

Edmond C. Mouton, Jr.

LDWF – New Iberia

Carl: Okay well before we get started I need to get your permission to record this

Edmond: Yes you have

C: Well for legal purposes I have to get the full spew on here. (Laughter) Basically we need to get your permission to put this recording, there will be copies of it put at the University in Lafayette

E: Okay

C: one at LSU, one at Louisiana Sea Grant, possibly one at the National Sea Grant Headquarters

E: Okay

C: for research purposes. There is no monetary compensation for anyone involved. We are strictly doing this to make this living memory available to future researchers. So if that's okay with you.

E: Yes it is. I'm very comfortable with that.

C: and we will proceed. I'd like for you to begin by telling us your full name and then your official title here and then we will plunge in.

E: Okay. My name is Edmond C. Mouton, Jr. I am a biologist program manager for Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. I'm with the coastal non-game section which historically used to be the fur and refuge section within the office of wildlife.

C: Okay and how long have you been

E: I started in the

C: Wait (background movement and mike noises)

E: I started in 1994 and I became involved basically with fur and fur trapping with Greg Linscombe probably towards the late '90s. Before that I mostly handled marsh management activities on the coastal refuges and WMAs.

C: Right. Now you're coming in after the golden age of

E: Yeah

C: of trapping

E: Yes, yes

C: in Louisiana but there have been important changes that have taken place during your professional career as well?

E: Yes there has

C: So if you could begin by telling us basically how, what has changed over time and why?

E: The fur trapping record in this office under the offices of Greg Linscombe and some of his predecessors. Actually they kept records here since the 1943-44 trapping season and that was basically because that's the season that nutria, which is an introduced species first was recorded in the Louisiana trapping records. Prior to that there was some record keeping, it was a little bit sketchy according to some of the annual reports. There is some data that actually dates back all the way to the early 1900s on trapping. I think some of the records was around 1910 and up and through the early '30s. And that's kind of where nutria showed up on the since, mid to late '30s whether they were introduced for fur farming. Eventually these fur farms collapsed, that's when they were released into the coastal wetlands, whether it was intentionally or not intentionally and as I mentioned earlier, they first showed up in the record in '43-'44. In my tenure here I came kind of on the cusp of when the trapping season was probably in its worst decline. In most recent years in the mid to late '70s was probably the peak of the trapping season in more recent time and that is indicated by a graph here that kind of follows the trend of nutria harvest in coastal Louisiana from the early '40s to present time. And the rest of fur trapping kind of followed this same scenario. The highest prices were found in the late '70s. Some of the situations that contributed to the decline of the fur prices was the saturation of the market. They had warmer winters in Eastern Europe and Russia where a lot of the fur was shipped to and utilized for garments. Also there was a shift in fashion to more leather goods than away from fur because of animal welfare movements that was in the late '70s early '80s. There was a lot of movement within the animal welfare group and eventually in the early part of 2000 the harvest was actually reduced to very few if any fur that was harvested and the price was very depressed. Also you see that same trend in the number of trappers that were bought trapping licenses which usually is another indicator of the activity of the fur business and we have actual data that dates back to the 1950s on licenses sold to present and if you look through here in the mid '70s like in '75 and '76, actually '74- '75 you had over 7,000 licenses sold, '75-'76 6,400, '76-'77 9,300, 1977-'78 12,000 or so, '78-'79 11,000, 1979-'80 12,000, and it stayed up there until the early '80s and right around the mid to late '80s is when they really started to decline. You can see a sharp drop from the 1987-88 season from 5,000 plus licenses to a little less than 3,000 and further decline down to less than 2,000 and actually in the year 2001-2002 it actually declined to 871. Since then it has picked up some, there has been some increases of fur prices and presently, this past year, 2011-12 there was a little over 2,000 licenses sold. Because of that

C: Are these actual trappers?

E: This is actually trapper's, licenses sold to Louisiana trappers statewide

C: Right and these are not people just going out to get the nutria bounty?

E: No, no

C: These are actual trappers

E: Actually there is some, about 400 individuals that participate, an average actually of about 330 trappers that participate in the nutria control program. These individuals trap only along the coast so about 300-350 of those licenses are attributed to the nutria trappers, where the rest are other people around other parts of the state, upland habitat and in northern Louisiana and those other areas.

C: Okay. Well I have two quick questions for you before I get you back on track.

E: Sure.

C: What happens to the people, we have at point over 12,000 people with licenses operating in the coastal marshes, the wetlands. What happens to these people within less than a decade? We are down to just a few hundred.

E: Yeah, a lot of those trappers were older individuals that were getting up in age but that's the old trappers that would go out and spend the winters in the marsh or potentially dedicate their time during the winter months for trapping. These individuals that may do other type of work for example crab or shrimp or work construction, more seasonal work and trapping to those individuals was just some supplemental income during the winter months when there wasn't much else going on. A lot of those trappers when muskrat was big, a lot of those trappers were trapping muskrat and a lot of those older trappers basically started dying off or became a lot less active because of their age and there was not another new breed of individuals that followed these. So there is a large gap, age gap between some of the older trappers and some of the newer trappers that are out there. In another words, there are not that many die-heart trappers left out there.

C: There had to be some kind of environmental impact as a result of the drastic decline in the number of trappers out there removing nutria and muskrats on the environment.

E: Yes. Muskrat actually in the early part of the 1900s was very important fur. It probably was the most important, most heavily trapped. They sold upwards, trapped upwards of 10 million muskrat alone a year. And those records are in this older book, fur animals of Louisiana and you can see that the number of fur animals that they trapped back then was phenomenal. Just for example here in 1924-25 just these species alone right here: muskrat, possum, raccoon, mink, skunk, otter and miscellaneous pelts which could be fox, weasel, other fur bearers almost 6,771,265 animals and then the 1924-25 dollars that was almost \$6.5 million which was quite a bit back then and it contributed not only to the local economy of those trappers but also the economy of the state. And you can see here some of the records that date back to 1913 all the way to 1930 back then as we mentioned there was a lot more trappers. Here we can see that the numbers from 1917 were a little over 6,000 and then you see here in the 1924-25 season there was 20,000 trappers in the '22-'23 season 26,000 plus trappers and '22-'23 28,000 trappers so it was a big industry back then.

C: Especially when you consider that they generally moved into the wetlands with their families, trapping season

E: Right the whole family, the whole family would basically

C: That's an amazing number of people living in the wetlands

E: Right so you had this whole community of people out there in the coastal wetlands that was out there working and trapping so the numbers are fairly phenomenal the amount of fur they harvested back then. You can see some of these numbers here of just muskrat alone over 3 million here, over 2 million here in '26-'27 and just the amount of fur that was harvested in those early years.

C: Now we've talked a lot about nutria. What about muskrat during this period from '44 - on. I mean are the numbers fairly steady?

E: Well muskrat, muskrat held its value until around the late '50s, right around 1960 is when they developed a market for nutria and in the fur trapping records that's when nutria surpass the muskrat harvest. And some of these comparative takes you can see the transition, that transition happening right around 1960. Let me see if I can find it.

C: So basically you have a downward trend for muskrat, and upward trend

E: Upward trend of nutria, like for example. Right here in the 1961-62 season they harvested 912,890 nutria where muskrat they only harvested 632,558 and that was the transition where nutria surpassed the muskrat prior to that though muskrat harvest was anywhere from a million and a half to over 2 million in the years did fluctuate all the way back until the records we have in the '43-'44 season.

C: Now during your tenure, what has been the tendency, I mean even today, is nutria still a more desirable pelt than

E: Actually there is not a whole lot of nutria that are harvested today for the fur and it's mostly because of price. The muskrat pelt is in high demand but unfortunately there is not many muskrat trappers left out there trapping muskrat. And the difference being that nutria can be trapped along bayous and canals and small banks where the trapper just riding down his boat setting traps up and down the bayou bank or small bank depending on what type of marsh he's in, where as to trap muskrat you have to be out there walking in the marsh amongst the muskrat mounds setting traps on the perimeter of the mounds. It's a different type of trapping and there is not many, if any, of those trappers that are left. So the reason why muskrat fur is not as prominent in most recent years is because it wasn't that many muskrat trappers out there.

C: Okay. Even though that is where the demand is?

E: Right

C: Lies

E: Right a lot of muskrat is used for faux mink in the manufacturing and fashion business. And the muskrat pelt is much smaller almost like a mink pelt. It's a much smaller pelt where one of the reasons nutria when it did become important and marketable during the '60s and beyond you had a much bigger

pelt to utilize in the fashion industry or for whatever product they were manufacturing with it. And again when those animals were harvested at those higher rates, both nutria and muskrat, we didn't see any impacts to the coastal wetlands due to overpopulation of those animals where as when trapping dropped off we saw more problems with muskrats in the marsh where they would cause these eat outs where they basically denude the marsh of vegetation and they can become easily friable and can either erode or subside or be washed away by the tide. And the same with nutria, if nutria become over populated in a wetlands situation they can too be detrimental to the coastal wetlands.

C: Well with the decline in the number of licenses, I would assume you are looking at an over population problem.

E: Yes and because of that you know the muskrat is an endemic species, its native to Louisiana. But the nutria was an introduced species. I mentioned earlier it was brought in for fur farming but they were very unsuccessful with that. There were 3 or 4 fur farms. There was one in St. Tammany parish north of Lake Pontchartrain, there was one in St. Bernard parish, there was one in the Houma area, and there was actually one on Avery Island that McIlhenny had. McIlhenny actually purchased his nutria from the gentleman in St. Bernard parish so he wasn't really the father of introducing nutria as he did claim and that has all been corrected by the historian that works for McIlhenny Corporation, Shane Bernard. But they, as you can see, as the trappers declined, also with this graph here you can see how the blue line is the average price and the bars in the number of nutria. You can see the peak that occurred in the late '70s where they were harvesting almost 2 million nutria per year, the average price of \$9 and then slowly because of the decline as I mentioned earlier: warmer winters, saturation of the market, also world economics in Eastern Europe, collapse of Russia. A lot of those factors contributed to the decline of the fur price and eventually you had a very low harvest of around half a million or so or less. This is just nutria here.

C: Right.

E: And eventually it went down to below 20,000 animals so just a couple a couple decades it went from harvesting 2 million to less than 20,000 so there was a big drop in the harvest and that's when the overpopulation occurred. That's when we started getting complaints from land owners and other marsh managers that there was this damage going out in the coastal wetlands. They suspected it was nutria. It was investigated by the department and it reported actually as early as the early to mid '80s and eventually in 1997 the department secured some funding with the coastal wetlands planning protection restoration act to do a pilot study to do further investigation and fly coast wide surveys to be able to determine the extent and amount of damage nutria were causing in coastal wetlands.

C: Okay, well can you address that for a few minutes? Where, is it generalized? Was it generalized the problem? Was it more or less concentrated in certain areas?

E: Well it was basically coast-wide from Texas to Mississippi. The area that was damaged the worst was located in southeastern Louisiana, pretty much in the Barataria Terrebonne Basin which is in between the Atchafalaya River, basically east of the Atchafalaya River and west of the Mississippi River was where a vast majority of the damage was. However, there was damage in other areas of the coast. And that

survey was funded to determine where the damage was and to try with a little more research, try and implement some kind of control method to try and control these species. And it took a while, that program was funded until 2003. However, in 2001 the department determined that with the incentive program if you paid trappers for a part of the animal which happens to be the tail. Every tail they turned in they received \$5 incentive. They implemented the program the first trapping season was 2002-2003. Also along that same time frame the coast wide surveys continued. They started in 1998, continued to this day. They are flown every spring and the program started with the 2002-2003 trapping season. The first few years the incentive was \$4 a tail. We had an average of 300 plus trappers involved.

C: And how many tails are they turning in?

E: They are turning in an average of over 330,000 plus tails annually. The lowest season was had was '05-'06 was after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita for obvious reasons trappers were dislocated from the area. Some lost equipment, some lost their homes. That was probably the lowest, it was a little over 167,000 tails, some where in there and a couple seasons ago in the 2009-2010 season I believe it was they set a record of 445,000 tails but over the ten years. This program has been operating ten years, we've averaged about 330,000 plus tails per year and at the same token, data from the coast-wide surveys indicate that prior to the start of this control program initiative, incentive program, excuse me, we were looking at damage ranging from 80,000-100,000 acres across the coast, which is an extrapolating number and over the course of ten years, we have reduced that number of acres to a little over 4,000.

C: That's tremendous!

E: So the program has been a very good success. Thus far we are in our 11th year this year and we have three more years of funding in front of us and potentially more so the program has been very successful. We're also at the same time trying to promote the use of the fur, trying to encourage Chinese fur buyers. We have an individual from Turkey and some other individuals to try and get nutria back into the fur industry. Some of the meat is being utilized to make dog biscuits and some dog foods so there is another economic incentive there. So and then also at the same time there has been a little economic boost in China which has impacted fur prices and they have been increasing slightly for the last couple of years so it's provided a little more of an incentive for trappers to go out and harvest not only nutria but other fur bearers as well.

C: Now Edmond, the people that are turning in the tails for the bounty, are they people doing this in addition to trapping or are they a separate group entirely?

E: Well there is, it's kind of a difference of individuals. There is some people that basically do it as a recreational activity. They may go out and harvest a few hundred or so on some property they may have where they either duck hunt or some access to some marsh land whether it's their family or lease. Then you have some people that are sort of serious about it may harvest a few more. But there is actually a group of people, it's about a 100 or so people out of the 330 plus people that harvest probably 70% of the tails that are turned in on an annual basis. So you have approximately 30% of these die heart trappers that are harvesting 70% of the tails. And some of those trappers are harvesting other animals

as well. Some target just nutria, it just depends on the individual and what, where he's trapping and what he's out for.

C: Um the Terrebonne Lafourche estuary, you know the Barataria area has really been hit hard by subsidence, erosion, land loss. To what extent do you think that the over population of nutria and muskrat contributed to that?

E: Well I think that they play a factor, they play a role. There is many environmental factors and ... factors that contribute to coastal erosion. Evidently nutria and muskrat have exasperated existing situations. And I don't think you can put your finger on any one mechanism that's solely responsible for this erosion and subsidence in this area as far as those factors are concerned but definitely they do exasperate the situation. You know we noticed first hand after Hurricane Rita especially, and Katrina, especially Katrina excuse me, in the south east. Some of the areas that were damaged by nutria whether it was moderate damage, severe, or even minor damage because the storm ..., those marshes were a lot more susceptible to storm damage than a healthy marsh. So obviously they did contribute to some of that, uh some of that damage and just their feeding activity contributes to some erosion as well. In particular fresh floating marshes which are very fragile and friable and once that mat is broken down and thin by nutria feeding activity it eventually breaks up and may eventually turn into open water.

C: To what extent, I just want to get your feel on this, to what extent did the storms of 2005, 2008, and then Isaac most recently control the population?

E: There was some control. In fact after Katrina there was several thousand nutria washed up on the beaches in Mississippi in Hancock County. Although nutria can survive events like that, it washed some, some nutria rode the rack line up to ship island and they developed a population on this interior wetland that's in there where they didn't have nutria before so it can drastically impact population numbers and densities, but it also can provide a mechanism to transport them to areas where they haven't been before. After Gustav, if you recall Gustav kind of passed right over Baton Rouge. It actually blew a bunch of nutria up and north of Lake Pontchartrain and St. Tammany parish in a bunch of those ... areas that didn't have nutria before. Just most recently in Hurricane Isaac it actually pushed a bunch of nutria from St. Bernard and Plaquemines up in Mississippi and Hancock County. Most of those nutrias were dead. Very few survived. But just to give you an idea of their reproductive effort, in Plaquemines Parish after Hurricane Rita the harvest nutria basically was reduced to almost nothing. There was very limited harvest there, the nutria wasn't around and because the nutria wasn't that abundant, trapping effort was too high. Most trappers didn't trap in that area and in a matter of five years or so Plaquemines Parish rose to the top over Terrebonne Parish as one of the highest parishes of harvest of nutria for that trapping season. So they can bounce back fairly readily.

C: That's amazing. The trappers that are out there now or at least over the course of your career, since there is a declining demand obviously this can't, I wouldn't imagine that trapping isn't their primary source of income.

E: No, in fact most individuals, most of the determined people the ones that trap part of that 30% that harvest the 70% do have other jobs and again they may be crabbers, they may fish, they may do

carpentry work, they may be self-employed in some other way, handyman work but the program has been going on for ten years and a lot of those individuals kind of attributed it to when trapping was very profitable that they kind of depend on this time frame for the supplement of their income and they treat it as a job. So that group of individuals is some serious, die-heart trappers. There is not many of those left around and then the rest of the individuals that participate may do it just for fun and earn a few dollars or what have you.

C: Are many people, I know at one time it was thought that people who worked offshore you know 7-7 and 14-14 basis and so forth would engage in a season pursueage when they were on shore

E: Yeah there is you know we have an application package and a lot of these individuals you know come from all different walks of life. I mean we had a city judge that was in the program (laughter). We have an old guy around Houma that's a shrimper. So it's all calibers. We have individuals who work offshore so right in their 7 days off or 14 depending what schedule they work, they will enroll in the program. And most of it goes back to historically is that these individuals used this time of year when there wasn't much else going on to attempt to supplement their income. Now obviously there is hardly any of those individuals that pack up their family and their belongings and move out in the marsh for the winter time. In fact there are very few of those left. There are some individuals that do for example stay at their camp like Continental Landing Fur for example. They have 48 or so trappers and there is an old gentleman, Mr. Sterling Freeue, he's 80 something years old. There is another guy, Mr. Willy who is 80 something. He runs like 175 traps a day, something I probably couldn't do (laughter). So there is still a few of those die-hearts out there and those guys may go out to their camp and spend several days out there trapping but very few people will do that anymore. Most people just come and go on a daily basis because transportation now is so dependable where as historically if you were at Marsh Island or some other place deep in the marsh in the '40s and '30s and in that time frame, just to get to point A to point B was a task so that is another reason they actually moved out there because they didn't want to waste all kind of time traveling back and forth.

C: Right, especially if you have a putt-putt engine (Laughter)

E: Yeah a putt-putt boat or you know and back then they were willing to do that and the whole family helped. I mean there is, you can go through some of these old pictures in the bulletins where you see the kids and the wife and everybody helping preparing the fur and dry it.

C: Two questions. First has the actual trapping technology changed much over the last few decades? And secondly, are they still preparing, dressing the furs in the field or you know for movement to the buyer?

E: I'll address your first question. A lot of the trapping technology has basically not changed. There is the leg hold traps which are commonly used by the marsh trappers. They have been improved upon but it is the same basic type trap. You know there has been introduction of other traps: the body gripping trap or the killing trap and some other advances in trapping. There is an organization the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies that helps state fish and game departments with different issues relative to their state whether it's fish or game or fur or what have you. And they are involved in what they call best

management practices where they go through and test traps and now it's become a science where they can recommend what traps are best to use for what animals to cause a less harm and are more animal welfare oriented to try and please some of the groups and make trapping a little more efficient. But the basic trap they use out in the marsh, the old leg-hold trap has not changed much at all. If you look at one from the 1700s that they used and you look at one manufactured today untrained eye they would look basically identical with some minor changes. There has been some improvements whereas when they stretch and dry out the fur they used to use wooden boards especially for nutria. They were shaped like a big popsicle and they would flesh the hide meaning they would take all the fat and anything else that was on the skin and it would be inverted on this board, tacked down at the bottom so it would be stretched and dried so when it was they could just pull it off and stack and bail it. That's how they prepared nutria. There is a picture of an old gentleman Lorneil Broussard in the marsh where he was one of the early guys to start using these wire frames instead of the boards. They were much easier to transport, a lot lighter, basically served the same purpose of holding the animal tight so it could dry properly. But most of the fleshing of the fur was done at the camp back then.

C: Right, well is that still?

E: That's not, no most people, some people will do it at the camp but a lot of people will bring the whole animal out and a lot of fur dealers actually buy the whole animal of the huff these days. Like for example if you'd come in with your daily catch of an otter, some nutria, muskrat, a few raccoons. Very few trappers process their own fur. They'll sell the whole animal on the huff to the dealer and then the dealer will process that fur.

C: Okay, well can you describe that process. Okay the person brings in, goes out into the field, catches

E: traps

C: traps the animals, okay now from that point to it's shipment off to manufacturer, what happens?

E: Okay, that's why the trappers a lot of them don't have to come in every day because they have to bring that animal if they are not going to process it themselves, they have to do something with it. Either put it in a cooler or do something with it fairly rapidly and that's kind of how they involved in that they come out the marsh with their daily catch, whether it's otters, nutria, raccoon, grey fox, red fox, what have you. They will come out of the marsh with their fur and they'll bring it to either a fur buyer which will meet them at the boat dock or some location. The fur buyer will in turn process it or turn around and bring it to a fur dealer or the trapper will go directly to a fur dealer. But normally these fur dealers have to run routes to where the trapper knows that this guy is going to be at the Bayou Black boat launch between 11 o'clock and 2 o'clock and he knows that he can show up there and sell his fur. Whereas the trappers, those who want to drive large distances to sell his fur so it's the dealer almost now has to go out and solicit fur from trappers.

C: Okay

E: Unless they are within close proximity of each other where they trap.

C: I know the '30s that there were major dealers in New Orleans

E: Right

C: I think Steinburgs were one and I don't remember the names of the others but they were basically individuals who had ties to New York

E: Right, fashion

C: fashion industry. Is that still the case where there are a few major players who have national or international connections?

E: No and unfortunately that's kind of what transitioned in the trapping industry is that those individuals you mentioned in New Orleans had enough capital to buy a lot of fur and sit on it for a while, sit on it until maybe the end of the summer or so and when the prices were good they could sell it. Well these days capital is a, is not something the fur dealers have to work with. So they are very reluctant to buy too much fur that they know they can't sell. So they like to do as quick of a turn around as they can. And you see that nowadays you see buyers from China or Turkey or from wherever will come in and actually bankroll a dealer to where if he wants to sell X number of nutria for example or raccoons or what have you, that way his only guarantee to get that number of fur from the dealer is that he'll actually bank roll this guy to buy this fur to where the dealer doesn't have to take the chance so because of the economy and the price, the rapid changes in fur prices, there is not a whole lot of stability if you will in the fur markets. So it is kind of a go as you can

C: It's also a crab shoot

E: It is, it is. I mean for example right now in Louisiana there is only 3 major fur dealers. There is one in Mansfield which is a gentleman by the name of Jimmy Gallaspy. He has a trapping supply place called R P Trapping. There is another gentleman Perry Fur, Danny Perry who is located in Oakdale and I think he does it because his father did it and his father's father did it. It's kind of most of these gentlemen kind of, it's been in their family for so long, they hate to let it go because they enjoy doing it. Then there is another gentleman Tab Pitre who is in Galliano, Cut Off area with Pitre Fur Company. His father just recently passed away. He was 90 something years old and he had been involved in the fur business since he was a young man. So most of them are family handed down businesses. Now historically there were a lot more dealers than that but basically at this point and time in Louisiana there is only three licensed dealers.

C: Are they all in New Orleans, the dealers?

E: No, no all the fur dealers, there is one in Mansfield, one in Oakdale, and one in Galliano-Cut Off area.

C: Okay, now you said that and it didn't process because it seems so far removed from the old historical model that

E: It is, its very different and that you see, most of the, most of the individuals that were in the industry in the New Orleans area, most of them were Jewish origin and you know they were involved in the fur business and also in the fashion business so they kind of had it cornered on both ends if you will and they had the money to bank roll these operations where that doesn't exist anymore. So that's the reason why the Louisiana Fur Advisory Council has hired contractors and we work with these contractors to try and go out and solicit some of these individuals because a lot of the fur these days goes to China and is processed in China. A lot of these fur dealers actually buy the raw fur, they tan it and they also make garments.

C: Now is that for the Chinese market or do they ship it out

E: Well a lot of it goes to Russia and Eastern Europe

C: Okay

E: And some of it may make its way back to the United States but the Eastern Rim is a big market for the fur. In fact every year in Beijing there is Beijing fur and leather show which our contractor attends because there is a big interest in you know China and also in Russia. So historically when the nutria harvest was very high that is where a lot of the nutria fur went to, Eastern Europe and Russia. Obviously because of the climate is very cold over there and but there were many garments made with nutria. And then there are some specialty garments like in China. They're always after otter because they make a ceremonial robe for when they young children go through puberty and mature. There is a ceremonial robe and the collar is lined with otter. So there is a demand for otter for that one specialty garment so there is a lot of demand in China for, at this time because the economy is good.

C: You mentioned earlier that trapping in many families is something of a family tradition, um I assume that there are now, that family camps that many of the trappers use when they are out in the field.

E: Yeah, there is some, there is very few that I guess very few siblings of a trapper that are out there maybe trapping. You do see a lot of father-son teams that do participate in the nutria control program that probably were raised by their grandfather or so that would trap out there in the marsh. You know and it maybe in an area for example where they have a duck lease and it may be their duck camp and they may trap in areas of their duck lease. Or again it could be trappers that have been associated with a land company like Continental Land and Fur, Conaco Philips, and some of these other land companies, the Patchy Corporation where historically those lands were purchased for surface use basically for trapping, timber, so on and so forth, hunting when you can hunt waterfowl commercially and initially that's how that started to where you had this group of trappers that every year harvested alligators for example. But there is very few of those die-heart trappers that are left in that type of situation. But I know Continental has 48 trappers and some of those other properties but some of the trappers I've mentioned, they're getting up in their 80s.

C: Right

E: So you know that's going to be a group of people, a dying breed if you will, Williams and some of those individuals like that that probably could tell you a lot of stories about their trapping on that property.

C: Well we may be in touch with you to get some names and numbers. Um in view of that fact, what is the future of the fur harvesting industry?

E: Well that is a good question and that some individuals think that the fur industry is a dying industry. It is hanging on just barely with individuals that are still interested enough to go out and trap. But counter to that we have an increase in nuisance animals and nuisance species because you know in this day and age when we sprawl out in these urban areas and we move in to what used to be sugarcane fields and areas of woods and fragment the habitat you basically invading habitat that once housed a lot of these fur bearers and other species of animals. So you are seeing a decrease in trapping but on the same token you may be seeing an increase in nuisance animal control so just because trapping and its history may go away, it doesn't alleviate the problem of all the fur bearer species that are out on the landscape and that's something that I need to remind some of our administrators sometimes because we see it now. We see it now, we see it now increasing amount of nuisance animal calls and it's because of the limited trapping.

C: Well also you know, I grew up between Sunset and ... which and my family always raised cattle and I know what a problem coyotes are becoming for that industry so is there any, this is from my own edification, is there any program out there to begin harvesting coyote fur or dealing with?

E: Coyotes are actually listed as a fur bearer. You know there is basically 11 species of fur bearers that they harvest now. I can run through them real quick if you would like. We got the nutria, the mink, in fact let me do this, much easier to go down the list: the nutria, the muskrat, raccoon, mink, the skunk is listed but it's very, it's not real popular, they actually have two species of skunk in Louisiana. They had the striped skunk and the spotted skunk which is very rare but the striped skunk is just the incidental take as you can see here this past year they harvested 8. The opossum, the river otter, red fox, grey fox, bobcat, beaver, and coyote. That is the basic furs that are harvested in Louisiana are part of this comparative take.

C: Well I know beaver is becoming a nuisance animal in some areas in St. Landry Parish and I'm just surprised by the number of pelts, almost 2,000.

E: Yeah and then you can see here raccoon was an important pelt and you can see river otter. River otter is one of the highest, has the most valuable pelt of the bunch. But you can see these days they barely broke \$300,000 in value when you are talking about in the early '20s and '30s when you had 6 to 7 million dollars worth and that's in 1930 dollars, not in 2012 dollars.

C: Right which is probably \$150 million in modern

E: So the value here is very low compared to historical values and then obviously we are adding in the number of nutria that are caught or turned in with the nutria control program which gives this number

here but it's really just to document those numbers. But as you can see the number of nutria sold for fur is less than 5,000 so it's fairly low, it's fairly low compared to

C: Absolutely and the price now is \$2.97 approximately

E: Yeah and it varies from a \$1.50 to \$2.00 and some of this \$2.79 is because few of the trappers that did harvest these animals actually pelted them and sold them green so they were already pelted and they get a little more money for that and that's what kind of artificially inflates this. The actual average price right now is around \$1.00 to \$1.50 and really economically these days that's why the harvest of nutria is so low for the fur because it's not worth the trapper's effort to process. And once it's processed and dried, that pelt right there is worth only \$5 if it is a #1. So there is a lot of work

C: If it's not, I would take it that the pelt itself is not worth more than the tail for the bounty.

E: No, no it's not and that is kind of, we looked, we basically looked at the historical trend of harvest from 1943-44 to 2011-12 or basically when we first started the nutria control program we went back to the numbers up to 2001 and that's where we got the 400,000 was our anticipated target of harvest which we have only reached one year but that's where we came up with that number to see when the harvest dropped below 500,000 that is when we started seeing damage and that's how we came up with the 400,000. And then we saw where at a price of \$5 they were harvesting you know a little over half a million so that is where we initially came up with the \$4 incentive and raised it to \$5 but that is kind of how we came up with those target numbers for the program.

C: Well let me ask you one final question and I hope we can do a follow up interview at some point.

E: Sure!

C: Standing at this point and looking back to 1994, what are the most significant changes that have taken place in your mind over that period?

E: I think watching basically the fur harvest drop to practically nothing. You know it was right around 1996-97 time frame where it really fell to 20,000-25,000 total animals per year with just nutria was a good indicator species. And I think it was concern because you know without any type of program in place we saw that number may drop even more drastically along with other fur. One thing you can't predict is the world economics and what's happening with that and that is a driving force evidently. Where is the market? You know it was in, it is in China now, historically it might have been more in Eastern Europe. It moves around so that is a moving target. But I guess the concern I saw is if the harvest basically dwindles down to nothing, then what will happen to these people who used to depend on it for some supplemental income? What will happen to all those fur bearers species that will be out there? You know what are we faced with if that were to happen? Fortunately around the same time the program started, fur prices actually started slowing climbing back up due to changes in fashion and they were using fur in not just for hats and coats, they were using it in fashion as more for trim and other type of accessories. So I think it became a little more versatile. Nutria fur actually became a little more appealing because it is associated with an invasive species so it became kind of an environmentally

kosher fur if you will and that's sort of what is being promoted. There is a lady in New Orleans Cream O'Cray who is trying to promote nutria fur. It has been looked at by other designers in New York so there is some potential there of marketing that fur as green or kosher fur which may help sell it. But you know prices are a little better now. You hear that from the dealers but as for as any long term projections of what will happen to the fur industry, I really don't know. Although we do have some concern that as time as gone there are going to be fewer and fewer trappers out there willing to go out and harvest fur bearers. Because if you look, if you would take all the trappers that work for all the major land companies, Continental, Conaco Philips, Patchy, all these land companies and take an average age, I think you would be up there pushing upper 60s to 70 years old. That's just for speculation but I think if you looked at that data, except for a few younger guys that have stepped in and taken over their dad or uncle's lease; a lot of that has happened because of the nutria control program. But still in all I think if you look at the average or median age of those trappers it's going to be up there. And once they're gone, who is going to step in and take their place?

C: Great, well this was

END OF TAPE