

# ALLIGATOR INCIDENTS



## Fact Sheet

### General Information

Alligators are considered fully recovered in all of their native-range states, but they are still included on the federal endangered species list within the category of “Threatened Due to Similarity of Appearance.” Alligators are listed this way because they closely resemble the American crocodile, which is threatened. In Florida, alligators are classified as “species of special concern.”

Alligators occur in all 67 counties of the state and can be found in practically all fresh and brackish bodies of waters, and occasionally in salt water. Although exact population figures are not known, Florida is believed to be home to more than one million alligators, based on an estimated 6.7 million acres of suitable habitat.

Alligators are opportunistic feeders and will eat what is readily available to them. They prefer to go after prey they can overpower easily. Opportunity is the primary factor that causes an alligator to pursue prey.

Most alligators are naturally afraid of humans, but may lose that fear when people feed them. Feeding alligators actually teaches them to associate people with food. For that reason, it is illegal to feed wild alligators.

According to Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) biologists, alligators seldom bite people for reasons other than food. Female alligators may protect their nests by hissing and opening their mouths to frighten intruders, but are seldom a threat to people.

Alligator bites are most likely to occur in or around water. Although alligators can move quickly on land, they are not well adapted for capturing prey out of the water. However, they can lunge at prey if within a few feet of the shoreline.

Some bites are the result of accidental collisions. When a swimmer bumps into an alligator, the reptile may inflict a defensive bite at whatever just bumped into it. This sometimes happens in golf course ponds when people retrieve golf balls.

Alligator bites can result in serious infection – therefore, victims should seek immediate medical attention if bitten.

The FWC allows an annual alligator harvest, which provides commercial and recreational hunting opportunities and assists in helping to achieve population management objectives. Alligator hides, meat and their parts can be sold from legally harvested and tagged alligators.

## Safety Tips

- If you encounter an alligator over four feet in length that poses a threat to humans or property, call the **FWC's Nuisance Alligator Hotline, toll-free at 1-866-FWC-GATOR (392-4286)**. The FWC will evaluate your complaint, and if warranted, send a contracted nuisance alligator trapper to remove the animal.
- Be aware of the possible presence of alligators when in or near fresh or brackish water. Negative alligator encounters may occur when people do not pay close attention to their surroundings when working or recreating near water.
- Closely supervise children when they are playing in or around water. Never allow small children to play unsupervised near water.
- Do not swim outside of posted swimming areas or in waters that might be inhabited by large alligators.
- Alligators are most active between dusk and dawn. Therefore, swim only during daylight hours.
- Do not allow pets to swim, exercise or drink in or near waters that may contain alligators or in designated swimming areas with humans. Dogs are more susceptible to being bitten than humans, because dogs resemble the natural prey of alligators. The sound of dogs barking and playing may draw an alligator to the area.
- Never feed or entice alligators – it is dangerous and illegal. When fed, alligators overcome their natural wariness and associate people with food.
- Inform others that feeding alligators is illegal and creates problems for others who want to use the water for recreational purposes.
- Dispose of fish scraps in garbage cans at boat ramps and fish camps – do not throw them in the water. Although you are not intentionally feeding alligators when you do this, the end result can be the same.
- Observe and photograph alligators only from a safe distance. Remember, they are an important part of Florida's natural history as well as an integral component of freshwater ecosystems.
- Leave alligators alone. State law prohibits killing, harassing or possession of alligators except under permit.
- Never remove an alligator from its natural habitat or accept one as a pet. It is illegal and dangerous to do so. Handling even small alligators can result in injury.
- If an alligator bites you, the best thing you can do is fight back, making as much noise and commotion as possible. Hitting or kicking the alligator, or poking it in its eyes may cause it to release its grip. When alligators seize prey they cannot easily overpower, they will often let go and retreat.
- Seek immediate medical attention if bitten by an alligator. Alligator bites often result in serious infection.

## **Risk of Being Bitten by an Alligator**

Florida has experienced tremendous human population growth in recent years. Today, many residents seek waterfront homes, and water-related recreational activities are very popular. As more people are drawn to the water, more alligator-human interactions can occur, creating a greater potential for conflict. But, alligators seldom bite people, and fatalities from such occurrences are extremely rare.

Florida is averaging about seven unprovoked bites per year that are serious enough to require special medical treatment. The frequency of these serious bites is increasing at a rate of about 3 percent each year, or one additional bite every 4-5 years. However, the likelihood of a Florida resident being seriously injured during an unprovoked alligator incident in Florida is roughly only one in 2.4 million.

As of September 2016, the FWC has documented 628 alligator bites on humans, 388 of which were unprovoked and 238 were provoked. 24 of these bites resulted in human fatalities.



**For more information on alligators, go to [www.MyFWC.com/gators](http://www.MyFWC.com/gators) or contact the Statewide Nuisance Alligator Program at 1-866-FWC-GATOR (392-4286).**