

Captive Wildlife Overview



May 2019



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Version 1

Captive Wildlife Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Captive Wildlife team to authorize and regulate the lawful possession of captive wildlife in an effort to ensure responsible ownership through education, inspection and enforcement. We will develop the best regulations to provide for public safety, animal welfare, and the legitimate use of wildlife for educational, exhibition, or personal purposes. The team will solicit input from industry leaders, subject matter experts, licensees, advocacy groups, the public, as well as federal and internal partners to identify trends, improve regulations and remain forward thinking. We will strive to continually develop our staff and we will display passion for our mission.

Division: Law Enforcement

Authors: Captain Kara Hooker

Report Date: May 1, 2019

Overview

The FWC regulates the commercial and personal use of captive wildlife in Florida. The purpose is to ensure that animals are possessed, housed, exhibited and sold/transferred according to the laws of the State of Florida.

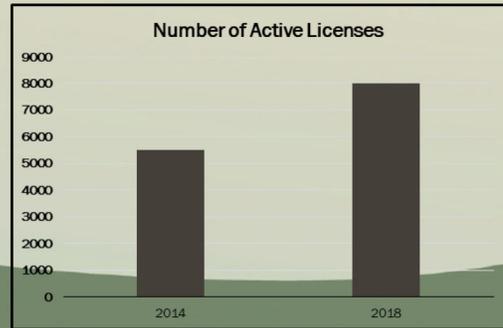


FWC promotes responsible ownership of captive wildlife, and it is the goal of the FWC to develop the best regulations possible that provide for public safety, animal welfare, and the legitimate use of wildlife for educational, exhibition, or personal purposes. Florida's captive wildlife regulations are among the most stringent in the nation. FWC investigators routinely conduct inspections of captive wildlife facilities to ensure humane treatment and sanitary conditions are in place for the animals. FWC investigators also inspect to make sure that cage and security requirements are followed to ensure public safety. Florida Statutes and captive wildlife regulations provide the tools our investigators need to address issues when violations occur. The captive wildlife section continues to systematically review rules and identify needed revisions with the goal of increasing public safety, clarifying regulations and ensuring animal welfare.

Photo Credit – FWC images

History of Program

- 1967 - Commission charged with regulation of native and exotic captive wildlife. Section 372.921, F.S., enacted (now 379.3761, F.S.)
- 1970 - Captive wildlife regulations became effective with assistance from “Wildlife Criteria Committee.”
- 1994 - Comprehensive review of Chapter 68A-6, F.A.C., aided by “Captive Wildlife Committee.”
- 2005 - Captive wildlife regulations revisited with aid of “Captive Wildlife Technical Assistance Group” (CWTAG).



On this slide you will see a brief history of the captive wildlife section and all the major rule reviews. 2005 started the last large review of captive wildlife regulations. Those changes were implemented in 2008 and 2009. Since then, only single rules have been updated. Caging, husbandry and experience standards have not been updated in 10 years for anything except venomous reptiles.

The number of captive wildlife licenses continues to increase. The chart on the lower right shows that from 2014 to 2018 there was a 45% increase in active captive wildlife licenses.

Rules that have been updated since 2009: reptile of concern (ROC), falconry, venomous reptiles, game farms and hunt preserves

Changes in numbers of licenses:

1970 - less than 1,000

2014 - approximately 5,500

2017 - more than 7,000

2018 - approximately 8,000

Photo from google of Lion Country Safari (1967) which is still a facility in Florida

Captive Wildlife Regulatory Classes

- Class I



- Class II



- Class III



- Venomous Reptiles



The captive wildlife regulatory classes are designed to categorize wildlife based on threats to human safety unlike wildlife impact management, who base their classifications of prohibited or conditional on ecological risk.

Class I – Wildlife, which because of its nature, habits, or status, shall not be possessed as a personal pet. Examples: lions, gorillas, bears

Class II – Wildlife is considered to present a real or potential threat to human safety. Examples: bobcat, giraffe, alligator

Class III – All other wildlife not included in Class I or II. Example: skunk

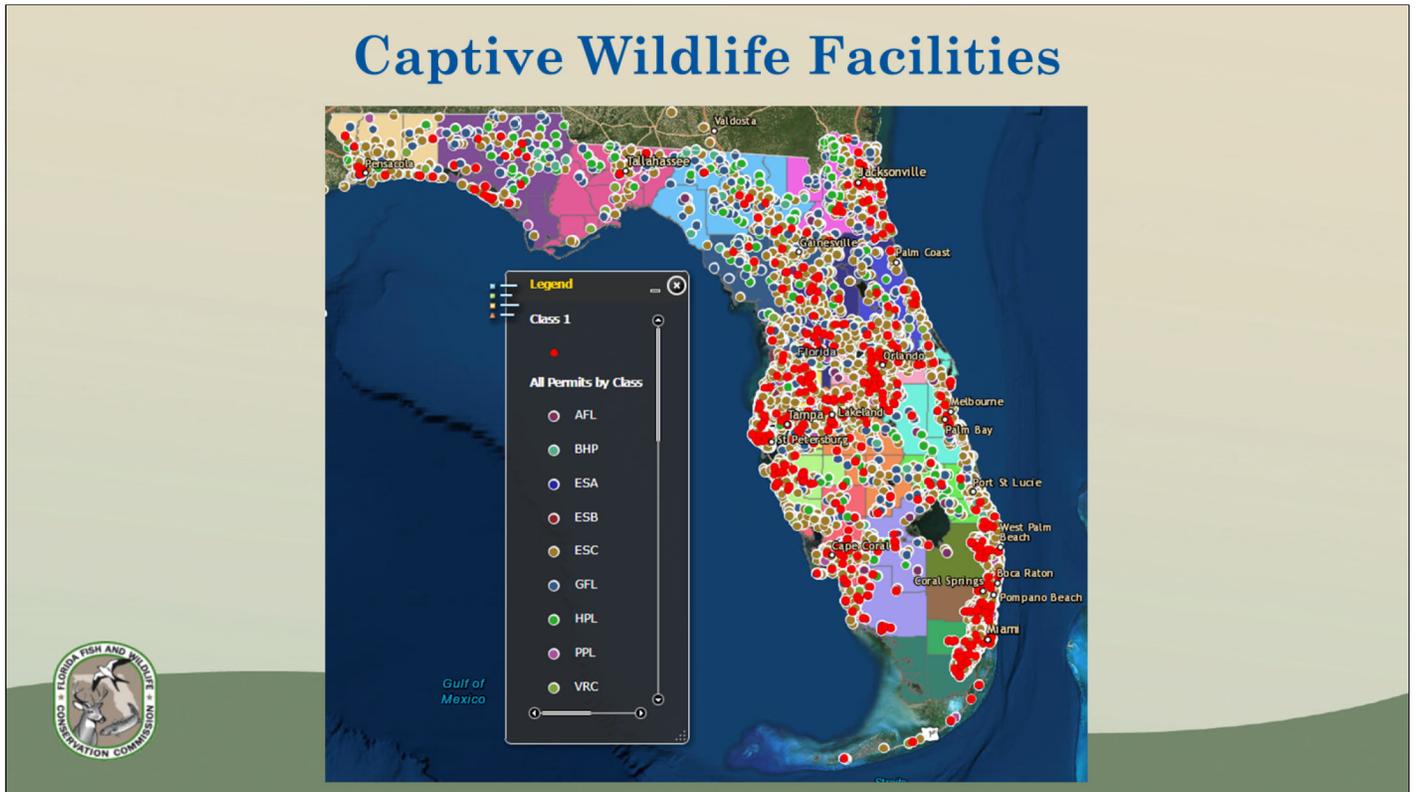
Venomous reptiles – All members of the class Reptilia including their taxonomic successors, subspecies, or any hybrid thereof, regardless of surgical alteration, which had been determined to have the potential to cause serious human injury due to the toxic effects of its venom or poison.

Photos:

Hippo- image from FWC, Giraffe- image from FWC, Geoffroy's cat- image from FWC

Cobra- image from google

Captive Wildlife Facilities



There are 21 captive wildlife investigators who are responsible for inspecting and monitoring the almost 8,000 captive wildlife licenses. Investigators ensure facilities meet all captive wildlife regulations while proactively combating the illegal trade, possession and commercialization of wildlife. Investigators are responsible for facility inspections, complaint response and ensuring compliance with our rules. Investigators are assigned throughout the state based on the density of licensed facilities.

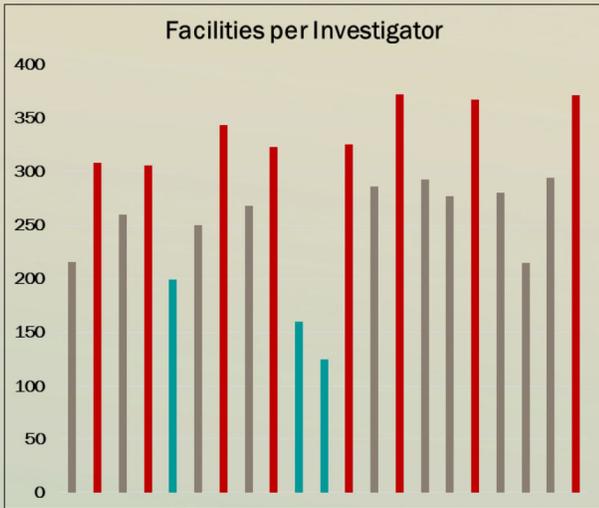
This map shows the location of some captive wildlife facilities in Florida and the investigators area of responsibility. The map does not include the no cost licenses, such as the more than 1,000 Class III personal pet licenses. The red dots on the map indicate facilities that are authorized for Class I wildlife.

In fiscal year 2017/18 captive wildlife investigators conducted more than 6,000 inspections of captive wildlife. Additionally, investigators responded to 234 wildlife alert complaints, 74 escaped exotic wildlife complaints, and seized 178 specimens of wildlife.

Along with regulating the captive wildlife facilities, the captive wildlife section is also responsible for authorizing the possession, importation, sale and exhibition of captive wildlife. We have 8 non-sworn members who assist with issuing the 16 different licenses for which this office handles. Last year the office processed more than 6,500 applications.

Map generated with data from March 2019

Captive Wildlife Staffing

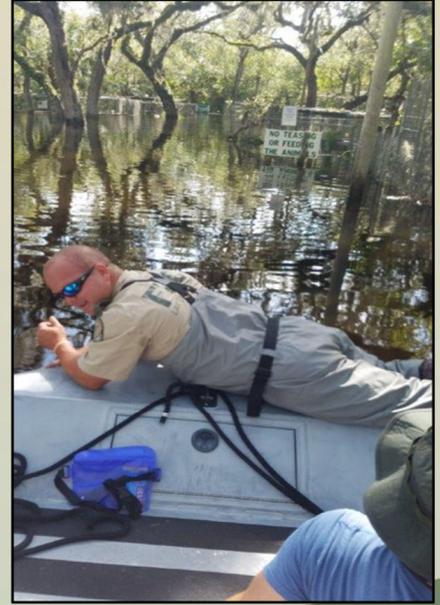


The chart on the left shows how many captive wildlife facilities each investigator is responsible for inspecting. There are several investigators who have more than 300 facilities assigned to them.

Chart generated with data from January 2019.

Public Safety Measures

- Natural disaster response
- Requirement of Critical Incident Disaster Plan
- Captive staff reviews experience and education of applicants prior to license issuance for Class I, II, III, and venomous reptiles



One of the main goals of the captive wildlife section is to ensure public safety. Some of the ways we accomplish this are:

- Standardizing our natural disaster response by contacting all facilities in a known path of destruction to ensure they are making appropriate preparations and do not require any assistance. Some examples of this would be a hurricane or wild fire. After a natural disaster has passed, all facilities are contacted to ensure animals safety and containment. All Class I and II facilities are inspected in person. A capture team was also established to deploy to areas impacted by a natural disaster to assist with after incident inspections and capture / relocate wildlife as needed. An example of this would be in the photo on the top right where you see one of our investigators on the capture team after Hurricane Irma riding on a small boat to rescue wolves. The wolves were left in their cages with rising flood water. The wolves were successfully rescued and relocated.
- All licenses except: hunt preserve, game farms, rehabilitation and falconry require a critical incident disaster plan to be completed with each application. The critical incident disaster plan formalizes a procedure that can be executed when an incident, such as an escape or hurricane occur. Examples also include a tornado or other severe storm, flood, wildfire, or any other similar natural disaster, terrorist act, biological or radiological event, or any other similar man-made disaster.
- 1000 hours of experience is required to possess any Class, I, II, III Spider, Woolly, Capuchin and Venomous reptile species. The hours are reviewed by captive wildlife staff prior to licensure for each family requested.

Photo description- Photo is of investigator riding on a small boat to respond to wolves in danger of drowning from hurricane Irma. Staff was able to successfully save them.

Rule Development

Staff has restructured Chapter 68A-6 F.A.C. to improve the organization and readability. There are no substantive changes.



Staff has drafted a restructure of Chapter 68A-6 which will allow for increased readability and improved organization. The modifications will also prepare the Chapter for future rule development projects. There are no substantive changes in the draft and it would not change any regulations.

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND from Bing.

Rule Development

Staff are currently reviewing Captive Wildlife rules regarding:

- Elephant rides
- Public contact / unconfined captive wildlife
- Administrative matters



Staff are currently working on reviewing rules for

- Elephant rides
- Public Contact and Unconfined Captive Wildlife
- Administrative matters

Staff anticipates drafting rules on these topics and bringing them to future Commission meetings. The goals of the rule modifications are to:

- Increase public safety
- Streamline the licensing process
- Update experience hours requirement
- Reduce regulations where possible
- Identify and correct problematic regulations

Photo on to left of raccoon - [This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#) from Bing

Photo on bottom right is of Commissioner Rood feeding a giraffe at White Oak.

Stakeholder Engagement

Recently staff interacted with stakeholders through:

- Public workshops
- Direct communications
- Online commenting



Staff recently held four public workshops which served as opportunities to engage with stakeholders and collect comments on the three topics mentioned previously. This helps to ensure there is open communication between licensees and staff.

Workshops were held in:

- Tallahassee
- Palm Beach Gardens
- Tampa
- Ocala

Photos are from Tampa Meeting. Top photo is of stakeholders providing comments to a captive wildlife staff member; Bottom is a media interview with Major Beaton.

Staff Recommendation

Approve and adopt proposed rule restructure of Chapter 68A-6, Florida Administrative Code.

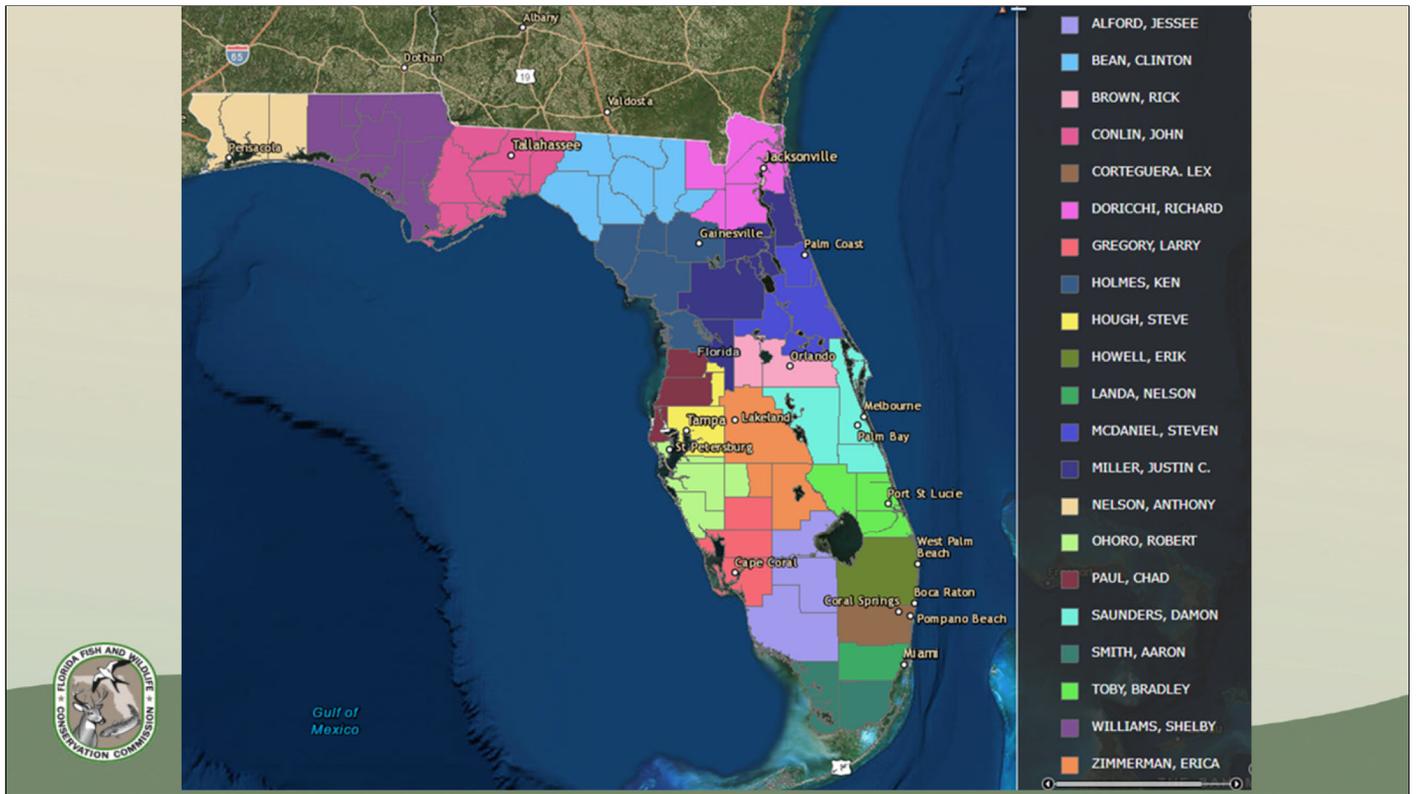
If approved, the restructure will be effective as soon as possible.



Staff requests the Commissioners to approve the Chapter 68A-6 restructure without further hearing, unless requested.

The following slides are for background only and not part of the presentation.





Map of investigators area of responsibility