



**Update:** An additional slide was added (Slide 4) to provide budget information related to the Statewide Nuisance Alligator Program.

The Commission's Alligator Management Program is comprised, in part, of three elements that result in taking wild alligators. Each of these elements is designed to address distinctly different primary purposes.

1. The Private Lands Alligator Management Program element is designed to provide landowners/management authorities and program participants the greatest amount of resource management flexibility and sustainable commercial hunting opportunities as possible, primarily on private lands.
2. The Statewide Alligator Harvest Program element is designed to provide the greatest amount of sustainable hunting opportunities to the general public as possible, primarily on sovereign waters and public land.
3. The Statewide Nuisance Alligator Program is designed to address the threat alligators pose to people, pets, and property, and results in more than 8,000 alligators removed, on average, each year.

Florida's nuisance alligator program has been recognized nationally and internationally as a model program, emulated by other states where alligators occur and by other countries dealing with crocodylian-human conflicts. The program has been modified over the years to address specific needs and concerns, and program staff remains committed to continual improvement. The purpose of this staff report is to update the Commission on this program and seek any guidance for future improvements.

## Approach – Pre-2005

- Implemented in 1978 to deal with  $\geq 4'$  alligators
- Species recovery led to increased alligator-human conflict
- Approach informed by science
- Professional trappers under contract
- Trappers compensated through sale of hides and meat
- Program administered by regional staff
- Policy implementation and service to citizens varied among regions



The initial nuisance alligator program was formally implemented in 1978 after the American alligator in Florida had been reclassified at the federal level from an endangered to threatened status. The population had recovered to a point that alligator – human conflicts had to be addressed. A research study designed to determine what the most cost-effective and ecologically sound way to deal with problem alligators was initiated and completed in 1977. This resulted in the agency (then the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission) using private contracted trappers who were not compensated for their time and expenses through service fees, but instead earned income from the sale of the hides and meat. This “no-cost” approach was implemented at the regional level, resulting in essentially five different versions of the program. While this approach was effective, there was inconsistent interpretation of policy, differing expectations of contracted trappers, and various levels of service to the citizens of Florida.

# Approach – Post-2005

- Statewide approach implemented in 2005
- Housed at South Florida Alligator Field Office (Okeechobee)
- Significant enhancements
  - Toll-free hotline, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m., year-round
  - Web-based logging and tracking of complaints
  - Performance measures and evaluations for trappers
  - Vision document for clear guidance and understanding of program operations



As part of the Commission's organizational change, a new, statewide approach to nuisance alligator management was implemented in 2005. The program is managed out of the South Florida Alligator Field Office in Okeechobee. The new approach retained many of the basic program attributes from the regionalized approach, such as complaint-driven response and utilization of private contracted trappers, but also incorporated enhancements to improve program efficiency and customer satisfaction:

- A toll-free nuisance alligator hotline, housed in the South Florida Alligator Field Office in Okeechobee and utilizing five call center operators, staffed from 8 a.m. through 5 p.m., every day, year round.
- A centralized web-based complaint logging and information tracking system that sends harvest permits to trappers upon approval.
- Performance expectations and annual evaluations for trappers.

A guiding foundational vision document (included as background document) was developed to ensure there was widespread, clear internal and external understanding of the program's operational approach and objectives.

# SNAP Budget

- Annual Recurring Allocation (FY 2012-13)
  - Provided by HGM's annual LBR appropriation
  - \$480,500
  - Funding source: alligator licenses and tag fees
- Major Program Elements
  - Salaries and wages: (4.5 FTEs/6.5 OPS) - \$230,500
  - Supplemental trapper stipend - \$210,000
  - Nuisance Alligator Hotline/Call Center - \$20,500
  - Public outreach - \$20,000

A Guide to  
Living with  
**Alligators**



Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Conservation Commission



For fiscal year 2012-13, the Statewide Nuisance Alligator Program has been provided a \$480,500 budget allocation from the Division of Hunting and Game Management's annual legislative appropriation. This funding originates from the State Game Trust Fund – with alligator licenses and tag fees covering the cost of program implementation.

Major recurring program elements include salaries, wages, and benefits (4.5 FTEs and 6.5 OPS); supplemental trapper stipend payments, maintenance of the Nuisance Alligator Hotline and Call Center, and public outreach.

# Typical Complaint Process

- Call comes in to the toll-free Nuisance Alligator Hotline
- Complaint details are logged and evaluated
- Permit is automatically emailed or faxed to trapper
- Caller is notified that trapper should be in contact within 24 hours
- Trapper maintains communication with complainant



The primary method of dealing with nuisance alligators is through point-specific complaints called in through the Nuisance Alligator Hotline. Under this method, call center operators log and evaluate details of the complaint and, if the situation meets basic alligator size and property access criteria, staff issues a harvest permit to the appropriate contracted trapper. Complainants receive an explanation of FWC trapper expectations, including that the responding trapper should be in contact within 24 hours and should maintain good communication with the complainant throughout the nuisance alligator response process. The Nuisance Alligator Hotline receives, on average, more than 13,000 complaints about alligators each year.

# Trappers

- Selected through advertisement followed by extensive interview and evaluation process
- Enter into standard written service agreement with FWC
- Held to high expectations and standards of accountability
- Most trappers achieve or exceed standards



Private individuals provide nuisance alligator trapping services to the Commission through an executed no-cost service agreement. These contracted trappers are important to the program's success in ensuring public safety. Further, they are the first-hand representatives of FWC delivering solutions to citizens experiencing problems with alligators. These service providers are carefully selected through a competitive advertisement of need and an extensive evaluation and interview process to determine the best candidate. Through a strong and thorough legal agreement, supported by a comprehensive set of operational working protocols and rigorous evaluations of customer satisfaction, contracted trappers are held to high expectations of service to the Commission and citizens of Florida. When these standards are not met, staff implements measures to improve performance, including reducing complaint workloads or potentially even terminating agreements. Contracted trappers receive ample notice and opportunity to self-initiate corrective measures before agency action is taken. The vast majority of trappers meet or exceed these standards each year.

## Trappers, continued

- Receive \$30/alligator stipend from \$210,000 budget allocation to FWC
- Compensated primarily from sale of hides and meat
- Allowed to have designated agents/assistants
- Many offer fee-based opportunity to participate in nuisance alligator removals, generally different experience than guided hunts



Contracted trappers are provided with a stipend payment of \$30/alligator until a budget allocation of \$210,000 runs out each year. Primarily, contracted trappers compensate themselves for their services through the sale of the hide and meat taken from harvested alligators. The use of designated agents to assist contracted trappers is common, and is vital to providing safe, superior service to the citizens of Florida. Many contracted trappers also provide for persons to experience the process of responding and removing a nuisance alligator for a fee. This experience is usually nothing like traditional guided hunts offered by commercial guides through either the public alligator hunts or those that are offered on private lands that have been permitted to harvest alligators.

Photo Information: circa 2002, 13' 5" nuisance alligator taken from construction site in Hillsborough County, FL

# Vision

- Public safety and customer satisfaction a priority
- Innovative proactive solutions
  - Targeted Harvest Areas (e.g., swimming areas, boat ramps, homeowner developments)
- Partner with county and municipal animal control agencies
- Monetary aspects secondary to public safety
- Positive working relationships with contracted trappers



Public safety and customer satisfaction are the primary goals of the program's implementation vision. Most complainants are satisfied whether or not an alligator is captured, as long as their communication needs and expectations are being met. Although a complaint-driven process is the main method used to identify and address problem alligators, the program also includes proactive measures. These measures, which provide for communities and management authorities to directly participate in nuisance alligator management decisions, have been integral to program success. An example of an important proactive measure is Targeted Harvest Areas, where the management authority, such as a Homeowner's Association or County/City Park, can work directly with a contracted trapper to proactively remove alligators. While providing monetary benefits and opportunities to contracted trappers from the capture of problem alligators is a part of the program's design, stakeholders expect this aspect of the program to be a secondary in importance to ensure the highest level of program credibility. Collectively, these visionary components are designed to lead to superior service to the citizens of Florida and enduring, positive working relationships with contracted trappers who serve a prominent role in program implementation.

# Recent Concerns

- Performance evaluations
  - Providing full access to complainant survey summaries and comment details
- Responsiveness
  - Added communication options (text, fax, voice mail) and clarified information exchange processes
- Communication
  - Implementing annual coordination meetings, SharePoint website, and mobile technologies.



Following the change in 2005 to a statewide approach to program implementation, contracted trappers expressed concerns about some of the changes. These concerns have persisted, despite staff efforts to address them at operational and leadership levels. Most notable are concerns about trapper performance evaluations. These evaluations have been an important tool for staff to measure customer satisfaction, assess program effectiveness, and address shortcomings. A large majority of contracted trappers meet or exceed established performance expectations each year. Staff has recently addressed the concerns by providing detailed summaries of performance evaluations and customer comments to trappers upon request and will be providing them routinely in the future. Trappers also have expressed dissatisfaction with staff communications and responsiveness to trappers' information needs. Staff has recently discussed these concerns with trappers to better understand them. Because of this input, staff has responded by diversifying the methods of communications with trappers, conducting and planning for annual coordination meetings with trappers, working on and establishing a SharePoint informational website, and developing mobile technologies, as possible, for better information exchange.

# Future

- Multiple trappers assigned to a given coverage area as needs occur
  - Additional involvement opportunities, Improved responsiveness to citizens, and service continuity
- Greater involvement by land management authorities
- Strengthened working relationships
  - Intra- and inter-agency and contracted trappers



As the program progresses into the future, ongoing efforts to achieve long lasting program effectiveness will be pursued, including:

- Using multiple contracted trappers for a given area with strategically determined complaint loads when a coverage need occurs, in lieu of single contracted trappers with heavy complaint loads. This approach provides opportunity for more persons to participate as trappers, helps ensure that service coverage is seamless, and strengthens program stability.
- Involving land management and community authorities will continue. This should result in better local understanding and tailored solutions to address alligator – human conflicts.
- Strengthening working relationships within FWC, with other agencies and with contracted trappers.