

# Proposed Changes to Private Lands Alligator Egg Collections



Draft Rule  
February 2020



**Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission**

Version 2/10/20

This report covers proposed amendments to the private lands alligator egg collection regulations to support opportunity for collecting more eggs and enhance resource protection measures. Full summaries of all proposed rule changes are included in the additional background material.

Division: Hunting and Game Management

Authors: Harry J. Dutton

Contact Phone Number: 850-617-9505

Report date: February 10, 2020

## Program Review/Improvement Process

- Received requests for program improvements
- Began ongoing stakeholder engagement in January 2019
- Alligator Management Standing Team developed proposals



Alligators are a conservation success story in Florida. FWC's alligator management programs have resulted in a healthy and stable alligator population that provides recreational and commercial opportunities. The Commission's programs are widely recognized as a model for sustainable use. To build on that success, staff is proposing changes to egg collections on private lands and measures designed to continue FWC's commitment to protecting the resource.

Stakeholders from the alligator farming industry, private lands program, and others interested in program changes have been engaged in this process. A Standing Team, consisting of staff from throughout the Commission, developed recommended proposals based on the input received from stakeholders.

# Overview of Recommended Program Improvements

- Provide opportunity to collect more eggs
- Allow greater program flexibility
- Enhance measures to protect the resource



Recommended improvements focus on 3 main objectives: (1) providing opportunity for participants in the Private Lands Alligator Management Program to collect more eggs, (2) allowing greater flexibility for using nest survey and egg collection data when establishing collection quotas, and (3) adding conservation measures to continue safeguarding the resource.

# Draft Rule Changes

## More Opportunity for Sustainable Egg Collection

Provide access to all observed alligator nests provided:

- Property has history of adequate nesting
- Collecting is monitored against baseline nesting average
- Nest collection data submitted annually for each property
- Alligator hatchlings not collected



To provide opportunity to collect more alligator eggs, the proposed rule would provide participants with the option to collect all observed alligator nests on a permitted property. To be eligible for this option, several criteria must be met:

- The property must have a history of having more than 10 nests each year.
- Property history must show 3 years in a row of permitted egg collections where nest surveys were conducted by a Certified Wildlife Biologist or an observer approved by the Commission.
- The number of nests for a given year must not fall below 20% of the baseline average, which is determined by 3 years worth of nest survey data.
- Nest collection data and a route showing where eggs are collected must be submitted to the Commission each year.
- Hatchlings may not be collected from the property.

# Draft Rule Changes

## Greater Flexibility for Participants

- Provide opportunity for qualified people to become Commission-approved nest observers
- Allow nest survey data from supervised collections to calculate average nest quota
- Allow licensed farming agents to sign egg records for farm permittee



Participants have requested greater program flexibility. The proposed rule would allow people who are not certified wildlife biologists to be approved by the Commission to conduct nest surveys as long as they meet established criteria.

In addition, the proposed rule would provide the option to use the previous two years of comparable nest surveys conducted during supervised egg collections to establish the following year's average nest quota. Currently, only surveys conducted in advance of egg collections are used. In addition, the proposed rule would allow any person who is listed as an agent of the egg collection permittee to sign forms on behalf of the permittee. At this time, only permittees are allowed to sign egg collection forms.

# Draft Rule Changes

## Enhance Conservation Measures

- Require nest surveys to be conducted by certified wildlife biologists or FWC-approved observers
- Prohibit transfer of egg fee records and require their return to FWC
- Require notification when there is a change in possession of collected eggs



To enhance conservation measures, the proposed rule would: (1) require all nest surveys to be conducted, not simply verified, by certified wildlife biologists or FWC-approved observers; (2) prohibit transferring egg fee assessment records and require those records be returned to the FWC within 15 days of the egg collection permit expiring; and (3) require the permittee to immediately notify the Commission when possession of retained eggs is transferred to someone not listed on the egg collection permit. Additionally, eligible Florida-licensed and permitted alligator farms receiving the eggs into their inventory would be required to provide immediate notice to FWC.

## Stakeholder Engagement

- Worked with alligator farming industry, private lands program participants, and other stakeholders
- Gathered stakeholder feedback through:
  - In-person workshops
  - Online commenting tool
  - Direct outreach
- Positive support for the majority of changes
- Staff is continuing to engage stakeholders



In developing program improvements, staff worked with a wide-ranging group of program stakeholders including the farming industry, private land program participants, and other interested people.

Stakeholders were engaged through in-person workshops, an online commenting tool, as well as more directed outreach via phone and email. The draft rule changes are generally well supported among program participants.

## Staff Recommendation



- Approve proposed amendments to Rule 68A-25.032, F.A.C., for advertising in the Florida Administrative Register
- Provide direction or guidance to staff as we continue working with stakeholders
- Consider final adoption at May 2020 Commission meeting



Staff recommends approval of draft amendments to rule 68A-25.032 for advertisement. Staff will continue working with stakeholders and bring this item back to the commission for final adoption at the Commission's May 2020 meeting. If approved, the amendments would go in effect for the 2020 egg collection season.