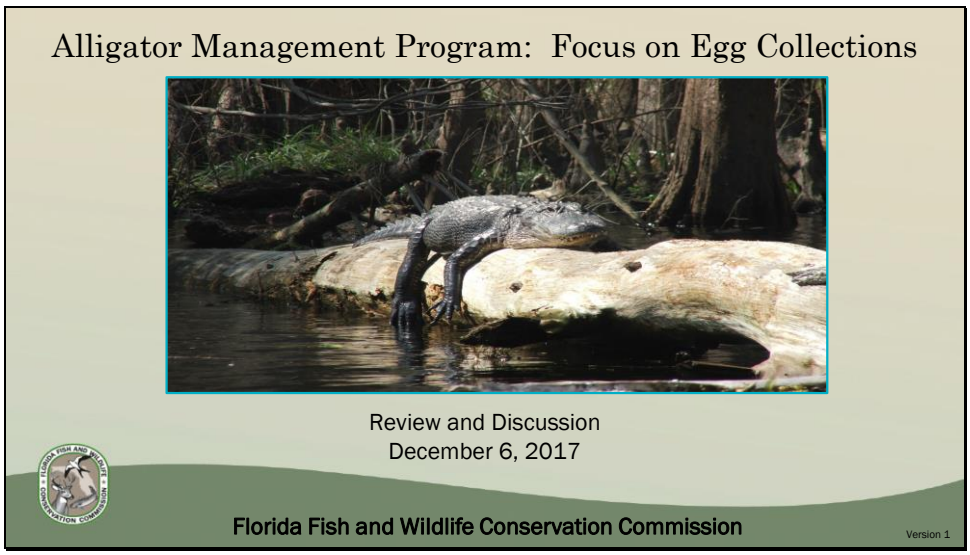

This report provides a brief overview of the Commission's Alligator Management Program, an update on an external review of the Alligator Management Program, and details of ongoing stakeholder engagement regarding the Alligator Farming Program. The report emphasizes the public-waters alligator egg collection program.

Division: Hunting and Game Management
Author: Harry Dutton
Contact Phone Number: 850-488-3831
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Elements of the Program

- Commercial
  - Farming
  - Egg collections
  - Hatchling collections
  - Private lands
- Recreational
  - Statewide harvest
- Public safety
  - Nuisance alligators
  - Nuisance crocodiles

The Commission's Alligator Management Program comprises seven program elements:
1. **Alligator Farming** allows alligators to be raised and produce offspring in captivity for hides and meat (governed by Rule 68A-25.004, F.A.C.).
2. **Public Waters Alligator Egg Collection** allows the take of alligator eggs on public waters to provide rearing stock to permitted alligator farms (governed by Rule 68A-25.031, F.A.C.).
3. **Statewide Alligator Hatchling Collection** allows the take of alligator hatchlings on public waters to provide rearing stock to permitted alligator farms (governed by Rule 68A-25.031, F.A.C.).
4. **Private Lands Alligator Management** provides landowners and land managers the ability to manage alligators on their properties through sustainable harvests (governed by Rule 68A-25.032, F.A.C.).
5. **Statewide Alligator Harvest** provides alligator hunting opportunities to the public, primarily on public waters and other government-managed wetlands (governed by Rule 68A-25.042, F.A.C.).
6. **Statewide Nuisance Alligator** provides for the take of alligators that are posing a threat to people, pets, and property (governed by Rule 68A-25.003, F.A.C.).
7. **Nuisance Crocodile Response** addresses human-crocodile conflicts.

Overview of the Program

- FWC's Statewide Alligator Management Program established in 1988
- All population elements managed (eggs, hatchlings, adults)
- Economic incentives to increase support for alligators and wetland conservation
- Strong scientific foundation for sustainable use
- Independent external review completed in July 2017
  - Findings:
    - Overall program well developed and adaptive
    - Opportunities for improvements identified
  - Action: Opportunities for improvement are being reviewed and incorporated, as possible, into operations

Farming Program Review

- To address stakeholder concerns
- Began in April 2016
- Eight-member working group created in August 2016
- Four meetings held with working group

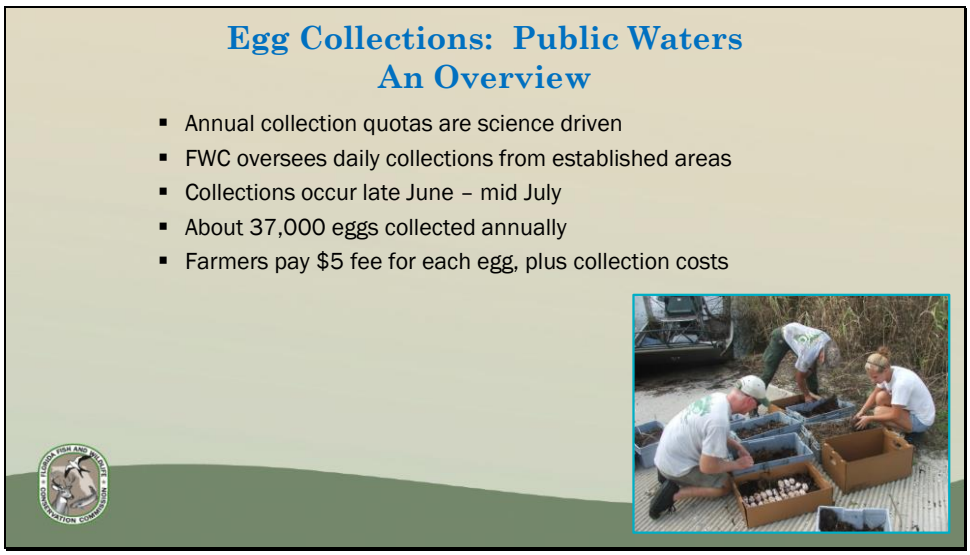
In response to recurring stakeholder concerns, staff met with alligator farmers and other interested stakeholders in April 2016 to initiate a review of the Alligator Farming Program. The April meeting was followed up by forming an informal eight-member working group of licensed and permitted alligator farmers with differing interests. The working group has met four times so far to address expressed concerns and develop possible program improvements.

Farming Program Review
Stakeholder's Primary Concerns

Eggs from Public Waters

- Expanding the number of farmers who have access to eggs
- Fairly allocating eggs to participating farms
- Increasing the number of eggs available for collection:
  - Seeking additional areas
  - Reviewing FWC's nest quota establishment protocol

Participation in public waters alligator egg collections is limited to 30 farmers. The limited number of participating farms is due to the fact that the number of eggs available from public waters is limited. Because these eggs are a public resource, they need to be used sustainably. FWC research indicates that at least 50% of wild alligator eggs can be sustainably harvested without negative impacts to the alligator population. Those surplus eggs can be used to stock alligator farms. The limited-30 provision was established at the time of program implementation (1988). After extensive consultation with alligator industry stakeholders and scientific staff, it was estimated that the sustainable number of alligator eggs that could be collected from public waters each year would likely be around 30,000+/- eggs/year. The industry believed that a farmer would need approximately 1,000 eggs/year from public waters for a farm to be economically viable. Captive alligators do not produce enough fertile eggs to maintain an economically viable alligator farm. Given these constraints, the limited-30 provision was implemented, providing participation for all interested persons at that time with room for growth. The remaining permits were issued within a few years, and limited-30 permits have only turned over, for the most part, through a bona fide sale of a limited-30 farm.



FWC establishes a nest collection quota for each egg collection area using a science-based protocol informed by rigorous analysis of data from annual onsite night-light alligator population surveys. FWC biologists oversee all daily collection efforts. Egg collections usually begin in late June each year and last about three weeks. The current five-year average of alligator eggs collected is approximately 37,000, and permitted farmers pay the FWC $5 for each egg. Farmers also incur all of the costs of their collections (e.g., their crews, equipment, fuel, and overnight travel). All eggs have to be equitably distributed among the limited-30 alligator farms. The fees paid to FWC are deposited into the State Game Trust Fund from which FWC receives appropriations by the Legislature to support the operational needs of the Alligator Management Program and other FWC activities.

The Private Lands element of the Alligator Management Program also provides access to the collection of wild alligator eggs. Any qualifying Florida alligator farm has access to this opportunity. Landowners must approve collections and are often charge a fee for access to the alligator egg resource. Private consulting wildlife biologists conduct alligator nest surveys to allow FWC biologists to establish sustainable egg collection quotas. Private consulting wildlife biologists oversee the egg collections. Collections usually begin in late June and continue for about six weeks. The current five-year average of alligator eggs collected is over 90,000, which is nearly 2.5 times the number of eggs collected from public waters. Permitted farmers pay the FWC $2 for each egg. Farmers also incur all of the costs of their collections (e.g., their crews, equipment, fuel, overnight travel, and any landowner fees). All eggs have to be transferred to Florida alligator farms permitted to receive eggs from the wild. The fees paid to FWC are deposited into the State Game Trust Fund from which FWC receives appropriations by the Legislature to support the operational needs of the Alligator Management Program and other FWC activities.

Farming Program Review Status

- Nearing industry/stakeholder consensus on solution
  - Increase in the number of farms permitted to collect public waters eggs based on a current, science-based evaluation of the resource
  - Acceptable allocation of eggs to existing limited-30 and new participants
  - Institute a preference point system used to award additional "limited" slots
  - Reassess participation opportunities every five years

The working group and greater industry is close to reaching consensus on suggestions for improvements to the alligator farming and public waters alligator egg collection programs. The goal of the working group is to achieve consensus as soon as possible, and well in advance of the 2018 egg-collection season.

Next Steps

- Continue stakeholder engagement
- Bring an update and any recommended rule changes to a future Commission meeting (February)
- Seek Commission guidance

Staff will continue engaging stakeholders to seek consensus, vet any draft rule changes that may be needed to accomplish the industry-based suggested improvements, and bring an update and any required action back to the Commission in time for the 2018 egg-collection season.