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## ***Government's Role in Supply Chain Sustainability, Traceability and Verification for American Alligators***

### **Background and History:**

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) manages the American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) as a commercial, renewable natural resource. LDWF's sustained use program is one of the world's most recognizable examples of a wildlife conservation success story. Louisiana's program has been used as a model for managing various crocodylian species throughout the world.

### **Our Legal Authority:**

Global Oversight: The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international treaty amongst over 180 countries regulating cross border trade in protected species. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

Federal Oversight: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) administers CITES requirements and controls for the United States. The federal government requires each state to comply with federal regulations in order to be granted export approval for harvested alligator skins and products. The most critical of those requirements are:

- Louisiana must scientifically prove, annually, that the harvest program of eggs and wild alligators will not be detrimental to the species and submit a report to the USFWS.
- The management program must provide for a meticulously controlled harvest to include serialized tagging for each alligator harvested and strict accountability for each tag allocated.

State Oversight: In 1970, the Louisiana State Legislature (Act 550) gave the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries full authority to regulate the alligator season in Louisiana.

### **Our Conservation Goals:**

- Manage and conserve Louisiana's alligators as part of the state's wetland ecosystem
- Provide benefits to alligators and to species of fish and wildlife associated with the wetland habitat

- Research and continually improve efforts for monitoring alligator species growth, survival and reproductive ability

### **Our Role in Ensuring Verification in Supply Chain Sustainability, Traceability and Verification for American Alligators:**

#### Population Surveys of Alligator to Ensure Non-Detriment to the Species:

- Each year since 1972, our wildlife biologists perform studies of alligator habitats to establish estimated population numbers of alligators. Our research is done by conducting aerial surveys via helicopter over public and private lands over a period of 8-10 days and mark nests with GPS coordinates.
- We analyze data with topography, weather and climate patterns, and other scientific tools to validate our findings. Only when our findings are scientifically validated and confirmed do we grant permits for egg collection and wild alligator harvests.

#### Licensing, Regulation, and Oversight of Alligator Farming:

- Each alligator farm in operation must apply for licenses and be approved to operate an alligator farm. The farmer must be able to prove that he or she is able to comply with all science-based animal welfare standards established by the state and is subject to annual inspections for license operation renewal.

#### Permitting of Egg Collection and Release Programs by Licensed Farmers from Approved Landowners:

- Permits for egg collections are a 3-party contract between the government, an individual land owner and a specific farm. Permits are highly regulated, and each party must have the proper licenses and letters of authorization to engage in the egg contract execution. The state must validate the egg collection and keeps detailed records of transactions in order to verify alligator inventory on farms.
- As a legally required follow up to egg collection, farmers must release 10% of alligators back onto the original land owner's property once the alligators hatch and grow to approximately four feet in length ensure LDWF's sustainable use conservation goals are met.

#### Regulation and Enforcement of Wild Alligator Harvest:

- We issue trapping permission for individual landowners to be considered for harvest tag allocation. We assess the habitat quantity and quality for each parcel of land and determine the number of alligators that can be harvested by each hunter. This methodology ensures that alligators are harvested in proportion to their population levels and that the harvest will not negatively impact populations at any location. We require proof of ownership of land and permission from the land owner to harvest alligators.
- LDWF regulates and enforces all aspects of wild alligator harvests including enforcing hunting seasons, method of catch, and commercial sales of alligator skins and meat.

### Inspection and Verification of Legal Acquisition of Skins and Meat Entering the Commercial Market:

- Our staff and technicians individually check and validate (tag by tag) each alligator shipment that leaves Louisiana and enters into interstate or foreign commerce.
- Shipping permits are granted only to those companies or individuals who have a valid license (issued by LDWF) to buy or sell alligator skins or meat. The license must be kept up to date and is subject to annual renewal. Skins or meat may not leave the state of Louisiana without shipping authorization from LDWF.
- Upon inspection for shipment approval, LDWF staff records and checks tag numbers in each shipment and collects a severance tax of \$4.25 per skin.
- Tag fees are collected and deposited into a government managed Alligator Resource Fund which covers the annual expenses of the LDWF Alligator Program and the surplus funds are used for various state budgetary needs including funding education and conservation efforts. Taxpayer dollars are not used to manage the alligator program. These funds are paid completely by the commercial trade.

### **Research:**

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has a long history of conducting research studies on the ecology, breeding biology, physiology, and captive propagation of the American alligator. Our department has long been considered a world leader in crocodylian research. Numerous manuscripts are published in peer-reviewed journals each year, and agency staff often host visiting researchers, both domestic and international, who work on crocodylians in their region. Over two hundred publications have been generated by LDWF staff in recent years. We have two research laboratories, a field laboratory at Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge, and a university affiliated facility at Ben Hur Aquaculture Research Station in Baton Rouge, where detailed nutrition studies are underway.

### **Conclusion:**

Alligators are a renewable natural resource. By placing an economic value on alligators, landowners are offered incentives to not only conserve wetlands but also enhance them, and ultimately increase alligator populations. Since the inception of the Department's program in 1972, over 1,000,000 wild alligators have been harvested, over 10 million alligator eggs have been collected, and over 6.4 million farm raised alligators have been sold bringing in millions of dollars of revenue to landowners, trappers and farmers. Conservative estimates have valued these resources at over 150 million dollars annually, providing significant, direct economic benefit to Louisiana. Proving that our conservation efforts are working, nest surveys show increasing numbers of alligator populations each year. We collaboratively work with the leather industry to promote the wellbeing of the alligator population. We want to build trust with those working at all levels of the supply chain and demonstrate that Louisiana alligator is the most holistically sustainable raw material available to the luxury leather market. Louisiana stands by its commitment to ensure, verify, and be accountable for the management of alligator in our state.