

LOUISIANA'S ALLIGATOR MANAGEMENT PROGRAM



FUR & REFUGE
DIVISION

GATOR NOTES



Volume 1 Number 1

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The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' Alligator Section will provide a quarterly newsletter entitled "**GATOR NOTES**" for Louisiana's alligator industry. **GATOR NOTES** provides information on all aspects of the alligator industry ranging from annual alligator harvest production to current research projects and findings. We hope these newsletters will keep the industry informed of current issues and activities. Any suggestions or comments concerning the newsletter should be sent to Noel Kinler at the address at the bottom of this page.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' Alligator Section is charged with the tasks of; 1) conducting all necessary activities associated with the administration and management of the wild alligator resource, the alligator farming industry and the nuisance program, 2) insuring compliance with all U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requirements and all Louisiana alligator rules and regulations, 3) conducting all necessary alligator research activities, 4) providing assistance to university researchers, 5) assisting alligator industry constituents and 6) assisting the public.

ALLIGATOR EGG COLLECTIONS\NEST PRODUCTION

In 2004 Louisiana's alligator farmers collected 396,069 wild alligator eggs (Table 1). This was an increase of 38,312 alligator eggs over the 2003 season and resulted from increased alligator nest production in coastal Louisiana (Figure 1). The 2004 coastal alligator nest production was the second highest on record. Egg collection and hatching rates increased by 9% and 2.2% respectively from 2003.

FARM AND WILD ALLIGATOR HARVESTS

In 2003 (Sept. 3, 2003 – Aug. 31, 2004) Louisiana alligator farmers harvested 274,485 alligators that averaged 3.81' in length (skin length) (Figure 2). This production, valued at over \$28 million for raw products alone, was the highest on record (Figure 3). Louisiana alligator hunters harvested 33,725 alligators and utilized 95.7% of the tags issued. Alligators harvested during the 2004 wild season (September 2004) averaged 7.17' for the regular harvest and 5.83' in length (skin length) for the bonus harvest. The harvest was valued at almost \$9 million. Farm and wild alligators averaged \$24.00 and \$22.50 per foot respectively.

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission previously ratified a rule establishing a permanent opening date for the wild alligator season: "*The season for taking alligators in the wild shall open on the first Wednesday of September and will remain open for 30 days thereafter. The Secretary shall be authorized to close, extend, delay, or reopen the season as biologically justifiable*". The 2005 wild alligator season will open on September 7 and close on October 6.

NUISANCE PROGRAM

Louisiana's nuisance alligator program currently has 60 licensed nuisance hunters that are distributed

throughout the state to respond to nuisance alligator calls. In 2003 (Sept. 3, 2003 – Aug. 31, 2004) 2,024 nuisance alligators were harvested that averaged 6.8' in length (skin length).

ALLIGATOR PROGRAM ACTIVITIES (January – March 2005)

Hide Inspections

Alligator program personnel conducted 34 inspections of 48,555 alligator hides this quarter. Since September 1, 2004 the staff has conducted 238 inspections of 168,245 alligator hides.

Farm Alligator Releases

The staff processed 6,538 farm alligators for release by nine farmers during the last two weeks of March.

Farm Tags Issued

A total of 49,075 alligator tags have been issued to farmers since January and 188,215 since September 1, 2004.

Egg Collection Permits

Alligator egg collection permits were mailed out to farmers/landowners on March 24, 2005. Staff continues to receive and process alligator egg collection permits and to evaluate alligator egg quotas as requested.

Farm Alligator Retraps

The staff began entering harvest data in October for farm-released alligators harvested during the 2004 wild season. Over 3,350 alligators have been identified as farm-releases and their harvest data entered for growth and survival analysis. These averaged 6.33' when they were harvested in September 2004, and 242 had carcass lengths of 8' or longer; including 21 over 10' and 5 over 11' long.

Annual Farm Reports

Annual farm reports were mailed out in November. We have reviewed and approved all reports submitted and entered all data prior to license renewal. There was less than 1% change in farm year end inventories between 2003 (529,015) and 2004 (533,045).

Alligator Industry Meeting

The FAAC (Fur and Alligator Advisory Council) and the Department arranged an alligator industry meeting at the Wildlife and Fisheries office in Baton Rouge on March 22, 2005. FAAC contractors reported on alligator marketing, disease research, representation regarding international issues and staff members reviewed action items from a facilitated alligator industry meeting on December 6, 2004, and gave an updated farm industry report.

GIS

The staff continues to enter properties into GATAS (GIS Alligator Tag Allocation System) when time is available and into GAPS (GIS Alligator Nest Production System) as needed. We are in the process of delineating alligator habitats inside the Atchafalaya Basin as well as cypress-tupelo swamp in other parishes. We continue to compile pertinent GIS data that may be useful to the alligator program.

Wild Alligator Season Applications

In May/June 2005, alligator hunter and helper applications will be mailed to all participants from 2004. Once received, please complete your applications and promptly return them to the appropriate Department office.

Local and International Issues

The staff continues to fulfill input/comment requests by the Executive Office of the Crocodile Specialist Group concerning international crocodilian issues. We have also prepared a response concerning the alligator portion of the aquaculture regulations for Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). We met with and provided contact information for alligator hide sources to a buyer from an Italian tannery/manufacturer. The alligator program hosted a Hong Kong CITES representative and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) CITES team at Rockefeller Refuge. Tours of a tannery and two alligator farms were conducted. The staff also reviewed Louisiana's alligator management program with the Hong Kong CITES representative. Through contracts established by the FAAC, program staff monitor numerous international issues that may impact the future of our sustainable harvest programs.

Research

Alligator personnel took blood samples from over 50 alligators for lead toxicity research/information. We continue to work with LSU statistical department to analyze growth rates of alligators based on early vs. late egg collections. The staff continues to assist with alligator wound healing and immunology research. Staff members have met with USFWS staff to review possible collaborative research projects.

Education

We recently delivered displays, alligator skins and educational materials and provided some personnel for the alligator booth at the Sportsman's Show in New Orleans. The FAAC is re-designing/updating their website www.alligatorfur.com in order to better serve the industry. The staff is working on supplying the FAAC with updated and additional alligator information for the website. We also supply the FAAC with any available/updated educational materials as needed. Alligator program personnel have recently met with and supplied swamp tour operators in the New Orleans area alligator information/literature.

Diseases

We are currently coordinating three research contracts investigating the cause of PIX/LPSA skin lesions in farm raised alligators. One contract is with the University of Florida Vet School and two are with the LSU Vet School. Alligator personnel coordinated and conducted sampling of alligators from 3 farms for PIX research and arranged for the investigation and sampling of; 1) farm alligators for possible association of West Nile Virus and PIX, 2) farm alligator mortalities, and 3) sick farm alligators. The LSU Vet School also provides diagnostic services to any farmer experiencing alligator diseases or mortality. Please contact the Department immediately for these services.

Farm Questionnaires

The alligator program has recently developed questionnaires to be completed by alligator farmers to obtain information on needed services. These questionnaires were/will be delivered whenever staff members visit these locations. Nearly half of all active farms have been surveyed and the results seem positive thus far.

REMINDERS

- Please remember as per Louisiana Alligator Regulations, June 2004 **“The annual deadline for submitting applications for Alligator Egg Collection Permits is June 1”**.
- Please take notice that we have hired two new temporary employees (Jay Lindsay and Scott Crochet) in the alligator program to help meet seasonal alligator industry needs, in particular farm-releases, research activities and wild season.

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Table 1. Louisiana Alligator Ranching

Year	Total Eggs Permitted	Number Collected	Percent Collected	Number Hatched	Alligators Returned to Wild	Percent Hatched
1986	2,903	2,903	100.0%	1,985	none	68.4%
1987	19,641	18,041	91.9%	13,782	none	76.4%
1988	90,305	64,887	71.9%	50,394	1,680	77.7%
1989	265,051	181,819	68.6%	137,323	7,078	75.5%
1990	366,055	293,412	80.2%	231,434	6,088	78.9%
1991	333,451	198,089	59.4%	165,054	44,405	83.3%
1992	297,125	164,892	55.5%	133,463	35,531	80.9%
1993	279,405	155,891	55.8%	123,666	28,512	79.3%
1994	362,835	266,408	73.4%	223,011	21,633	83.7%
1995	402,830	314,371	78.0%	261,428	20,749	83.2%
1996	467,545	279,237	59.7%	233,076	40,919	83.5%
1997	476,115	377,636	79.3%	321,641	48,171	85.2%
1998	539,216	280,870	52.1%	240,118	36,733	85.5%
1999	574,731	382,611	66.6%	332,428	44,169	86.9%
2000	593,625	279,217	47.0%	236,313	39,559	84.6%
2001	616,465	354,636	57.5%	294,405	48,288	83.0%
2002	639,145	354,523	55.5%	304,448	32,716	85.9%
2003	651,207	357,757	54.9%	307,805	50,417	86.0%
2004	619,730	396,069	63.9%	349,311	47,431	88.2%
Total	7,597,380	4,723,269	62.2%	3,961,085	554,079	83.9%

Updated February 10, 2005

Figure 1. Louisiana Coastal Marsh Alligator Nest Projections Based on Aerial Surveys, 1970-2004

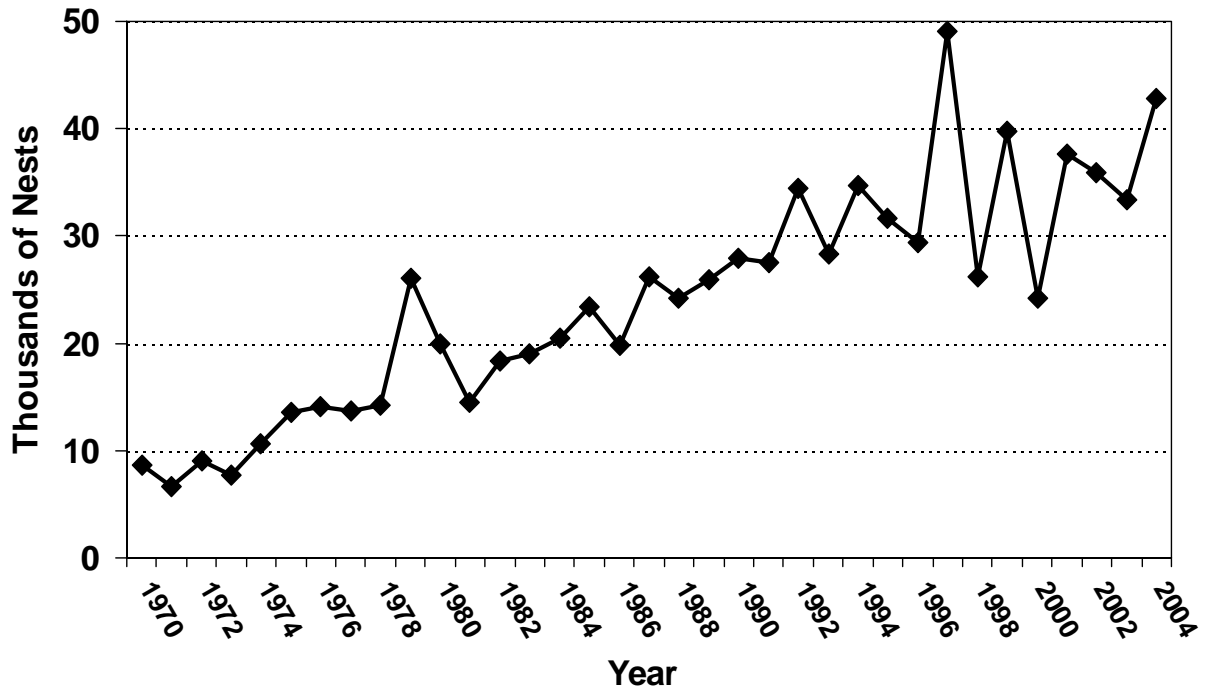
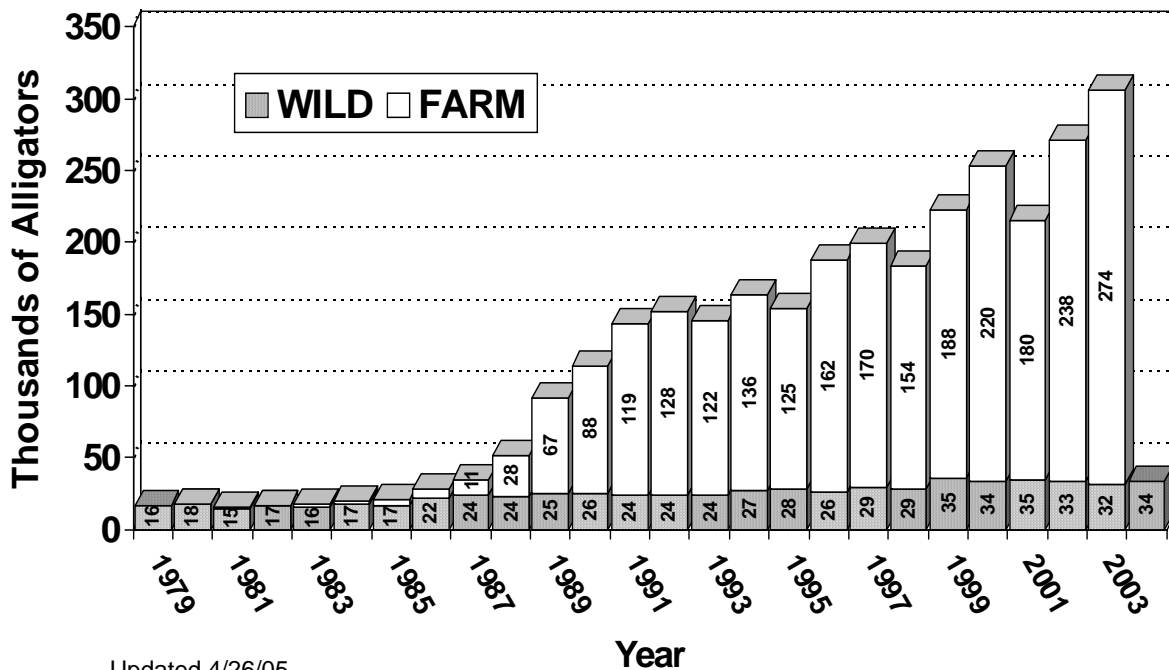
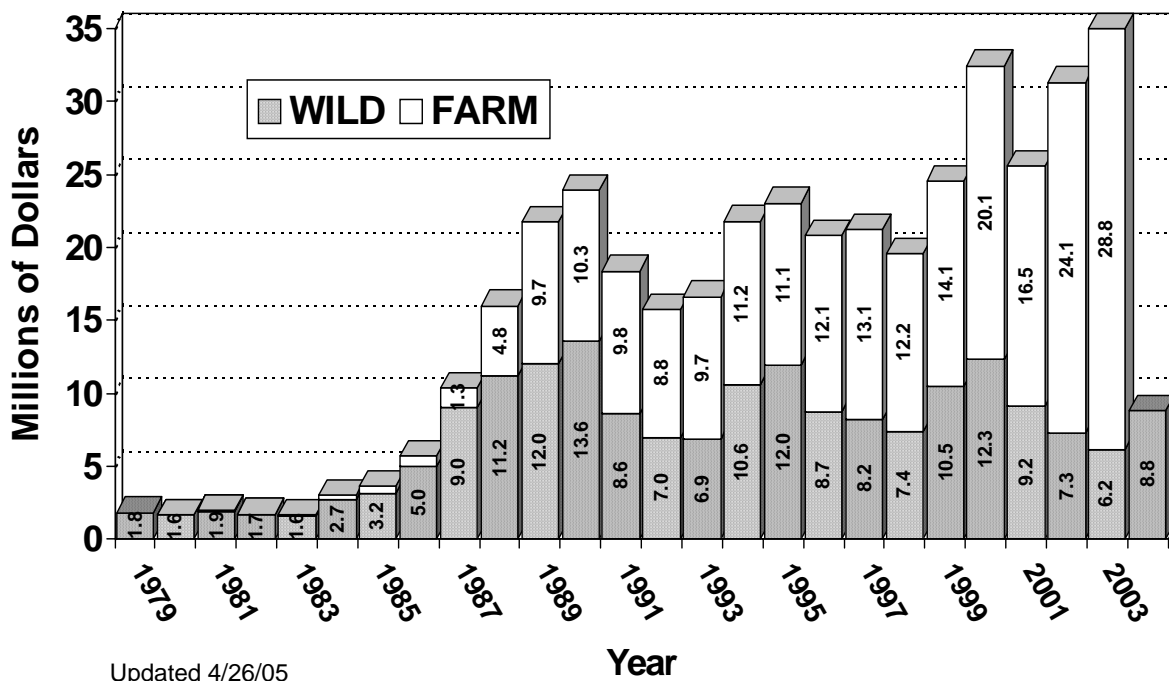


Figure 2. Louisiana Alligator Harvests, 1979-2004



Updated 4/26/05

Figure 3. Value of Alligators Harvested in Louisiana, 1979-2004



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