

**Summary of the Alligator Advisory Council Meeting
October 11, 2011
Louisiana Room
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

Council Present

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

Others

Dr. Javier Nevarez
Dr. Lisa McRoberts
Ted Joanen
Marco Dermody
Archie Domangue
Dr. Robert Reigh
Dr. Dave Morrison

Council Absent

Dan Davis

LDWF Presence

Noel Kinler
Tanya Sturman
Buddy Baker
Bob Love
Ruth Elsey
Jeb Linscombe

Noel Kinler introduced Errol Falgout.

Mike motioned to amend the agenda and to elect officers between agenda items 2 and 3. Gerald seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Ronald motioned to approve the minutes from the May 31st meeting. Nathan seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Tim motioned to keep the same officers. Nathan seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

LSU Vet School Update- Dr. Javier Nevarez

Dr. Javier Nevarez expressed concern over bringing Florida alligators into Louisiana due to mycoplasma bacteria.

West Nile cases have all been in animals imported from Florida. The strain is weaker this year. They are waiting on federal approval for the vaccine. Then animals that are imported can be tested and vaccinated. Right now it is a two injection vaccine. The cost is \$2.50 per dose; \$5.00 per alligator. Javier is pushing for a one dose version. The pharmaceutical company will donate a

percentage of the profits back to LSU Vet School for alligator research. The vaccine is very concentrated, so it can also be unstable.

Javier said that it takes a week to get antibody results on alligators. He suggests quarantining imported animals for a period. Mike asked how many alligators are typically shipped in from Florida. Noel said that about 40,000 came in this year. They are typically hatchlings. Louisiana exports about 15,000 hatchlings to Georgia and Alabama.

Relative to the issue of mycoplasma, Chad said that he is concerned about one of these hatchlings getting released back into the wild in Louisiana and spreading the disease. Chad asked if the Department could take a position to start developing protocols to prevent the spread of mycoplasma. Nathan said that it is important to test Louisiana animals as well, because we don't really know if it is a farm practice issue or a Florida alligator issue. Javier said that only farms that have Florida alligators have tested positive. Javier said that we have never seen mycoplasma in Louisiana, but it is seen in Florida. Javier said that he can put some protocols together.

Tim said that Javier should be working with scientists in Florida, since the problem is there. He is concerned about jumping into regulations without more answers. Javier said that mycoplasma is worse than West Nile. A farmer could lose half of his stock. Chad said that he'd like to see protocols that are general enough to address many disease problems. Javier said that other animals have to be tested by vets in order to move across state borders. He recommends testing animals for specific diseases prior to shipping into Louisiana. If they test positive, then protocols and recommendations would be in place regarding action such as quarantining the animals once they arrive in Louisiana.

Gerald asked if Florida farms are losing a lot of stock. Javier said that some of them have. Once mycoplasma is in a building, it is very hard to get rid of it. Sometimes the farmers have to tear the building down and start over.

Nathan motioned to give LDWF and Javier the authority to develop a protocol relating to disease. Mike seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Errol suggested that Javier send letters to farmers recommending the tests that he feels should be administered to incoming alligators. Nathan suggested that testing be tailored to captive hatched and wild hatched hatchlings, since captive hatched alligators are not as likely to have the disease.

Javier said that he finished data collection for the euthanasia study. He compared four methods, and they are currently examining the data. Initial results suggest that the brain remains active for a longer period with cervical dislocation as compared with the other three methods tested. All data will be analyzed, and recommendations of euthanasia methods will follow.

Promoting Global Adoption of Grade Three Alligator Skins- Dr. Lisa McRoberts

Dr. McRoberts has incorporated alligator design into the graduate classes and senior classes. They teach sustainable use concepts to the students as well as the technical skills required to work with alligator leather. They had a fashion show in May. The students used it a lot in bodices and created some very creative pieces. A wedding gown with an alligator bodice won the show.

Graduate students created some small pieces, including golf club covers and tail-gating kits. She met with many designers and manufacturers in Europe. She also worked with a student who is

competing in Project Runway. He used alligator in the national television show. Dr. McRoberts has been working with alum designers to incorporate alligator leather into their designs.

Mike Bengé congratulated her on a job well done. Buddy Baker said that he was able to observe the fashion show and talk to the reporters that covered the event. He was happy to see the acceptance and excitement at the show and believes that some of it comes from the enthusiasm of the contractor. She said that from an apparel stand-point, the grade 3 skin is a great value. It has a lower price and more footage.

Alligator Program and Budget Update- Noel Kinler

Noel gave an update on number of tags issued (35,728), projected harvest (32-33,000) and the average price per foot (\$15-\$18). He reported that we had a very successful wild season. Recovery of price and demand for alligator skins has been good. 350,000 eggs were collected and they project releases to be about 34,440. He gave updates on farm numbers, including the total farm inventory of just over 500,000.

The expenditures for the past fiscal year are \$1,335,694 for the alligator program and the Council. Income was \$922,730. The last couple of years the income was around \$1.5 million. The balance in the ARF is \$1.3 million. Noel said that we are in good shape, because the income will increase this year to about \$1.4 million. He projects that the balance in the fund will begin to rise.

The Department would like to hold Council expenditures to \$300,000 this year, but projects a budget up to \$350,000 for the 2012 year. If a project came up this year that would require extra funding, the Department would consider budgeting for it.

LSU Nutritional Research Proposal- Dr. Robert Reigh

Noel introduced Dr. Reigh and gave the Council some background information. Goals of the project are to develop improved diets for alligator aquaculture that will reduce animal production cost and improve air and water quality in the production environment. Dr. Reigh explained that he has been working on digestibility issues and metabolism. They propose to look at nutritional requirements, availability of nutrients in feed products and product cost. He has been studying how easily nutritional elements can be digested from various sources. He would like to look at waste issues related to undigested food products. The protein excreted through waste can cause ammonia in the water. The hypothesis is that protein content can be decreased in the food and would improve the environment. He proposes feeding alligators diets with varying levels of protein, and charting growth, weight, skin quality and air and water quality. The budget request is \$50,400 per year for two years and would come from the alligator program budget.

Gerald said that he has been doing some feed studies for several years. He said that protein levels below 40% causes digestion problems. He said that some of these answers are already available, and it'll take LSU two years and over \$100,000 to come up with it.

Dr. Reigh said that the problems that Gerald has noticed could be related to whatever was added to the feed to make up for the decrease in protein. He said that it is important to create a diet based on alligator dietary needs.

Nathan said that he would like to see research done in the future that would allow less water consumption in raising alligators. He also asked Dr. Reigh if he would add girth measurements to the measurements.

Tim motioned to approve request for the Department to fund this study. Mike seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

LSU Research Facility- Dr. Dave Morrison

Dr. Morrison thanked the Council for approving Dr. Reigh's project. The foundation for the new captive alligator research facility at LSU has been poured. Jeff Donald will donate the insulation for the building. The building will be completed in January. They still need 28 tanks for the interior of the building. They are a little short on donations at this point. LSU will take care of interior piping and plumbing.

Gerald recommended that they spray foam on the tanks and put radiant heat under the tanks. Dr. Morrison said that they plan to have a heater in each tank. Gerald said spray foam on a metal building would cause deterioration.

Alligator Hunting License Fees- Noel Kinler

The Department is reviewing the costs of licenses for all sport licenses. They anticipate going to legislation and increasing license fees at some point. The Department would like to discuss a potential raise in alligator license fees. Noel will have some details together for the next meeting. Tim said that he would support increasing fees for out of state hunters rather than in-state residents. Chad said he'd like to see a comparison on fees from Texas, Louisiana and Florida.

Other Business

Chad asked Noel about sending a letter to USFWS. Noel said that he'd work on that.

Chad suggested that we send a letter to the Swamp People show asking them to portray the industry in a better light. Nathan agreed that a letter should be sent. Tim said that we should also request that they tell the whole story, including the marsh to market story. Chad suggested that the Council send letters to all of the landowners explaining the negative image produced by participating in this show. The letter would circulate to council members prior for review. Chad suggested that we copy the letter sent to the History Channel to the industry as a whole.

Tim motioned to authorize the Chairman to work with Noel to develop a letter to send the History Channel. Mike seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Lance showed a video during lunch on alligator hunting.

Nathan motioned to adjourn. Mike seconded. Motion carried unanimously.