

FAC Annual Report

F U R A D V I S O R Y C O U N C I L

Louisiana's Fur Industry

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From the early 1900's through the 1980's, Louisiana led the nation in the production of wild fur pelts.

During the early 1900's the Louisiana fur industry involved over 20,000 trappers and 1,000 fur buyers and dealers. Muskrat populations exploded during that period with the harvest peaking at over 9 million pelts worth \$12 million in 1945. This production was more than occurred in all the other states combined.



A much larger rodent, the nutria, was placed in captivity in the state in the late 1930s and escaped and/or was released into the near perfect habitat of coastal Louisiana in the late 1930's. This South American native multiplied quickly and by 1962 surpassed the muskrat in numbers harvested. Between 1962 and 1982 coastal trappers averaged harvesting over 1.3 million nutria each year, representing over 64% of the total catch and 60% of the total value of the industry.

Louisiana produces 11 different species of furbearers (beaver, bobcat, coyote, gray fox, mink, muskrat, nutria, opossum, raccoon, red fox, river otter). During the past 10 years, the state has averaged producing nearly 44,000 pelts annually down from 195,362. The average annual production of nutria during the past 10 years has been, 26,175 and raccoon 8,839 . These two species alone provided nearly 80% of the value of an industry worth over \$2.3 million annually to Louisiana trappers, including Coastwide Nutria Control Program (CNCP) incentive payment \$5.00 per tail to participating trapper .

Washington D.C. Education

The FAC has long maintained an active and visible presence in Washington, DC, both on Capitol Hill and with the Administration. It provides a critical voice for the Louisiana fur industry and is a “go-to” source of information for Washington policymakers.



Education on the Hill

Outreach and education activities remained a top priority for the FAC during the year particularly with several freshmen Congressmen on the Louisiana Delegation and the larger need to keep the entire Delegation informed of the dynamics within the industry so heavily impacted by the global economic downturn. FAC activities in this arena typically include a variety of Member and staff ad hoc meetings and briefings as issues arise. Similar efforts involve federal agencies such as the US Fish & Wildlife Service which regulates the trade in all CITES species including fur bearers. This activity provides a critical opportunity to ensure that key decision-makers in Washington, DC are kept up to date of the state of the LA fur industry and management programs, and are fully apprised of the range of issues and information important to the FAC and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

The FAC also had a very busy year on the legislative front. Working in close cooperation with the Louisiana and Maryland Congressional Delegations, legislation was introduced by Louisiana Senators Landrieu and Vitter and Maryland Senators Cardin and Mikulski, to reauthorize and extend authorities of the Nutria Eradication and Control Act of 2003. Companion legislation was introduced in the House by Louisiana Congressman Boustany and Maryland Congressman Kratovil. This statute has been a key component of the authorities underlying the successful Louisiana nutria control program that has been so important to Louisiana trappers and the fur industry for years.

Working in close coordination with the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries, the FAC in partnership with the Alligator Advisory Council led an initiative to secure introduction of the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program Act of 2009. The bill was introduced by Louisiana Senators Landrieu and Vitter to establish a program to research and develop control methods for the exploding population of feral swine and to minimize the damage these invasive species are having on some of the most productive coastal wetland habitat in the State that is so important to furbearers. This is a proactive effort that is in many ways patterned after the successful Louisiana nutria control program. Substantial progress was made in moving both of these bills through the legislative process during the year and the prognosis for final enactment is excellent. Efforts have also begun to secure federal appropriations to fund the feral swine program once it is established.

Finally, the FAC was kept apprised of any major legislative developments that could affect the Louisiana fur trapping industry, and is poised to pursue any legislative objectives identified by FAC. This often includes working in cooperation with other organizations such as the closely-aligned Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Fur Market Overview

The Fur Advisory Council has continued to promote Louisiana fur and Louisiana's fur dealers through a contract with Michael Consiglio and Nick Shao. The fur market has improved a lot over the past year. All mink has sold at strong prices, in some cases at record prices. This just does not show any weakness in mink in any segment or country. Foxes are also strong and also selling at 100 % which is another strong indicator for a better market going forward. The Russians are also starting to become active in the market. Wild fur is opening up on all fur types at just at the right time. This becomes very important because the Chinese are now buying - or rather investing in - ranch mink & fox. As the ranch fox commands higher prices, the wild furs especially the long hair wild furs, (like raccoon and nutria) start to move upward as well. In the wild fur marketplace raccoon, otters, nutria, beaver, bob cats, muskrats, and coyotes are all selling at the North American raw fur country dealer & auction level. It is a big change from last year.

China has begun to request wild fur skins, especially muskrats and now otter, beaver and some raccoon. The Chinese buyers named Peter Li, Liu Haixing, and Guida, who have offices in China have been purchasing. Peter Li has bought and paid for all Daniel Perry's raccoon and now has advanced money for more skins to the coming year. All of our Louisiana furs have now sold and even the last 10,000 nutria of Daniel Perry are gone, and he is ready to buy for the coming season. Our new customer from the Ukraine ordered 3000 nutria skins and would like to have 5,000 more as a beginning for the new season, Guida. This becomes important because we now not only have interest from China but Eastern Europe, as well, for our nutria which has been our problem and primary focus. It appears this will be our turnaround year.

Louisiana's Fur Advisory Council continued its presence at international fur shows. Louisiana Fur Advisory Council had a large booth at the Beijing Fur Show and attended the Hong Kong fur show as well. The Beijing booth was worked by two contractors, Michael Consiglio and Nick Shao. Several Chinese buyers, who have bought Louisiana skins in the past, continue to show interest in Louisiana's fur market for the coming season. Michael Consiglio will also represent the Louisiana fur council in three other international fairs.



*Fur Advisory Council Booth at the
Beijing Fur Show,
January 2010.*

General Education



The Fur Advisory Council and Alligator Advisory Council's education program coordinated with other educators around the state, and presented at schools, libraries, and public events. This year, we gave 31 school presentations, 13 library presentations, and 1 scout presentation. Events included La Fete De L'Ecologie, Ocean Commotion, Earthfest at the Audubon Zoo, National Trappers And Alligator Hunters Association Convention, "AgMagic" at the State Fair and Reading On The River. Quentin Morris, the main educational outreach person, attended the Trapper's College at the LDWF Education Center at Woodworth. He has begun to incorporate trapping principals into his presentations at the request of the Fur Advisory Council.

Children are very interested in fur bearing animals and alligators. Many of these children have hunting experience and some even have trapping experience.

School Presentation

Most formal presentations are about an hour long and involve the following: First, several traps are shown to the class. These are as follows: three live-restraining double long-spring double foothold traps: one with rubberized jaws, another one with a gap in the jaws, and finally one that has plain jaws. The third trap is brought to the class set and then it is sprung for the audience. I also show a kill-type body-gripping trap, as well as a cable device type snare trap. A council representative explains how each trap works and why it is a humane way to take a furbearer. The students always seem to enjoy watching the set traps get sprung.

Throughout the presentation, four important trapping points are discussed, one of which is that trapping is a highly regulated activity that has licensing requirements that are overseen by LDWF biologists. Pelts are displayed to the audience and the audience is provided various biological and/or ecological information about the type of animals from which the pelts were taken. Additionally, some key characteristics of each pelt are pointed out that will help the audience members positively identify the animal if seen in the wild. Various concerns surrounding the animals are discussed, including beneficial and problematic behaviors. Usually, the last thing that is done with the furbearers is to discuss the similarities and differences in the structure of the skull of some of the furbearing animals. Concepts such as occlusion, along with the relationship between dentition and diet and muscle attachment sites are discussed.

An alligator presentation follows. First, in order to grab the audience's attention, a hatchling alligator is shown and the audience is given some brief facts about the hatchling. Next, depending on time availability and the age group, the discussion continues while holding either the hatchling or an alligator head. Either way, the topics of alligator life habits in the wild and some basics on alligator anatomy are covered.

General Education Continued

Concepts such as nest building, maternal care, digestion, thermoregulation and threats to hatchlings are discussed. Finally, as the audience leaves the presentation area, children have the opportunity to pet the hatchling alligator on the tail and ask any question that they may have thought of during the course of the program. When the children are leaving, they are always happy if not inspired by what they saw and experienced during the presentation. We usually receive several, if not several tens of questions. We have even had a number of children say that they wish to enter wildlife related careers and many teachers have told us that these presentations are very relevant to their lesson content.



School Presentation

whereby people look at a jar of bones and try to identify which furbearer these bones are from by comparing them to the skulls on the plaque. Both children and adults seem to enjoy this activity.

At events, a booth is set up and the same items that are used in presentations are displayed. When patrons come to the booth, we always show them points of interest about alligators, furbearers, and the issues surrounding them. Patrons, especially children, seem to be all smiles during their brief visit to the booth. We have created a new exercise



Nutria Pelts

C h i n a M a r k e t

The Fur Advisory Council contracted with Nick Shao to promote Louisiana furs in China. He works and travels through Mainland China and Hong Kong SAR. He maintains a close relationship with fur buyers in the region. He attended the fur fairs in Beijing and Hong Kong to promote Louisiana fur products. He set up a fur booth with Louisiana fur samples and met potential buyers at these shows.

Mr. Shao handles translations and negotiations between Louisiana fur dealers and Chinese buyers. He has worked with Peter Li, a large Chinese buyer. Peter Li traveled to Louisiana in March, 2010 to meet the Council members as well as several skin suppliers. He subsequently bought several thousands of skins in the year 2009-2010 including raccoons, beavers and red foxes.

Although the international fur market has been depressed over the past fiscal year, the fur shows in Beijing and Hong Kong drew interest from Chinese fur buyers in Louisiana products.



Hong Kong: 'Asia's World City'

2009 - 2010 Expenditures

The Fur Advisory Council operates from two funding sources, Rockefeller Trust Funds and Education and Marketing Funds.

Rockefeller Trust Funds	
Budgeted	\$150,000.00
Salaries	\$28,123.94
Related Benefits	\$8,425.11
Travel	\$2,282.32
Operating Services- <i>i.e. cell phone, newspaper ads</i>	\$10,915.57
Supplies- <i>i.e. sample furs, sample products</i>	\$1,924.84
Professional Services- <i>i.e. fur promotion contract, D.C. education</i>	\$76,500.00
Capital Outlay	\$0.00
Rockefeller Trust Funds Expended	\$128,171.78
Education and Marketing Fund	
Budgeted	\$95,000.00
Salaries	\$0.00
Related Benefits	\$0.00
Travel	\$5,223.81
Operating Services- <i>i.e. cell phone, internet service</i>	\$2,500.00
Supplies- <i>i.e. printing supplies, office supplies, sample furs</i>	\$0.00
Professional Services	\$0.00
Education and Marketing Funds Expended	\$7,723.81
Total FAC Funds Budgeted	\$245,000.00
Total Expended	\$135,895.59

F A C M e m b e r s

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