

# ALLIGATOR HUNTING REGULATION OVERVIEW



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## **Introduction**

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. Since the inception of LDWF's wild harvest program in 1972, over 1,000,000 wild alligators have been harvested and sold bringing in millions of dollars of revenue to landowners and trappers. Conservative estimates have valued these resources at over \$320,000,000, providing significant, direct economic benefit to Louisiana.

## **Historical Perspective**

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. In 1962, the alligator season in Louisiana was closed, and research studies, focusing on basic life history factors, were undertaken which led to development of a biologically sound management harvest 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 which, through regulated harvest, would provide long term benefits to the survival of the species, maintain its habitats, and provide significant economic benefits to the citizens of the state. Since Louisiana's coastal alligator habitats are primarily privately owned (approximately 81%), our sustained use management program provides direct economic benefit and incentive to private landowners, and alligator hunters who lease land, to protect the alligator and to protect, maintain, and enhance the alligator's wetland habitats. One of the most critical components of the wild harvest program is to equitably distribute the harvest in relation to population levels.

Alligator populations quickly increased between 1962 and 1972 while alligators were totally protected. In September 1972 LDWF initiated a closely regulated experimental commercial wild alligator harvest in Cameron Parish. Additional parishes were included in subsequent years and became statewide in 1981. Currently over 2,000 licensed alligator hunters harvest 30,000 to 35,000 wild alligators annually in Louisiana.

## **Alligator Hunting**

### **General**

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries issues alligator harvest tags for property containing sufficient wetland alligator habitat capable of sustaining an alligator harvest. Wild alligator tags can only be issued to licensed alligator hunters and are nontransferable. An alligator hunter must either own land or have permission to hunt alligators on land that qualifies for alligator harvest tags. Alligator hunters apply for alligator tags prior to the season.

## **Licenses**

### **Hunter<sup>1</sup>**

An alligator hunter must possess on his person an alligator hunter's license as well as one or more current alligator tags for the property on which he is hunting. Tags are property specific and must be used on the property indicated on the hunter's license. Alligator hunters must have their alligator hunter's license in possession to possess or sell wild alligators, their skins, or parts. Resident alligator hunter licenses cost \$25, nonresident landowner licenses cost \$150 and there is no cost for alligator tags.

### **Helper (Residents Only)**

Individuals other than the hunter harvesting alligators for the hunter must possess either a helper or a sport license. A licensed helper can hunt independently of the alligator hunter, but a sport hunter must always be accompanied by a licensed hunter or helper. Anyone assisting the hunter needs a license. A helper license costs \$25 and must bear the name and license number of the hunter(s) being assisted.

### **Sport (Residents and Nonresidents)**

Individuals can harvest alligators as a sport while being guided by a hunter possessing tags. Sport hunters must always be accompanied by a licensed hunter or helper. A sport license costs \$25 for Louisiana residents and \$150 for nonresidents.

## **Seasons**

Louisiana is divided into east and west alligator hunting zones. Each zone has specific opening and closing dates. The east zone opens the last Wednesday of August and the west zone opens the first Wednesday of September. Each zone remains open for 60 days from the opening date. Baited hooks and lines may be set no more than 24 hours prior to the general 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.

## **Limits and Size Restrictions**

The daily and season quota is equal to the number of alligator tags that a licensed alligator hunter possesses. There are no size restrictions on wild alligators taken during the general open season.

## **Legal Methods**

Alligators may be harvested by hook and line, bow and arrow and firearms (except shotguns). The possession of shotguns is prohibited while hunting or taking wild alligators. The fishing (hook and line) method is the most common.

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<sup>1</sup> A nonresident landowner may be issued alligator tags on his own property in Louisiana provided that the property qualifies for alligator harvest tags and the proper applications have been submitted. Any alligator hunter related information provided in this document or in current alligator regulations also applies to nonresident landowners.

## **Fishing Method (hook and line)**

Baited hooks and lines are suspended above the water by some type of structure. 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' of line is tied off to the bottom of the structure while the baited hook end is suspended about 1-2' 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 sometimes used to hold lines to facilitate easy line removal. Excess line is rolled up near the base of the structure. Alligators (feeding primarily at night) will take the bait. Once alligator lines are set and baited, alligator hunters must inspect their hooks and lines and remove captured alligators daily. Alligators should be dispatched immediately upon checking lines. Shot placement should be centered directly behind the skull. No person shall release any alligator from any taking device for any purpose without first dispatching the alligator, except in the event that an alligator is hooked and the hunter's quota has been reached, the hunter must immediately release the alligator in the most humane method possible. All hooks and lines shall be removed when an alligator hunter's quota is reached.

## **Bow and Arrow**

Bow and arrow can be used to dispatch alligators while on hook and line (see Fishing Method above) or to capture alligators. Barbed arrow must be used to capture alligators. A minimum of 300 lb. test line must be securely attached to the head of the arrow in such a manner to prevent separation from the arrow head. The other end of the line must be attached to a stationary or floating object capable of maintaining the line above water when an alligator is attached. Bow and arrow use may not be permitted if hunting on WMAs or public lakes.

## **Firearms**

Firearms (except shotguns) may be used to dispatch alligators while on hook and line (see Fishing Method above) or to harvest free swimming alligators. Harvesting free swimming alligators with firearms may increase chances of losing alligators. Extreme caution should be used when harvesting free swimming alligators to ensure that alligators can be retrieved once harvested. Alligator hunters should practice firearm safety at all times and pay close attention to ricochet hazards. Harvesting free swimming alligators may not be permitted if hunting on WMAs or public lakes.

## **Tagging**

Alligators are to be tagged immediately upon harvest before moving from the capture location. The tag should be placed about 6" from the end of the tail on the bottom side of the tail. Once the tag is placed through the tail it must be locked using the tag's locking device. The tag must stay affixed to the alligator or alligator hide until the tanned hide is used for product manufacturing. Be careful not to prematurely lock tags or catch tags on objects that may rip out or break tags. Be careful not to lose or drop tags overboard. Tags do not float and will not be replaced if lost.

## **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 will cause hide damage which will substantially lower value or even make the alligator worthless.

## **Selling Alligators**

Alligators/hides can only be sold to licensed fur buyers or fur dealers. Most wild alligators are sold whole to fur buyers/dealers at processing facilities. Make sure that arrangements have been made to sell alligators prior to setting lines or harvesting alligators.

## **Processing Alligators and Hides**

Properly skinning alligators can be difficult. Minor knife cuts, holes or poor skin preparation can severely decrease alligator hide value. Alligators should be skinned by someone with prior alligator skinning experience whenever possible. If no experienced skinner is available and a hunter chooses to skin his 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 <https://www.louisianaalligators.com/hide-care.html> 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 skin. Once the skin has been scraped and cleaned it must be salted. Salt removes moisture and helps cure the alligator skin. A fine grain salt should be applied generously (1/2 to 1 inch thick) and rubbed into all parts of the skin. The skin 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 skin resalted, rolled and refrigerated if possible.

## **Alligator Parts**

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, address, date, hide tag number, and the license 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. In addition an alligator transaction parts form must be submitted to LDWF by the end of the calendar year if any parts transaction has taken place. (\* alligator part - any part of the carcass of an alligator except the hide and includes the bony dorsum plates, if detached from the tagged alligator hide)

## **Storage, Tanning or Taxidermy**

Alligators/alligator skins may be stored at any location provided that they are properly tagged and documented. An alligator hunter must have any alligators/alligator skins being shipped out of state or being tanned or used for taxidermy in state inspected by LDWF, pay the appropriate tag fee and severance tax and receive a shipping tag prior to shipping. A hunter needing an inspection should contact their local LDWF office, or the office that issued their license and tags, in advance to schedule the inspection.

## **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). These tag returns are like duck bands, and allow biologists to follow the movement, growth, and survival of alligators. Alligator hunters should report and submit any research alligator captured by recording the full web tag number (usually 6 digits), the length, tail notch(es) and sex 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 the information to LDWF if a marked alligator is captured, as it helps LDWF's management programs for continued harvests.

## **Unused Alligator Tags**

All unused alligator tags shall be returned within 15 days following the close of the season.

## **Lost or Stolen Alligator Tags**

If alligator tags are lost or stolen the alligator hunter must complete an official lost tag form and submit it to LDWF within 15 days following the close of the season. Lost or stolen tags will not be replaced.

## **Hides Not Sold or Shipped Within 30 Days Following the Close of the Season**

All alligators/alligator skins not sold to commercial buyers/dealers or shipped for tanning/taxidermy within 30 days following the close of the season must be reported to LDWF. LDWF's official forms require specific information which includes tag number, location, intended use and length.

## **Disposing of Alligators/Alligator Hides Deemed to Be of No Value**

Alligators/alligator skins deemed to be of no value may be disposed of by the hunter. The hunter must remove the alligator tag from the alligator/alligator skin at the time of disposal and return the tag with the corresponding length to LDWF within 15 days following the close of the season.

## **Reminders**

- **Alligator hunters are responsible for disposition of all issued alligator tags.**
- **All alligator hunters should thoroughly review all current alligator regulations.**
- **Always follow all alligator regulations.**
- **Alligator hunters harvesting alligators on WMAs or public lakes should review and follow all regulations and agreements specific to that public area. For specific details check with the office responsible for that public area prior to commencing alligator harvest activities.**

## **Questions**

See [www.lagatorprogram.com](http://www.lagatorprogram.com) for more alligator hunting information as well as other alligator program information.

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](mailto: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.