

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is proposing changes to its Alligator Farming and Private Lands Alligator Management program elements.

This background report will detail the proposed changes, the rule development process and staff recommendations for moving forward.

Alligator Farming Program

- Allows individuals to rear and captively propagate alligators
- Nearly 60 permitted farms
- Dependent upon wild alligator egg and hatchling resource for rearing stock
- Approx. 22,000 alligators removed from farm stock each year for commercial hide and meat marketplace
- Rule Change Proposals:
 - More flexibility with pen designs
 - Improved program administration



The Alligator Farming program element allows individuals to rear and captively propagate alligators for their hides and meat. As of May 2013, there were nearly 60 farms permitted, with 38 of these farms being allowed to collect eggs or hatchlings from the wild under separate permits. Alligator farms are dependent upon access to the wild alligator egg and hatchling resource to provide stock which they rear. Total egg collections from the wild amount to approximately 50,000 annually. Additional eggs are provided to the farming program by enrollees in the private land alligator management program. With a current standing alligator farm inventory of approximately 90,000 animals, an average of 22,000 alligators are harvested each year, supplying the commercial alligator hide and meat marketplace. Program participants have requested rule changes to allow greater flexibility with alligator pen designs in pursuit of achieving better hide quality and more efficient farm operations. Staff, too, are seeking program improvements to better administer the program.

Private Lands Alligator Management Program

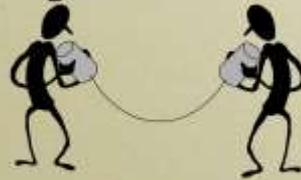
- Allows landowners and public land managers the ability to manage the alligator resource on their property
- 125+ properties enrolled, more than 2M acres of wetland habitat
- More than 3,800 alligators harvested and 40,000 eggs collected each year
- Rule Change Proposals:
 - Allow capture and release of alligators
 - Improve program administration



The Private Lands Alligator Management program element allows property owners and public lands managers access to and flexibility for managing the alligator resources on their property. In 2012, there were more than 125 properties enrolled in the program representing more than two million acres of wetland habitat. On average over the last five years, more than 3,800 alligators have been harvested and 40,000 eggs collected each year, supplying the commercial alligator hide and meat marketplace and the alligator farming industry. Program participants have requested changes that would allow them additional options for handling the alligator resource on permitted properties.

Input Process for Program Improvement

- Proposals received by program participants and staff
- Vetted through the Alligator Management Standing Team
- Input sought from program participants and key stakeholders
- Posted for comment on MyFWC.com/Alligator
- Public workshop held



Proposals were received through alligator farming and private lands program participants and staff who are charged with administering and enforcing program requirements. The proposals were vetted through the Alligator Management Standing Team, a diverse group of FWC staff representing all entities within the agency involved in alligator management issues. A summary of the vetted proposals and draft rule language was provided to alligator farm and private lands alligator management program participants and key stakeholders. The proposed changes were also prominently posted on the MyFWC.com/Alligators website with instructions on how to provide input and comments. A public workshop will be held prior to the June 2013 Commission meeting, and will be announced through a social media, posting on the MyFWC.com/Alligators website, and direct notification to program participants.

Changes to Rule 68A-25.004 (Alligator Farming)

Draft changes include:

- clarifying minimum space requirements for alligator pens
- requiring alligator farm permittees to be at least 18 years old
- requiring permittees or designees to make farm records accessible upon request
- establishing farm fencing requirements
- modifying the Annual Alligator Farm Report form



The current rule requires permitted farms to comply with the captive wildlife housing regulations, which are not well suited for adaptive alligator husbandry techniques. The proposed rule would eliminate reference to the captive wildlife housing regulations and specify minimum space and housing requirements for alligators less than 24 inches, 24 inches to 48 inches, and greater than 48 inches. The current rule does not specify a minimum age to be issued an alligator farm permit. However, to possess an alligator under the Captive Wildlife regulations, a person must be at least 18 years of age. Making new farm permit holders be at least 18 years old will achieve consistency between alligator farms and captive alligator exhibits and will improve program implementation. Currently, farm permittees are not required to make farm records accessible for inspection. Requiring a farm permittee or designee to present records upon request will improve compliance with program requirements and achieve consistency between farm facilities and captive alligator exhibitors. The proposed changes would also establish rule specific fencing requirements for clarity to program participants while achieving a level of consistency between alligator farms and captive alligator exhibits. The Annual Alligator Farm Report form (FWC Form 1000AF) is being amended and reincorporated to improve reconciliation of farm inventories and reporting of alligator farming activities and status of CITES tags issued. Please refer to the draft rule language and draft form for specific details.

Changes to Rule 68A-25.032

(Private Land Alligator Management Program)

■ Draft changes include:

- allowing the capture and release of alligators on the same permitted property using only non-injurious capture methods
- updating the Private Lands Alligator Management Program Application form



The current rule only provides for the harvesting of captured alligators on a permitted property. The proposed change would give program participants the option of capturing and releasing alligators on permitted properties when using non-injurious capture methods. The Private Lands Alligator Program Application form (FWC 1000PW) is being updated. Please refer to the draft rule language and draft form for specific details.

Feedback

- Alternative fencing and enclosure specifications



Feedback received, thus far, includes:

-suggested alternatives to the proposed fencing requirements for preventing alligators from escaping or entering permitted farms. Staff believes the suggested alternatives would cause unnecessary changes to existing facilities and would be inconsistent with regulations governing captive alligator exhibits.

At the June 2013 Commission meeting, staff will present any additional input received since posting this background report.

Requested Action

- Approval to advertise the proposed changes to Rules 68A-25.004 and 68A-25.032, F.A.C.
- Commission staff will continue to work with stakeholders to refine and develop the proposals for final consideration at the September 2013 Commission meeting.

Go to
MyFWC.com/Alligator
for updates.



Requested Commission action is to approve the draft rule changes for advertising and final public hearing at the September 2013 Commission meeting.

Please continue to monitor MyFWC.com/Alligator for updates.