There will be recommendations on slaughter techniques for the alligator industry including illustrations of the alligator's skull and placement of the pit.

Chad asked if there were any animal rights groups at this meeting. Dr. Nevarez said that there were not, even though it was an open meeting.

Dr. Nevarez said that one of the biggest challenges now is working with the equipment and finding a reliable supplier.

Chad asked if there is potential for these recommendations to apply to wild harvest in the future. Dr. Nevarez said that it is up to the industry, but he thinks it might. He mentioned that Mississippi publishes a diagram instructing hunters to shoot the alligators in the back of the head. This paralyzes the alligator, but does not kill it. This type of information may need to be modified as we learn more about alligator anatomy.

Chad asked about the status of the research on immobilization. Dr. Nevarez said that there needs to be more research done on that. There is a need for some farmers to immobilize larger alligators in order to move them. We need some data showing that the animals are unconscious, not just paralyzed. We need data comparing the stress hormones between alligators that are immobilized versus restrained.

LSU Vet Research Proposal- Consideration

This is basically a renewal of the existing contract. Dr. Nevarez added a pathologist to the team. There is a small increase in the price of the contract because of the extra staff person. Chad mentioned that this contract does not come from the Alligator Council budget. Nathan thanked Dr. Nevarez for his service to the farmers.

Mike motioned to contract with LSU Vet School. Nathan seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

CITES Tag Hold Period for Nuisance Hunters- Update

Ronald asked that the Council consider allowing nuisance hunters 48 hours to tag alligators outside of the regular season. Farmers have 48 hours to tag. Nuisance hunters take alligators from now through the end of the regular season. It would be easier for the nuisance hunters to handle the alligators without having to work around the tags. He thinks that all wild alligators should be tagged immediately during the open season, but outside of the open season there is no reason for nuisance hunters to have to tag on the spot.

Edmond handed out a page from the alligator regulation booklet. He read the lines related to tagging. The alligator staff within the Department has discussed this. The reasons for allowing the farmers 48 hours was because the farmers are dealing in large numbers of alligators at a time and because they are generally dealing with small alligators, which are more difficult to process. The Department feels like this

would take a rule change within the Department as well as regulation changes. Enforcement has concerns and is not in favor of a rule change. The Department does not feel like nuisance hunters are dealing with a large enough number of skins at a time to justify changing the rules and regulations.

Edmond said that Ronald Guy is the only nuisance hunter that has made this request. Nathan suggested that Ronald get other nuisance hunters to come before the Council and make their wishes known. He said that the Department never wants a rule or regulation change.

Noel mentioned that the tag is the reference for a complaint. Ruth added that on a farm, the alligators stay on the premise. Nuisance alligators are moved from the wild to another location. Ronald said that the complaint form asks for information such as when the alligator was taken. He argued that there is a way to track complaints. Ronald mentioned to Edmond that farmers have more than one person skinning, whereas nuisance hunters do all of the skinning themselves.

Chad agreed with Nathan that Ronald should bring more nuisance hunters before the Council to discuss this again. Buddy said that this might not be the best approach, because he believes that all nuisance hunters would be in favor of this. Buddy suggested that he and Bob discuss this with the nuisance community and enforcement to try to work out the enforcement issues. Buddy said that he will come back with a recommendation for the Council.

Gerald said that the farmers' needs are very different than the needs of the nuisance hunters. He said that farmed skins are thinner and the tags tend to pull out. They are also dealing with a couple of thousand skins per week.

Alligator Program Update- Edmond Mouton

Edmond said that the tag issues have moved from a fiscal year to a calendar year. So, the 2013 tags only cover 6 months from July to December, and tags in 2014 covered the full calendar year. Edmond read through some of the data for the number of tags issued, eggs collected, and hatch rate. 2014 was a very good year. The eggs collected were very close to the record in 2008, and the hatch rate set a new record.

Chad asked if the Senate ever commented on this report. Edmond said that he does not get comments from the Natural Resource Committee.

Chad asked about mentioning to the Natural Resource Committee that the Council has concerns about reality TV and how those programs show Louisiana industries. Buddy said that the Department would not oppose reality TV. Chad asked if the Council wants to make a statement against it, could it go into the Council's report to the Natural Resource Committee. Bob said that would be appropriate. He also said that the Council could write a letter.

Other Business

Edmond mentioned the date and location of the next Alligator Farmers Association meeting, March 4th, ten until noon, at the Wetland's Center in Lafayette.

Ronald mentioned the cups on the table. The Council purchased these for educational events. They change color with a cold drink. He thanked the Council for providing these.

Don Ashley pointed out that Swamp People is one of the most popular programs in Australia. He said that this type of program may serve as a buffer. It may benefit the industry that a program like this can air with strong public support, and the animal rights advocates have not jumped on it. He suggested that we focus on trying to get some educational value built into the programs, rather than try to eliminate them all together.

Don also said that the sponsor for the California bill is interested in coming to Louisiana. Getting people into the marsh is the best way to bring home our message. Bob said that the Department will work with Don to host him while he is here. Don said that the egg collection period gives the best story.

Buddy handed out a packet that he developed. It is an educational booklet with case studies demonstrating why it is important for the State to be involved in CITES. Don Ashley and Ted Joanen worked with Buddy on the alligator case study. Chad asked if it was shared with the Natural Resource Committee. Buddy said that it was not shared with the Committee. Chad asked that the Council send this to the Natural Resource Committee with a letter of explanation.

Gerald asked if the Department has the manpower to use the data of next survey and nest collections. Edmond said that we do use the data. We didn't use it last year only because of transitions within the program. The data was still collected. It can be used for three year or five year averages. Edmond said that the data was very similar to the year before.

Nathan said that the Council would do more with the Natural Resource Committee, if members were approached one on one within the district. Buddy agreed that one on one contact is much more productive than mailing a letter. Bob said that there will be a need for education with turnover in the House and Senate with term limits.

Chad asked if Al would be interested in serving a full term when his term expires. Nathan and Tim will have to sit out a term. Chad said that we need the Farmers Association and the Land Owners Association to make recommendations.

Motion made by Dwight to adjourn. Ronald seconded. Motion carried unanimously.