



RECREATIONAL ALLIGATOR HUNTING OVERVIEW

Introduction

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) manages the American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) as a 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 crocodilian species throughout the world.

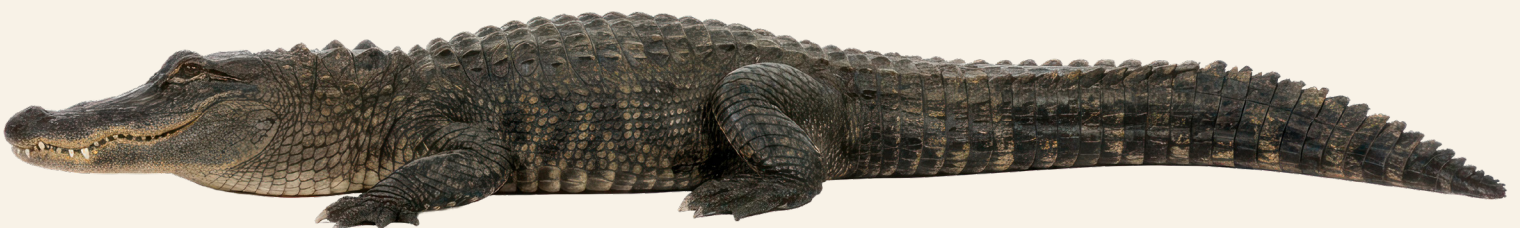
Alligators have been used commercially for their valuable leather since the 1800s. This harvest was generally unregulated throughout the 1900s, until a gradual population decline resulted in severely reduced harvests in the early 1950s. Alligator season in Louisiana was closed in 1962. At that time, research, focusing on basic life history factors, was undertaken which led to development of a biologically sound harvest management program.

The goals of LDWF's wild alligator harvest program are to manage and conserve Louisiana's alligators as part of the state's wetland ecosystem, provide benefits to the species, its habitat and the other species of fish and wildlife associated with alligators. The basic philosophy was to develop a sustained use management program to provide long term benefits to the survival of the species, maintain its habitats, and provide significant economic benefits to the citizens of the state.

Alligator hunting was prohibited from 1962 to 1972 and, as a result, alligator populations quickly increased. In September 1972, LDWF initiated an experimental commercial wild alligator harvest in Cameron Parish. Additional parishes were included in subsequent years and became statewide in 1981. Since the inception of LDWF's wild harvest program in 1972, over 1.2 million wild alligators have been harvested and sold bringing in millions of dollars of revenue to landowners and trappers.

On August 20, 2026, the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission promulgated rules to establish a recreational alligator hunting season. Through a lottery system, this season will allow as many as 5,000 alligator hunters to receive two recreational alligator hide tags. This recreational alligator hunting season has been established in Louisiana to provide Louisiana sportsmen and women with greater opportunity to utilize and enjoy this iconic species. Louisiana now has a robust alligator resource that is capable of providing sustainable recreational harvest opportunities to Louisiana residents without negatively impacting a highly valuable commercial industry.

This new season creates a controlled recreational harvest opportunity for resident hunters, separate from the existing commercial alligator program.



www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/alligator-hunting

RECREATIONAL ALLIGATOR HUNTING



General

LDWF issues recreational alligator hide tags for eight different zones through a lottery system. Recreational alligator hide tags can only be issued to bona fide residents age 16 and older that are hunter-education certified. Recreational alligator hide tags are nontransferable and may not be used on properties already allocated commercial alligator hide tags..

Recreational alligator hunters are prohibited from conducting, advertising, or participating in any for-hire guided alligator hunt using recreational hide tags.

Recreationally harvested alligators, hides, meat, and parts absolutely cannot be sold commercially or enter into commerce.

Licenses

Recreational Alligator Hunter

A recreational alligator hunter must possess on his person a Basic Hunting License, a Resident Alligator Sports Hunter License, either written evidence of ownership or written permission from the landowner of the property they are hunting, and one or more current recreational alligator hide tags for the zone they are hunting. Recreational alligator hide tags are valid only in the harvest zone indicated on the hunter's license and tags. A Resident Alligator Sports Hunter License costs \$25.

Anyone assisting in a recreational alligator hunt is required to possess an Alligator Sports Hunter License and must be in the physical presence of a recreational alligator hunter who has been issued recreational hide tags. A Resident Alligator Sports Hunter License costs \$25 and the Non-resident Alligator Sports Hunter License costs \$150. The Resident and Non-resident Alligator Sports Hunter License may be purchased on-line (louisianaoutdoors.com/licenses-and-permits) or at any retail store that sells hunting and fishing licenses.

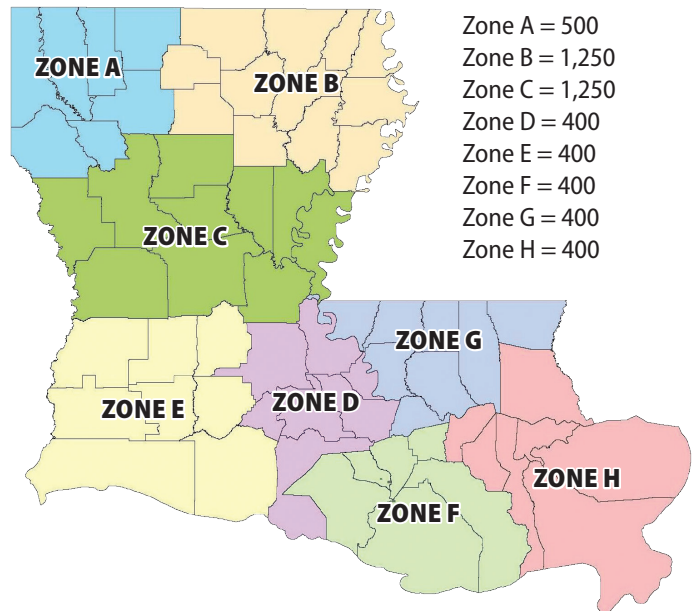
Seasons

Louisiana is divided into eight recreational alligator hunting zones. Each zone will open on October 1 and close on October 31. Baited hooks and lines may not be set more than 24 hours prior to the open season and shall be removed no later than sunset of the last day of the open season.

Hunting Hours

Alligators may be harvested between official sunrise and sunset only. No nighttime harvest is allowed.

Year 1: Recreational Opportunities by Zone



RECREATIONAL ALLIGATOR HUNTING



Limits and Size Restrictions

The daily and season quota is equal to the number of alligator tags that a licensed recreational alligator hunter possesses. There are no size restrictions on wild alligators taken during the recreational alligator season. The intentional taking of white or albino alligators is prohibited and carries a \$10,000 fine.



Legal Methods

The only legal method to take alligators recreationally is with hook and line or snatch hook. Lines must be anchored or tethered, and originating from the immovable eligible property owned by the hunter or where the hunter has written landowner permission to hunt alligators. Properties already allocated commercial alligator hide tags are not eligible. A recreational alligator hunter may set no more than two (2) baited lines per unused tag. All lines must be labeled with the hunter's LDWF customer number on weatherproof material. A firearm or bang stick may be used to dispatch an alligator after it has been taken on hook and line. Alligators may be dispatched from a boat once captured via hook and line. Pole hunting and shooting of free-swimming alligators is prohibited.

Hook and Line Method

Baited hooks are suspended above the water. In most cases hunters will use poles, branches or trees to suspend baits as well as provide for a stationary object for securing the end of the line. The most commonly used baits are chicken quarters and beef melt. Approximately 30 feet of line is tied off to the bottom of the structure while the baited hook end is suspended about 1-2 feet above the water surface. Line must be a minimum of 300 lb. test. The baited end is suspended in such a manner to allow for easy line removal by an alligator. Clothes pins are commonly used to hold the baited end and freely release the line once the alligator takes the bait. Excess line is neatly rolled up near the base of the structure. Alligators primarily feed at night and will typically take the bait overnight. Alligator hunters must inspect their baited lines and remove captured alligators daily. Alligators should be dispatched immediately upon checking lines. Shot placement should be centered directly behind the skull. Alligator hunters shall not release any alligator from any taking device, except in the event that an alligator is hooked and the hunter's quota has been reached. In that situation, the hunter must immediately release the alligator in the most humane method possible. All hooks and lines shall be removed by sunset on the last day of the season, or when an alligator hunter's quota is reached.

Tagging

Alligators are to be tagged immediately upon harvest before moving from the capture location. The tag shall be securely affixed on the bottom side of the tail approximately 6 inches from the end. Keep the tag attached to the alligator or hide until the hide is tanned or made into a finished item for your own personal use. Be careful not to prematurely lock tags or catch affixed tags on objects that may rip out or break tags.

Lost, Stolen or Defective Alligator Tags

If alligator hide tags are lost, stolen, or defective, report them immediately to LDWF. Staff will review the situation and determine if replacement tags can be issued.

RECREATIONAL ALLIGATOR HUNTING



Alligator Care

Alligators should be kept cool and covered with damp coverings (burlap sacks, blankets, etc.) and away from gasoline, oil or other contaminants. Contaminants and prolonged exposure to direct sunlight and heat may cause hide damage and compromise meat quality. Proper practices during harvest and storage are key elements for a safe and high-quality meat. Simple steps like rinsing the alligators before chilling, washing hands and equipment regularly, and changing clothes/aprons when dirty can have a big effect on reducing contamination. For additional information on how to properly preserve your alligator meat after harvest please visit

www.lafisheriesforward.org/alligator.

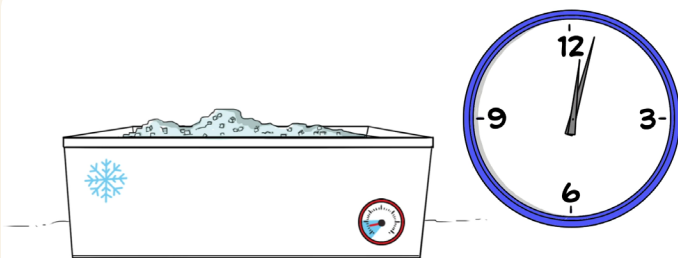
COVER FOR PROTECTION



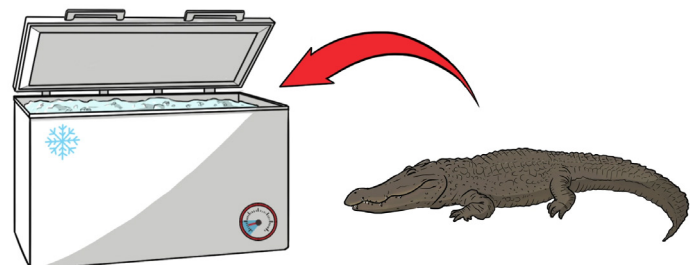
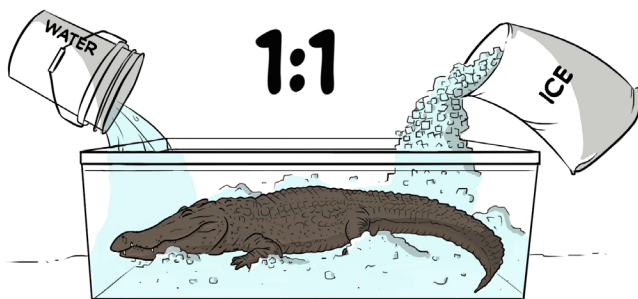
SURROUND THE ALLIGATOR



NOT JUST A BAG



- 5-6 HOURS OF BEING CAUGHT INTO AN ICE SLUSH
- KEEP THEM THERE FOR AT LEAST 12 HOURS



IF MORE THAN **48HRS**,
PLACE THE ALLIGATOR IN A FREEZER

RECREATIONAL ALLIGATOR HUNTING



Processing Alligators and Hides

Properly skinning alligators can be difficult. If a hunter chooses to skin their own alligator(s) for personal use, the first step is to prepare for skinning with a table at a comfortable height, a sharp knife, a sharpener, a scraper and salt. Begin the skinning process (see www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/alligator-hide-care for detailed instructions and diagrams). Once skinning is complete all meat and fat must be removed from the alligator hide to prevent decay. The most common scraping method is to use dull tools such as blunt knives, paint scrapers or beveled pipes to scrape excess meat and fat from the underside of the hide. Once the hide has been scraped and cleaned it must be salted. Salt removes moisture and helps cure the alligator hide. A fine grain salt should be applied generously (1/2 to 1 inch thick) and rubbed into all parts of the hide. The hide should then be tightly rolled and stored in a cool and well ventilated area where it can drain. After three to five days, the old salt should be thrown away, the hide resalted, rolled and refrigerated if possible. It is recommended that hunters wishing to taxidermy or tan hides utilize the service of a professional alligator processor to ensure hide is skinned, cured, and preserved properly.

Diagram of Proper Hornback Cut Pattern

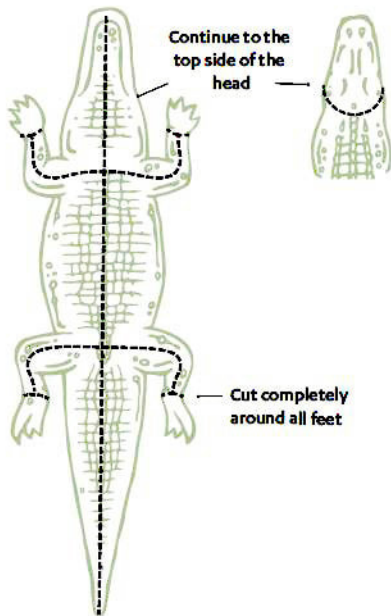


Diagram of Proper Hornback Skin After Skinning

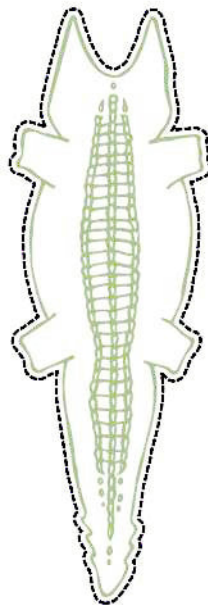


Diagram of Proper Belly Cut Pattern

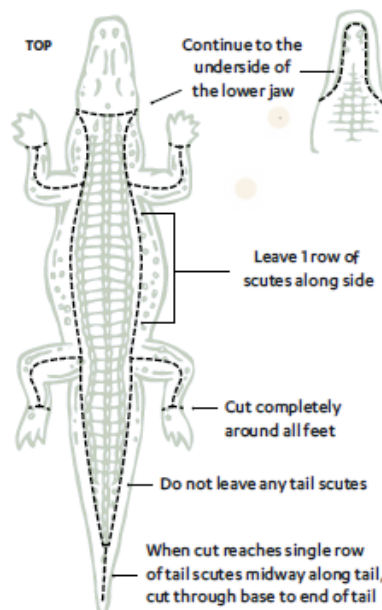


Diagram of Proper Belly Skin After Skinning

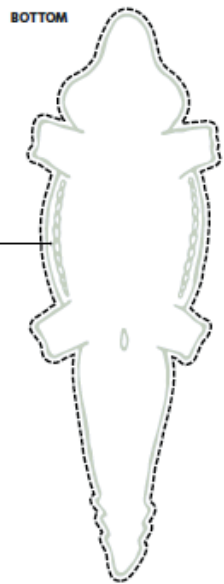
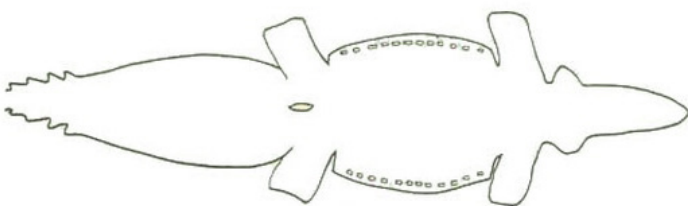


DIAGRAM 2



The area between the neck and vent in Diagram 2 is the part of the belly hide that is graded. Holes or cuts in this part of the hide make it difficult or impossible to cut full belly patterns for purses, briefcases, or larger leather articles. Enough holes or cuts in the flanks can even make cutting shoe vamps or smaller leather goods difficult. One row of scutes along the sides of the alligator is left so the tanner has some extra hide to tack to when the hide is stretched and dried during the tanning process. Take special care not to cut or put holes in the belly pattern of the hide (particularly around the legs and flanks where the thin hide is easy to nick with a knife).

RECREATIONAL ALLIGATOR HUNTING



Alligator Parts

Alligator parts are any portion of the alligator carcass except the hide and includes the bony dorsum plates, if detached from the tagged alligator hide. Alligator hunters may give alligator parts to anyone for personal use. Any alligator parts or containers enclosing alligator parts must be tagged with the name, hide tag number, address, date and the LDWF customer number of the person donating the alligator part(s). This information must remain affixed until the part(s) has been stored at the domicile of the possessor.

Storage, Tanning or Taxidermy

Alligators/alligator hides may be stored at any location if they are properly tagged and documented. Alligator hides being shipped out of state for tanning or for taxidermy instate must be properly tagged until the hide is tanned or made into a finished product. Alligator hides, meat, or parts cannot be shipped outside of the United States.



RECREATIONAL ALLIGATOR HUNTING



Research Alligators

Many alligators have been marked by LDWF biologists for research purposes. Some of these were caught in the wild, and some were released to the wild from commercial farms. These alligators have one or more notches cut out of the tail scutes and have had two metal tags placed in the webbing between the toes (usually on the back feet). Data obtained through the reporting of these tags allow biologists to track alligator movement, growth, and survival. Alligator hunters should report any research alligator captured by recording the full web tag number (usually 6 digits), the length, tail notch(es) and sex (if possible) of the alligator on forms provided by LDWF. Sometimes the web tag in the foot is lost as the alligator grows, but the information from the tail notch lets LDWF know what year the alligator was marked. It is very important that hunters report this information to LDWF, as it helps LDWF's management programs for continued harvests. Reporting forms for research alligators can be found at the following link:

www.wlf.louisiana.gov/assets/Hunting/Alligator/Files/research_alligator_report_form_2022.pdf

Alligator Recapture Information For The Wild Harvest Season

Hunter/Reporter's Name _____ License No. _____
Address: _____ Phone: (____) _____
Did you skin your own alligators or take them to a processing shed/dealer? _____ (If yes, list where processed)

Date Trapped	Tail Scute Mark	Toe (Web) Tag Numbers*	Total Length	Sex	General Body Condition	CITES Tail Tag Number (Example 2019012496)	Remarks	For LDWF Use Only

Picture Showing Marking of Tail Scutes
Double Scutes Single Scutes
A B C D E F G

Picture Showing Web Tag Placement in Foot

WHEN YOU FINISH TRAPPING, PLEASE RETURN TO BRODEE LANDRY:
200 DULLES DRIVE, LAFAYETTE, LA 70506 OR CALL 337-735-8672

Reporting Requirements

Report the recreational hide tag number, length of the alligator, date, and parish of harvest to LDWF within 72 hours of harvest. Hunters can validate their harvest by reporting it at one of the following:

- LDWF web portal
- LA Wallet
- Toll-Free Validation Line
- louisianaoutdoors.com

Hunters who fail to validate harvested alligators will be prohibited from future participation in the recreational alligator hunting lottery

Wanton Waste/Sanitary Disposal

Reasonable effort must be made to retrieve any hooked, wounded, or killed alligator and to preserve the meat for human consumption. Alligator carcasses and other remains may not be disposed of in public lands, rights-of-way, or water bodies.



RECREATIONAL ALLIGATOR HUNTING



Questions

For more alligator hunting information as well as other alligator program information:

www.lagatorprogram.com

For specific questions not covered previously or by the alligator program's webpage, contact the local LDWF office or e-mail the alligator program at LAalligatorprogram@wlf.louisiana.gov



Disclaimer

This publication is not an official copy of the laws in effect and should not be utilized or relied upon as such. It does represent an attempt by the publisher to present as a public service, an overview of some of the laws and a set of regulations adopted by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission and being current at the time of this publication. Substantive changes to the state laws may very well occur following the printing of this publication. For these reasons, the accuracy of the information contained within this publication cannot be guaranteed and the reader is cautioned that it is his responsibility to apprise himself of the laws in effect at any given time. These regulations include those contained within the Louisiana Revised Statutes, particularly Title 56 and the official regulations of the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission.

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Best Practices Handling Wild Alligator Meat

ALLIGATOR MEAT IS GROWING IN POPULARITY, showing up on restaurant menus across the United States. However, meat safety and quality are key elements to a sustainable market. To help harvesters and processors ensure a safe and high quality product, Louisiana Sea Grant researchers analyzed best handling practices to prevent spoilage and extend shelf life.

RESEARCH

Meat from wild alligators was evaluated to determine how soon it must be chilled – and the best way to chill it—before levels of common food spoilage and pathogen microorganisms spiked and the meat became unsafe. Key findings included:

- No difference in total microbial count and spoilage microorganisms comparing alligators chilled within 1 or 6 hours after caught. At both observation points, total counts and spoilage microorganisms were within acceptable limits.
- Long storage (over 48 hours) of alligators in ice slush can be a source of *Salmonella* to the product.

CURRENT INDUSTRY PRACTICES

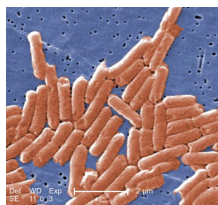
Docks and processors that receive wild alligators generally follow these practices to keep meat in good condition:

- Alligators received within 5 or 6 hours of being caught are placed in ice slush for at least 12 hours.
- Any alligator out of the water for more than 6 hours must be placed in a cooler or in ice by the hunter.
- If alligators are not going to be skinned within 48 hours of receiving at a dock, they should be transferred from ice slush or cooler to a freezer.

FURTHER STEPS TO MAINTAIN QUALITY

When it comes to processing any animal product, taking the heat out of the meat quickly and effectively is the primary step in keeping the product from spoiling. Also, protecting the skin from direct sunlight exposure will help maintain its integrity and quality. This research has shown a few additional practices to improve quality:

- Covering alligator to protect from direct sunlight to maintain meat and skin quality.
- Get to processing ASAP so the carcass can be iced down.
- Though a proper ice slush is the best way to get the animal cold fast, it could be a source of contamination of *Salmonella*, because of potential drainage of intestinal content to the water. This contamination could be reduced by:
 - Chill in ice slush for 12 hours; once chilled, move carcasses to a cooler for alligators to be processed within 48 hours, or freezer for longer storage.
 - Make sure to use a true 1:1 ratio of ice to water for an effective slush the carcass is completely submerged.
- If using ice to initially chill the alligator, be sure and get ice around the entire alligator to actually have impact on internal temperature.
- The use of citric acid at 1% dip solution after chilling showed a reduction in *Salmonella*.



Simple steps can help preserve.

Standard good manufacturing practices during the harvest and storage process are key elements for a safe and high-quality meat. Simple steps like rinsing the alligators before chilling, washing hands and equipment regularly, and changing clothes/aprons when dirty, can have a big effect on reducing contamination.

Though total bacteria count and spoilage microorganisms in collected samples were within recommended limits before 18 hours, using the recommended steps to maintain quality can further reduce limits and extend shelf life.

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FISHERIES FORWARD



Get more details at:
<https://www.lafisheriesforward.org/alligator/>



This publication is a cooperative effort of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and Louisiana Sea Grant College at LSU through the Louisiana Fisheries Forward program, which aims to advance Louisiana's seafood industry. This is one of many fact sheets available free of charge at our website www.lafisheriesforward.org. // Authors: E Watts





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