Living with alligators

In Florida, increasing numbers of people living and recreating near water have led to a steady rise in the number of alligator-related complaints. Although the majority of these complaints relate to alligators occurring in locations where they simply aren't wanted, a small number tragically involve bites to people. The FWC removes more than 7,000 nuisance alligators per year. Through removal of these alligators and increased public awareness, the rate of alligator bites has remained constant despite the increased potential for alligator-human interaction.

Alligators are an important part of Florida's heritage and play a valuable role in the ecology of our state's wetlands. A better understanding of these facts and a broader knowledge of alligator behavior will help ensure that people and alligators can continue to coexist.

Visit MyFWC.com/gators for more information about alligators and the latest statistics.

Tim Donovan

Call 1-866-FWC-GATOR (392-4286) to report nuisance alligators.

Janice Plain

Call 1-866-FWC-GATOR (392-4286) to report nuisance alligators.

Regional offices

Northwest Region, Panama City
850-265-3676

North Central Region, Lake City
386-758-0525

Northeast Region, Ocala
352-732-1225

Southwest Region, Lakeland
863-648-3200

South Region, West Palm Beach
561-625-5122

REWARD
Report Fish & Wildlife Violations
1-888-404-3922

The FWC prohibits discrimination by race, color, nationality, age, sex or handicap. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility of this agency, write to: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 620 South Meridian Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600; or to: Office of Human Relations, USFWS, Department of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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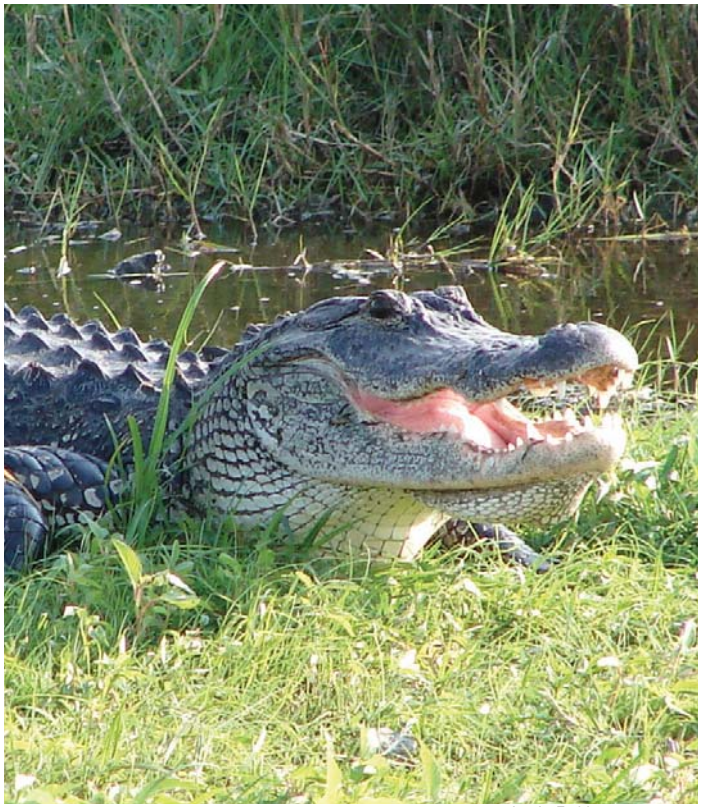
A guide to living with

Alligators



Jamie Feddersen

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
MyFWC.com

Lizabeth West

Do not swim outside of posted swimming areas or in waters that may be inhabited by alligators.

About alligators

Alligators have inhabited Florida's marshes, swamps, rivers and lakes for many centuries. Meanwhile, Florida has experienced tremendous human population growth, with hundreds of people moving into the state daily. Many new residents seek waterfront homes, resulting in increased interactions between people and alligators, which are found in all 67 counties.

Although many Floridians have learned to coexist with alligators, the potential for conflict always exists. Because of their predatory nature and large size (up to 14 feet in length and weighing as much as 1,000 pounds), alligators sometimes target pets and livestock as prey. Unfortunately, people are occasionally bitten, and in rare instances, killed by large alligators. Since 1948, more than 300 unprovoked bites to people have been documented in Florida, with at least 22 resulting in deaths.

Over the past 10 years, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has received an average of more than 16,000 alligator-related complaints per year. Most of these complaints deal with alligators occurring in places such as backyard ponds, canals, ditches and streams, but other conflicts occur in garages, pools and in golf course ponds. In many cases, if left alone, alligators will eventually retreat to more-preferred, isolated areas away from people.

Safety tips

■ If you encounter an alligator over four feet in length that poses a threat to humans or property, call 1-866-FWC-GATOR (392-4286). The FWC will evaluate your complaint and, if necessary, send a contracted nuisance alligator trapper to remove it.

■ Be aware of the possibility of alligator attacks when in or near fresh or brackish waterbodies. Attacks may occur when people do not pay close enough attention to their surroundings when working or recreating near water.

■ Closely supervise children when they are playing in or around water. Never allow small children to play unsupervised near water.

■ Do not swim outside of posted swimming areas or in waters that might be inhabited by large alligators.

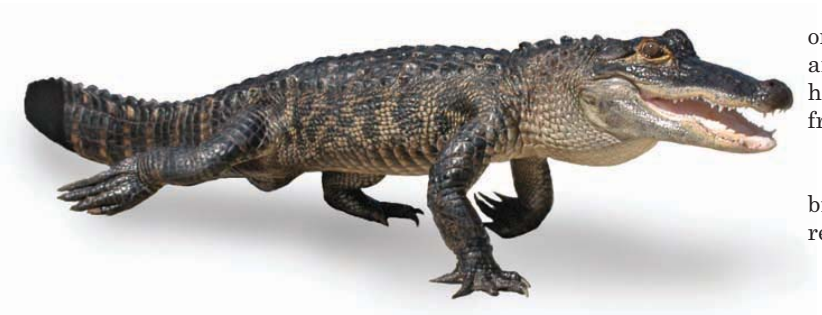
■ Alligators are most active between dusk and dawn. Therefore, swim only during daylight hours.

■ Leave alligators alone. State law prohibits killing, harassing or possessing alligators.

■ Never feed or entice alligators – it's dangerous and illegal. When fed, alligators overcome their natural wariness and learn to associate people with food.

■ Inform others that feeding alligators is illegal and creates problems for others who want to use the water for recreational purposes.

■ Dispose of fish scraps in garbage cans at boat ramps and fish camps. Do not throw them in the water. Although you are not intentionally feeding alligators when you do this, the end result can be the same.



Tim Donovan

A young alligator wanders onto a porch in a residential neighborhood.

■ Don't allow pets to swim, exercise or drink in or near waters that may contain alligators or in designated swimming areas. Dogs are more susceptible to being targeted than people, because dogs resemble the natural prey of alligators.

■ Never remove an alligator from its natural habitat or accept one as a pet. It is illegal and dangerous to do so. Handling even small alligators can result in injury.

■ Observe and photograph alligators only from a distance. Remember, they're an important part of Florida's natural history as well as an integral component of freshwater ecosystems.

■ Seek immediate medical attention if bitten by an alligator. Alligator bites can result in serious infection.