

## The Convention

What a whirlwind the last five months have been, culminating with the LTAHA 2022 Convention on April 2<sup>nd</sup>. The night before the convention members and friends of the Association gathered in Woodworth at the LDWF gun range at 661 Robins Bridge Rd and enjoyed an evening of fellowship and tall tales around a table full of crawfish donated by Association member, Justin Ebarb. Perfectly seasoned and cooked to perfection by Mr. Robert Dukes, owner and operator of Big Creek Taxidermy, the conversation ceased while a small feast began. When the steam settled and the last drop of seasoned water hit the slab, there was not a single crawfish left. If there is one thing the LTAHA knows how to do, it is cook!

Saturday morning came early as the attendance started developing right after the gourmet breakfast of donuts and coffee was served. Old friends and new poured through the gates and made the 8:30 a.m. Live Market Coyote demo hosted by our very own Bobby Farris. Sleepy-eyed and ready to learn, a crowd gathered near the southeast corner of the pond as Bobby demoed his methods and tools for live marketing southwest Louisiana coyotes. It must have been a great demo as the crowd lingered all the way into the next demo slot. Good job, Bobby! Thanks for sharing your knowledge.

Next attendees were treated to professional trapper Mark Conner from right across the state line in Hutting, Arkansas. With a borrowed pair of wader boots, Mark put on a show explaining his techniques for open water beaver removal, along with some otter trapping. My hat is off to Mark for making his demo a huge hit and taking the time to explain in-depth the questions that were asked of him. Thanks, Mark, and I look forward to seeing you soon.

Cajunman Sneauxballs opened its food truck between Mark's demo and the beaver skinning contest. We enjoyed the many flavors of their shaved ice snow cones while Mr. Danny Perry of Perry Furs unloaded the six whole beavers he graciously donated for our skinning contest. With knives out and sharp, six contestants stepped forward ready to take home the Beaver Peeler 2022 trophy custom made for the event by Tony Howard of seasoned Missouri black walnut and open grain red oak. Mr. Wesley Blanchard, the official timekeeper, called time plus 10 seconds at four minutes and 44 seconds for Ms. Gwenda Bennett of Woodworth, Louisiana after her amazing case skinned beaver pelt hit the slab. After 12 years of retirement from skinning for Boone's Fur in Woodworth, Ms. Bennett was badgered into competing, and she showed the men how to do it right and fast. All I can say is I am glad she didn't have a table to start on or she might have embarrassed someone. What a great time the Beaver Peeler contest was, and what an honor to have had six contestants step forward. If you find yourself in Boone's Trapping Supply store, look around; I am sure you will see the Beaver Peeler 2022 Trophy proudly displayed somewhere near the cash register.

Walking around paying very close attention to the labor intensity of the beaver-peeling contest was Mr. Colby Hebert, The Cajun Hatter. Colby makes custom hats the old-fashioned way in his Lafayette, Louisiana shop. Colby explained and discussed with trappers and fur dealers his desire to bring a nutria felt market to Louisiana in the near future. Colby's dream is where all small businesses start, and if you get to see the quality of the product, which he makes, you too can see this dream becoming a reality. I was so very impressed with the pure quality of the hat, which Colby wore. I hope to see Colby become a mainstay around our community, and we will welcome him and his dream with open arms as our industry and his can be joined at the hip to produce a quality Louisiana product.

After almost two full years of COVID lockdown and restrictions, our members were ready to see one another and make new friends. With the call to order by the President, the general member meeting began. This year's meeting took a little longer as we opened with award presentations. First awards were Octa blue jackets with "The Heritage Lives On" logo embroidered in vivid colors on the right chest and presented by President Tony Howard, to Mrs. Tanya Sturman and Mrs. Jennifer Manuel of the LDWF. The awards were donated by members of the instructor group for all the hard work and dedication these two ladies have shown to the education program over the past five years. Without their constant encouragement and persistent pursuit of a better program, we would still be trying to launch the education program. Thank you so much, ladies; you mean so much to the program.

After last year's COVID relief convention in October of 2021, the newly seated board of directors voted on purchasing Magellan short sleeve fishing shirts for all instructors who attended at least one instructor workshop and at least one one-day workshop. The board announced the criteria to all instructors at the beginning of the season. "The Heritage Lives On" logo was embroidered above the right pocket and the instructors name above the left pocket. On the left sleeve, one inch above the hem, was the caption "Instructor 2021-22". President, Tony Howard, opened the presentation by first awarding Vice President and Education Director, Homer Gibson, with his instructor shirt and then turning the mic over to Homer. This year we had thirteen instructors who received shirts starting with Mr. John Sturgis followed by Leon Petty, Chad Mire, Cam Mire, Randall Williamson, Clint Johnson, Chuck Sturgis, Justin Ebarb, Steve Hughes, Jeff Aguillard and Tony Howard. James McCullin was not able to make to the event due to work, and his shirt was mailed the following Tuesday.

After all the Instructor shirts were presented, two special awards were presented. Three of our senior instructors talked earlier in the season and pledged to a monetary fund, which would be used to purchase these special awards. The criteria for the awards were the instructor who attended at least one instructor workshop and the most one-day events throughout the year. None of the other instructors knew of this special award other than the three seniors who dreamt it up. This year we had two instructors who met these requirements and attended the exact same number of events around the state. These awards consisted of smoke grey jackets with black trim with the "Heritage Lives On" logo and the instructors name embroidered on the front chest. They were also awarded custom made trophies in the shape of Louisiana made from Missouri black walnut and set on open grain red oak diamond bearing the inscription, "Instructor of the year 2022" and their respective names, Mr. Randall Williamson and Mr. Justin Ebarb. Their consistent attendance made sure the LTAHA's message was being presented in a positive manner throughout the state this year. Hats off to our two instructors of the year.

After the award presentation, the floor was opened for Board of Director nominations. After all nominations were made, the general membership was issued ballots and the votes were cast. Current Board of Director members, Tony Howard and Mr. Chuck Sturgis, will return to the board for another three-year term, and Mr. Randall Williamson will join them for his first three-year term. Randall came to the LTAHA after attending a three-day workshop with his cousin almost five years ago. He has hung around ever since, becoming a full-on instructor and sharing his successful trapping knowledge with many students. We would like to welcome Randall Williamson to the Board of Directors.

After many years of representing the LTAHA on the Board of Directors, Mr. Steve Hughes is taking a break. With his son now in college and time to reflect, Steve is looking at his next adventure in the

trapping world. Steve has served the interest of the LTAHA and its members faithfully for almost 18 years now. Steve is not going anywhere; he is just going to fill a different role for the association in the near future.

With the election and general member meeting behind us, there was only one thing to do, EAT! Chad Mire and his crew out-did themselves this time with grilled Boston Butt pork steaks, falling-off-the-bone grilled chicken, baked beans, rice dressing and loaded mash potatoes; if you did not get full, it was your own fault. Oh, my goodness, it was good, and it was such a perfect day to eat outdoors. Chad, thank you so much for your donation of the food and time preparing it.

After such a fine meal, Mr. Mike Sievering, Principal Officer of the Alabama Trappers Association, presented a skull-cleaning demo that was out of this world. There were so many good questions asked, and Mike had the answer. It is such a joy seeing other states offering help and sharing information in such an open and delightful manner. You are first-class, Mike, thank you for informative demo.

This year's live auction was loaded with so many awesome items from people who support the LTAHA. We were able to raise funds, which will support our education and our outreach program through the upcoming year. Thank you so much to all our sponsors: **Action Specialties, Vycah, Cajun Hatter, Carter Federal Credit Union, Hales Towing, LineTec Services, Ryan Scheafer, Chuck Jones, Nicholas Lemoine, Clint Johnson, Chad Mire, Chuck Sturgis, Justin Ebarb, Tony Howard, Donnie Grafton, Steve Hughes, Cam Mire, Joseph Vicari, Joshua Morace, Homer Gibson, Jeff Aguilard, Tim Ross, Wesley Blanchard, Randall Williamson and Donavon.** I hope I have not missed anyone, but if I have, I apologize.

At the end of the day while we were cleaning up, Tanya Sturman reminded us that we had not held our Board of Directors meeting that we normally hold. We all had a laugh about it and gathered the BOD together in the LDWF education building. Tony Howard called the meeting to order and took roll. With eight members present, it constituted a quorum and the floor was open for discussion on officers. With a motion to retain Tony Howard as President made by Clint Johnson and seconded by Chuck Sturgis, the motion carried. Next Clint Johnson made a motion, seconded by Chuck Sturgis, to retain Homer Gibson as Vice President, and that motion carried. Chad Mire made a motion to retain Justin Ebarb as Secretary/Treasurer with Chuck Sturgis seconding, and that motion carried. With no other pressing business for the day, Clint Johnson made a motion to adjourn with a second from Homer Gibson, and the motion carried. No date was set for the next meeting, but we intend to have one by May 1, 2022.

### **National Trapper Association Convention**

This year the LTAHA and Fur Advisory Council plan to have a booth at the National Trappers Association in Lima, OH. Displaying many of our Louisiana specific offerings such as a bobcat coat trimmed in alligator, or maybe a Louisiana nutria felt hat, and, yes, a really large alligator head. Our goal is to reach out to other states and use their resources while offering insight into our successful education program. We did not have a booth last year, and we were still able to meet other states biologist and program managers who offered a wealth of knowledge and material, which we have been able to use in our program. In addition, our booth will be open for any members of the LTAHA to stop by and rest or just sit and represent the association in style.

### **Education**

The LTAHA education program is growing at a rate that no one truthfully expected. We are trying to develop a program in a printable and reproducible outline format that will lay the foundation for future generations to carry on the work. Our 2017 partnership with LDWF has led to the development of a strong Best Management Practices (BMP) based hands-on workshop where the LTAHA provides instructors trained on these principles, the Fur Advisory Council provides funding for trapping kits and food, and LDWF provides support personnel who plan events and present the BMPs.

COVID slowed the program down some, but we roared back in full force even with COVID restrictions by complying with outdoor mandates at all gatherings. The response to our efforts has been overwhelming with waiting lists for many event locations around the state. Our goal has always been to cover the four corners of the state and one central location with one-day events each year. This requires enough instructors to cover the events with the least amount of travel possible for the instructors. This has not been possible in years past. However as more instructors come on board each year, we can envision more events in the near future. This plan revolves around the idea of standard education material laid out in an outline format, which our instructors can follow and present at each event keeping everyone on the same page. We achieve these goals through hosting instructor workshops, approximately five hours long, intended to give instructors the in-person, hands-on BMP training for the classes. The LTAHA hosts these workshops at least two times a year: once in the spring and once in the fall.

We are teaching the basics: how each trap style functions, how to handle each type of trap safely, why proper sizes are important for each species and distinctions between old school language and new terminology, which mean the same thing but sound much better. The one-day events are a pre-requisite to attend a three-day trapper school. The morning starts with greetings, introduction and covering the day's agenda. The first item on the agenda is Jennifer Manual's PowerPoint presentation. This is the longest classroom time the student will have to endure once they enter the program; yet, it is most important. The goal is to ensure that each student has heard or read the most important take-aways from the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) Trapper Education Manual. We have found that even seasoned trappers, who have come to the workshops, learn from the Trappers Education Manual. The day progresses with instructors giving trap setting and handling demos to small student groups. Provided we have enough instructors present, we like to have three group rotations: a beaver demo, a coon demo, and a land demo. Again, our goal is not to make trappers of every person attending, but rather to plant the seeds and allow them the knowledge and resources to properly set traps if they so choose.

Knowledge and participation are the key to the program's success. We welcome new ideas, and many have become a reality, such as the postcard-sized demo outline for instructors to use at each event to ensure all topics are covered. This helps the instructor flow through his or her demo without searching for or stalling on topics. We are developing standard demo boxes so that instructors can show or explain the same equipment at each event. Just today, an idea came forth about only demoing one animal species per station, such as beaver at the water demo, coon at the coon demo and coyote at the land station. The greatest tool we have right now is the great partnership with LDWF staff and their ability to transform our ideas and trials into written reality in reproducible form. In closing, I would like our membership to understand the time, thought and care with which we are developing this program.

Anyone wishing to become a LTAHA instructor please contact Homer Gibson, Tony Howard or Justin Ebarb by phone or email. The LTAHA website has our contact information.

### **Fall Rendezvous**

We have set the date for our Fall Rendezvous as November 4-6, 2022, at the shooting range in Woodworth, LA. This gathering will be a pre-season event with special invitations extended to our brethren in Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and, yes, Louisiana. Yes, we understand this is probably an opening day for something. However, in Louisiana, every weekend is opening day for something. This will be a gathering for fellowship, pre-season supplies, fur dealers' talks and good cooking. We will also be entertaining the second instructor workshop for the year this weekend. We will announce more details as we get closer to the event.

### **Our Presentation Matters**

While working the last three-day workshop in March, Mr. Danny Perry of Perry Fur made his second fur market presentation of the season. Danny's explanation of the Louisiana fur industry is a hit with the students and explains a lot about where we have been and where we are going in the world of fur. Danny closed out his second presentation with a word of advice, which I feel is very important and worth repeating. Danny said, "You represent the fur industry. You represent all of us. Be presentable and represent the industry well."

I have lived long enough to witness the fur industry evolve into a reputable industry of concerned conservationists, considering animal welfare, while managing healthy populations throughout the state. We teach this at every event: reputation and presentation matter. Through modern tools and techniques, we are trying to remove the image of heartless trappers toting clubs everywhere they go and clubbing animals to death. Through education, we are teaching modern trappers and even older trappers that what we say and how we present ourselves in public have huge impacts on the industry. The modern era of trapping has arrived, and we are proudly endorsing it.

### **LDWF Trapper Survey**

Good harvest data is an essential part of wildlife management. It tells wildlife managers which animals the public is most interested in harvesting, how many, and from which locations in the state. Fluctuations in harvest over time can also indicate issues that managers may need to address for both the trappers and the resource. This can help managers focus conservation dollars appropriately.

Traditionally; the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries got their fur harvest data from fur shipments that left the state to go to market. The Department does still collect that data but also recognize that most trappers are not harvesting furbearers for the market anymore. Trappers are moving towards nuisance control or for personal use of the meat, fur, or other parts. Because of this shift, there is a lot of data that is currently unaccounted for. The survey will help capture some of the data.

The Department is also collecting some general demographic data that will help the agency form a picture of who the active trapping base is in the state of Louisiana and where they are primarily

operating. This can help the Department focus trapper education efforts in underserved areas and give managers an idea of the current motivations of trappers so that we can better manage the industry for the constituents. These types of questions are subject to change each year as the Department forms a better picture of the trapping population and/or is in need of information from the active trappers on specific issues. In this way, trappers can have a say in how their resource is managed.

**Membership Drive**

Our membership has grown every month throughout the season and leading up to the convention, but we don't want it to stop growing. The LTAHA Board of Directors is asking each member to recruit just one person by December 2022. We all know someone who use to trap or use to be a member of the Association, we want them back on the membership rolls. Invite them to a workshop or the Fall Rendezvous, point them to the web site or show them this newsletter. There is strength in numbers and fellowship shared with likeminded people gives rise to many good ideas. The LTAHA would also like to remind all members to keep your NTA membership current and up to date so the national information is always available and flowing to you. [louisianatrappers.com/membership](http://louisianatrappers.com/membership)



**Membership Application Louisiana Trappers & Alligator Hunters**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ New Membership \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal

\$20 - Primary Membership (one year) \_\_\_\_\_

\$34 - Primary Membership w/Trappers Post magazine (one year) \_\_\_\_\_

\$300 - Lifetime Membership w/TP magazine \_\_\_\_\_

Return to: LTAHA membership 261 Sandy Lane Marksville LA 71351
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