

FUR ADVISORY COUNCIL 2022-2023 ANNUAL REPORT



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INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

Louisiana has a strong trapping heritage. From the early 1900s through the 1980s, Louisiana led the continent in the production of wild fur pelts.

During the early 1900s, the Louisiana fur market supported over 20,000 trappers and 1,000 fur buyers and dealers. Muskrat populations expanded, and trappers harvested over 9 million pelts worth \$12 million in 1945. Louisiana produced almost 65% of North American fur during this period.

Farming of a much larger non-native rodent, the nutria, began in the state in the late 1930s and some animals escaped and/ or were released into the near perfect habitat of coastal Louisiana. Nutria multiplied quickly and by 1962 surpassed the muskrat in numbers harvested. Between 1962 and 1982, average harvest by trappers topped 1.3 million nutria annually, representing over 60% of the total fur industry. Today, nutria harvest is an essential part of habitat management due to the nutria’s aggressive eating habits.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) manages the state’s 12 different species of furbearers (beaver, bobcat, coyote, gray fox, mink, muskrat, nutria, opossum, skunk, raccoon, red fox, and river otter). During the past 10 years, the state has averaged 8,592 pelts annually. The average annual production of nutria during the past 10 years has been 1,300 and raccoon has been 2,973. These two species alone provided approximately 50% of the value of an industry worth over \$1 million annually to Louisiana trappers, including the \$6.00 per tail Coastwide Nutria Control Program (CNCP) payments to participating trappers.

Although fur harvest has continued to decrease due to a poor market, trapping license sales have trended upward for the past six seasons, thus keeping this Louisiana heritage alive. The increased interest is largely due to interest in nuisance control and the desire of participants for a new activity or challenge.

WASHINGTON D.C. EDUCATION

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) contracted with Glenn Delaney to stay abreast of any federal administrative or legislative activities that might be of interest to LDWF, the Fur Advisory Council, or the Alligator Advisory Council.

Mr. Delaney maintained his dialogue with key Members of Congress, Committees, and their staff to educate them on issues important to Louisiana’s sustainable use wildlife programs including a broad range of funding and policy legislation under consideration in the 118th Congress.

He continued to monitor and provide analyses of legislation advanced by animal rights groups on Capitol Hill so that they could be addressed in a timely and effective manner.

He also focused on new bills introduced in the House and Senate to amend the Lacey Act, similar to legislation included in the “America COMPETES Act” in the 117th Congress, that have the potential to prohibit interstate commerce and imports of certain species if determined by the Department of Interior to be “injurious”. This included reptiles and their offspring and eggs.

With letters of support from the AAC, he also continued to successfully pursue the LA Congressional Delegation for the funding of research on infectious diseases affecting Louisiana’s alligator farms in both

the FY 23 and FY 24 appropriations cycles. The FY23 Omnibus Appropriations Conference Report included the funding requested by Mr. Delaney and championed by Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA) through which USDA APHIS has now provided \$500,000 for this research. Dr. Javier Navarez at the LSU School of Veterinary Medicine reports that this APHIS funding will support the following research priorities of the Department and Alligator Advisory Council:

- Determine West Nile virus and Chlamydia antibody status of alligator hatchlings
- Screening of alligators for Chlamydia in order to accomplish the following:
 - Sequence and attempt to speciate the chlamydial DNA positive amplicons
 - Use the data to develop and validate PCR-based screening assays specifically for the Chlamydia affecting alligators
 - Compare in situ hybridization to PCR-based testing of frozen tissues and deparaffinized tissues for documentation of chlamydial nucleic acid
 - Full genome sequence the chlamydial organism

For the FY23 appropriations cycle, Mr. Delaney’s efforts have resulted in the inclusion of another \$500,000 in APHIS funding for this research in both the House and Senate Agriculture Appropriations Committee Reports. This time, Senator Cassidy’s efforts were supported by Senator John Kennedy (R-LA), and they were joined by Congress-

man Garret Graves (R-LA) and Congresswoman Julia Letlow in the House in securing these provisions which will not likely be enacted into law until the end of calendar year 2023.

Mr. Delaney worked closely with LDWF administration and program managers to address pertinent federal administrative and legislative issues. The funding for the contract was split equally between the Fur Advisory Council and the Alligator Advisory Council’s budgets.



2022-2023 EXPENDITURES

The Fur Advisory Council operates within the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and uses the Louisiana Fur Public Education and Marketing Fund.

LOUISIANA FUR PUBLIC EDUCATION AND MARKETING FUND	
Budgeted	\$64,500
Salaries	\$ 3,214
Related Benefits	\$ 1,730
Travel	\$7,649
Operating Services	\$183
Supplies	\$ 2,908
Professional Services (Washington D.C. Education Contract)	\$25,000
Inter-Agency Transfer (Office of Technology Services)	\$ 941
Education and Marketing Funds Expended	\$41,625
Remaining	\$22,875



EDUCATION PROGRAM

The first goal specified in the legislation that created the Fur Advisory Council identifies the need for education, and the Council and LDWF focuses primarily on this directive. The Council has taken a two-tiered approach to education focusing on both outreach education and trapper education.

This year, staff participated in several large educational events such as the Louisiana Envirothon targeting high school students and LSU Ocean Commotion as well as 4-H events targeting elementary and middle school children. Staff also presented at numerous schools and libraries state-wide. The Council provided biological facts and educational support to other LDWF staff who presented at schools and at other outreach events. The Council also partnered with a number of educational and outreach organizations such as the Audubon Zoo and Wetland Watchers to reach a broader audience.

LDWF and the Louisiana Trappers and Alligator Hunter's Association hosted three trapper instructor workshops and five trapping workshops around the state. These workshops attracted a wide range of students, including teenagers, biology students, working adults, and retired adults. LDWF also ran two full weekend trapping schools, where students set and ran their own trap-line and skinned their own harvest under the supervision of an instructor. Due in part to this program, trapping license sales have increased the past several years.

LDWF continued the partnership with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) for the Louisiana Level 1 Online Trappers' Course. The online course covers Louisiana trapping regulations, ethics, safety, and habitat management as well as practical trapping skills. Although all trapper education is voluntary in Louisiana, trapping students are encouraged to take the online course as a prerequisite to the hands-on workshops and the trapping school.

The Fur Advisory Council funded travel for two council members and two staff from the department to attend the National Trappers Association annual convention in Lima, Ohio. The attendees gathered educational advice and educational materials from other states' education departments. Professional presentations were attended by the members who upon returning, shared their experience with Louisiana's trapping instructors.





FUR QUEEN PROMOTION

The FAC and LDWF sponsor the Louisiana Fur and Wildlife Festival by providing a fur garment to the Louisiana Fur and Wildlife Festival Fur Queen and alligator or fur accessories to the Fur Queen, Miss Cameron, and Miss Teen Fur as a prize at the end of each pageant. Ms. Jordyn Kelley was crowned the 64th Louisiana Fur and Wildlife Festival Queen in January of 2023. She attended multiple fairs, festivals, and special events monthly as a representative of Louisiana's fur industry.

The queens wear real fur at these events and explain how supporting the fur industry invests in Louisiana's beautiful, rich habitat. They promote the use of real fur over faux fur, show examples of the different furbearers found in Louisiana, and talk about ecology and habitat management as it relates to trapping.

The queens as well as the pageant coordinators use social media platforms to promote the Louisiana Fur and Wildlife Festival and all that the festival represents. The queens used their platforms to promote cultural pride in Louisiana and its natural resources.



Jordyn Kelley, 64th Louisiana Fur and Wildlife Festival Queen.

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