



A Snapshot of the Louisiana Wild Alligator Industry

THE STORY OF THE AMERICAN ALLIGATOR IS ONE OF THE GREATEST WILDLIFE conservation success stories in the world. In the 1960s, alligators were considered endangered, and completely protected from 1962-1972. During this period, populations increased quickly; and have continued this upward trend due to science-based, highly regulated management and a conservation alliance between wildlife agencies, landowners, and alligator farmers and hunters.

Partners in Sustainability

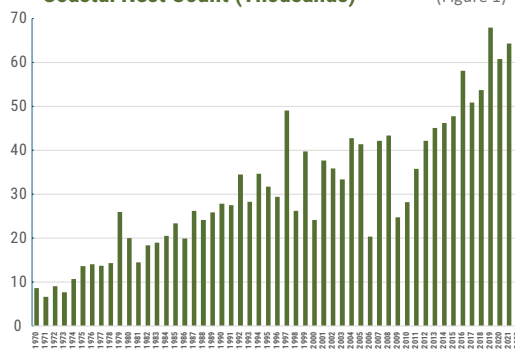
Alligators and their eggs in Louisiana are harvested with quotas set by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF). These quotas are based on the quantity and quality of habitat, and current population estimates.

The economic value of the industry helps provide direct incentives for landowners to work together with hunters and farmers to protect the alligator and its important wetland habitats. This has been critical to the alligator's comeback, as well as the growth of responsible alligator farming.

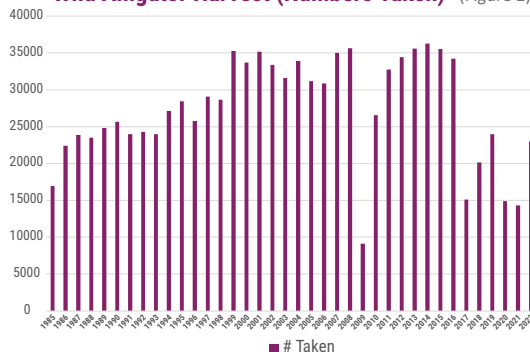
Through the practice of egg ranching (the collection of alligator eggs from the wild), which is more economical and successful than captive breeding, alligator farmers are able to acquire necessary stock to produce hides and meat. However, to make sure the wild alligator population is not depleted due to this practice, LDWF currently requires a quantity of juvenile alligators equal to 5% of the eggs hatched by the farmer be returned to the wild within two years.

Enormous effort has been made by LDWF to monitor the fate of the alligators released to the wild. In 2022, farmers released a total of 19,255 farm raised alligators into the wild; each was measured, sexed, tail-notched, tagged and recorded by LDWF prior to release to the same area where the farmers originally harvested the eggs.

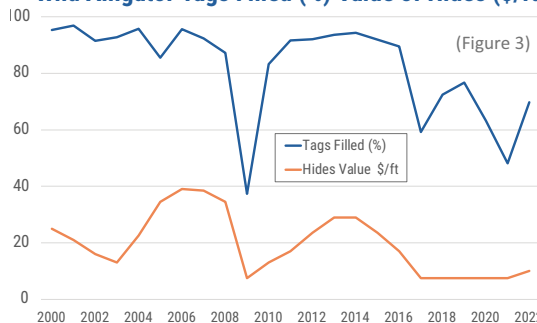
Coastal Nest Count (Thousands) (Figure 1)



Wild Alligator Harvest (Numbers Taken) (Figure 2)



Wild Alligator Tags Filled (%) Value of Hides (\$/ft) (Figure 3)



Wild Alligator Management

LDWF monitors the status of alligator populations by conducting an annual inventory of alligator nest production throughout coastal Louisiana (Figure 1).

LDWF regulates harvest with tags. In 2022, 3,428 hunters harvested 23,000 wild alligators at an average total length of 7.73 feet. The hides and meat are the main value of the animals, and in 2022, the hides were valued at \$1,777,900 and the 529,000 lbs. of meat at \$3,703,000.

Wild alligator populations in the U.S. have increased by over 10-fold and are now stable and healthy. Today, an estimated 5 million occur in the wild across the U.S.

The maximum harvest is preset with the number of tags available each year. However, while allowable harvest remains relatively constant, the percentage of tags filled fluctuates. Over the past two decades, usually over 30,000 animals are harvested annually. However, in 2009, a low of only 9,143 alligators were harvested, and in 2014, over 36,000 were harvested (Figure 2). These highs and lows are mostly driven by the demand for wild alligator hides in luxury goods markets (Figure 3).



Get all the details about LDWF's alligator management program at <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/resources/category/alligator/annual-reports>



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

