



# South Carolina Alligator Hunting Guide for 2021

*This edition supersedes all previous versions and contains information  
for the Public Alligator Hunting season*



SCDNR File Photo

**South Carolina Department of Natural Resources**  
**Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries Division**

**Wildlife Section - Special Projects**

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# South Carolina Alligator Hunting Guide

## South Carolina Department of Natural Resources

Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries Division

Wildlife Section - Special Projects

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Portions of this booklet adapted from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' *Guide to Hunting Alligator in Georgia*, by Waters et al.

### Preface

This booklet was developed to provide basic information regarding the alligator hunting season and what hunters will need in order to familiarize themselves with taking alligators. It includes common hunting techniques, safety tips, how to harvest an alligator, requirements for processing an alligator, and how to care for an alligator hide.

For additional information, visit [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov) or contact the nearest SCDNR Regional Office listed below:

<b>Region I</b>	Clemson (864) 654-1671
<b>Region II</b>	Florence (843) 661-4766
<b>Region III</b>	Columbia (803) 734-3886
<b>Region IV</b>	Charleston (843) 953-9300

### Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources for allowing us to modify their alligator booklet for use in South Carolina. We also express our appreciation to biologists with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for the use of information from their "Public Waters Alligator Harvest Training and Orientation Manual" in the preparation of this book. SCDNR also thanks Texas Parks and Wildlife Department © 2002 for the use of the artwork found on page 18.

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	2
Alligators in South Carolina .....	3
History, Range, and Habitat .....	3
Biology .....	4
Estimating Alligator Length.....	4
Benefits .....	5
Human-Alligator Conflicts.....	5
Hunt Application Process .....	5
Public Alligator Hunts .....	5
Alligator Season Management Units .....	6
Preparing for the Hunt .....	8
License Requirements for Residents .....	8
License Requirements for Non-Residents .....	8
Pre-hunt Tips .....	9
Areas Open to Hunting .....	9
Areas Not Open to Hunting .....	10
Hunting Checklist .....	10
Airboat Restrictions .....	11
Alligator Capture & Harvest Techniques .....	11
Important Safety Note .....	11
Opening and Closing of Alligator Season .....	12
Capture Methods .....	12
Dispatch Methods .....	13
Capture and Dispatch Tools .....	14
Availability of Capture and Dispatch Tools .....	15
What to Do after Your Alligator Is Harvested .....	16
Attaching the Harvest Tag .....	16
Cooling the Harvested Alligator .....	16
Completing the Harvest Permit Report.....	16
Validating the Hides for CITES Tags .....	16
Skinning, Processing, Curing and Tanning .....	17
Skinning .....	17
Processing .....	19
Processors .....	19
Consumption Guidelines .....	19
Curing .....	20
Taxidermy and Tanning .....	21
Sale or Transfer of Alligator Products .....	22
Suggested Timeline for Your Hunt.....	23
Reporting Tagged or Marked Alligators .....	24
Examples of Tagged or Marked Alligators .....	25
Map of SCDNR Offices for obtaining CITES tags.....	26

# INTRODUCTION

To participate in South Carolina's Public Alligator Harvest Program, hunters should go online to [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov) and apply to take part in the upcoming alligator hunting season. The Public Alligator Harvest Program allows anyone to participate in the alligator harvest. Residents and nonresidents are allowed to participate, but all must possess a current SC hunting license. Prior to the alligator hunting season, hunters are selected through an online quota application system and random selection process. Each applicant is required to apply online at [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov) and pay a \$10 nonrefundable application fee. If selected, a \$100 permit fee is required to purchase the permit and harvest tag. The alligator hunting season is integral to the conservation of the American alligator in South Carolina, adds to the value of the animal and allows hunters to benefit from this sustainable and renewable natural resource.

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (DNR or SCDNR) is tasked with the conservation of the state's alligator population, and through its Alligator Project, in addition to the Public Alligator Harvest, several other alligator management programs are available. The Alligator Depredation Permit Program focuses on providing property owners a mechanism to be able to deal with individual problem alligators on their property on a year-round basis. The Private Lands Harvest Program issues harvest quotas to property owners with large areas of alligator habitat to provide means to manage alligator populations. The Private Lands Harvest Program was initiated in 1995 to provide an alligator hunting season on larger properties to allow the selective removal and utilization of alligators from these areas.



Ted Borg, SCDNR

*All fees from the alligator hunting program are retained by SCDNR, and by law are applied to the research and management of the alligator resource in South Carolina.*

# ALLIGATORS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

## HISTORY

The American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*), a reptile, is a member of the family Alligatoridae. Alligator populations reached their lowest levels in the early 1960's due to several factors. However, management and conservation actions by state and federal governments, as required by the Endangered Species Act (ESA), allowed the alligator population to increase. They were removed from "total protection" status under the ESA in 1987. The alligator is now listed as "threatened by similarity of appearance" because of its likeness to other protected crocodylians worldwide. This provides greater flexibility for South Carolina and other southeastern states to manage alligator populations. Today, approximately 100,000 alligators occur in the state of South Carolina.

## RANGE

Alligators occur from the southern tip of Texas to the northeastern part of North Carolina. In South Carolina, they are typically found south of the fall line (which roughly traverses the state from I-20 in Aiken to Kershaw County, then up highway US 1 towards Cheraw in Chesterfield County). There is no evidence that alligator populations reproduce north of the fall line, and it is suspected that many of the alligators found well above the fall line may have been illegally relocated. However, a small number of individual alligators can naturally show up in these areas. Alligators usually remain in the area where they were hatched for two to three years before establishing their own range. Females generally have small home ranges, while males may occupy a home territory of more than two square miles. Severe drought or flood conditions may cause alligators to move considerable distances in search of suitable waters.

## HABITAT

Alligators occupy a variety of wetland habitats in South Carolina. They normally are found in marshes, swamps, rivers, farm ponds and lakes in the wild, but also have been found in ditches, neighborhoods, drainage canals, retention ponds, roadways, golf course ponds and sometimes in swimming pools. Nearly any water body in the Lowcountry has the potential to harbor alligators at one time or another. During courtship and breeding, from April to May, alligators prefer open waters. During the remainder of the year, males prefer open and deep waters while females seek out nesting habitat in secluded areas with shallow water and heavy vegetation.

## BIOLOGY

Alligators can live up to 60 years in captivity, but in the wild they rarely live more than 50 years. Male alligators can presumably grow up to 16 feet in length, although 13-footers are rare, whereas female alligators can grow up to 10 feet. After breeding, females lay an average of 35 to 40 eggs that incubate for about 65 days. Hatchlings are about eight to ten inches in length. About 20 percent of the young will survive to maturity. The others fall victim to predators such as raccoons, birds, snakes, otters and other alligators. They grow approximately eight to ten inches per year for the first few years and will reach sexual maturity at about six to seven feet in length. Large alligators can reach weights of over 800 pounds. Alligators are carnivores and will eat almost anything they can catch. During the first few years their diet consists mainly of small prey such as snails, crayfish, frogs, insects and other invertebrates. Depending on their size, larger alligators may eat fish, turtles, snakes, waterbirds, raccoons, beavers and otters. Alligators also feed on carrion and, given the opportunity, they may also eat pets and smaller domestic animals, such as goats and pigs.

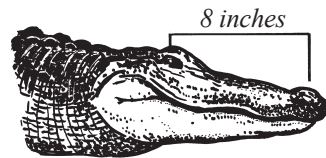
## ESTIMATING ALLIGATOR LENGTH

The length of an alligator can be estimated by determining (in inches) the distance between the center of the skull (between the eyes) and the nostrils. This number then can be translated into feet to give an estimate of the entire length of the animal. For example, if the measurement on the diagram below was eight inches, one can estimate that the entire animal is approximately eight feet long.

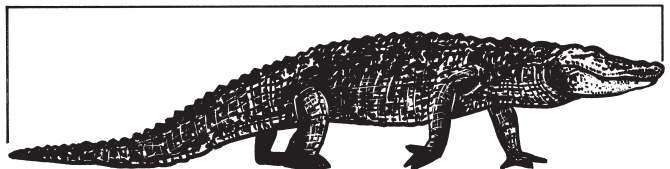
### *Estimating Alligator Length:*

The length of an alligator can be estimated by determining the length (in inches) between the center of the skull (between the eyes) and the nostrils. This number gives the approximate length of the alligator in feet.

For example, if the measurement on the diagram to the right was eight inches, one can estimate that the entire animal is about 8 feet long.



8 Feet



*Artwork courtesy of GADNR*

## BENEFITS

Alligators are ecologically important. They help maintain the population balance of certain prey species and they help shape and modify habitat. During times of severe drought, alligators are known to dig holes (“gator holes”) to concentrate water. This helps the alligator survive, and provides a water source to many other species of plants and animals in the area.

## HUMAN-ALLIGATOR CONFLICTS

In 1989, the SCDNR initiated a problem alligator program that allows contracted agent trappers to capture and harvest specific problem alligators greater than four feet in length. A nuisance alligator is one that exhibits aggressive behavior toward humans or domestic animals, has become habituated to people, shows symptoms of some debilitating illness or injury, or inhabits recreational waters intended primarily for swimming. Agent trappers harvest approximately 250-300 problem alligators annually in South Carolina.

## HUNT APPLICATION PROCESS

### PUBLIC ALLIGATOR HUNTS

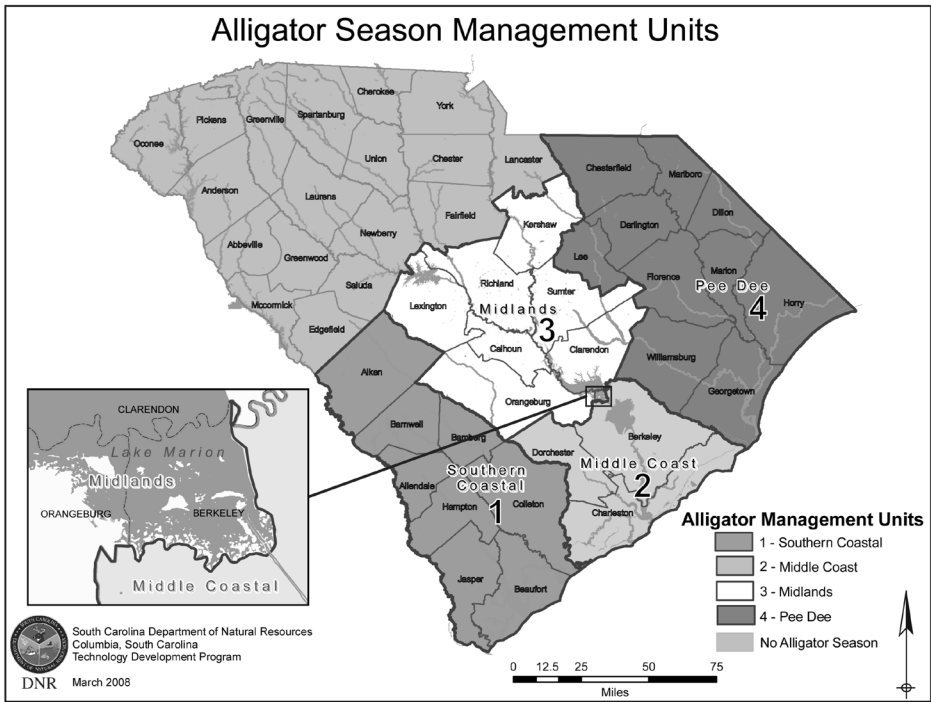
South Carolina’s alligator hunting season has been designated as a quota hunt where a limited number of hunters are allowed to harvest one alligator (4 feet or greater in length) each from a specified hunt unit. This allows the Department to monitor and manage the number of animals harvested. Hunters must apply electronically over the internet ([www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov)) from **May 1 until 5:00 p.m. on June 15**. There is a \$10 nonrefundable application fee to apply. There are four alligator management units in the Coastal Plain with a set number of permits allocated for each management unit. The number of tags allocated for each hunt unit is subject to change and is based on harvest levels and alligator survey information. Hunters may choose any number of units they desire to hunt in (1 to 4) and, when applying, select (in order of preference) their preferred hunt unit(s). However, hunters will be selected to hunt in only one unit (see hunt unit map at the end of this section).

Potential applicants may visit the SCDNR website ([www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov)) to check for any changes to the alligator permit allotment.

**Note:** *There is no added benefit in trying to apply as early as possible since the selection process does not differentiate between applications received on the first day or the last day of the application period.*

A random, preference-based drawing will select the applicants for each hunt unit and notifications will be sent out beginning in July. All selected hunters are then required to go back online and purchase their permit and tag at a cost of \$100. The mailing of the actual permit and tag for hunters who have paid the \$100 fee will begin after August 1. Each selected applicant may hunt only the area for which they were chosen and may only harvest one alligator. **All applicants must be 16 or older at the time of the hunt to be eligible for an alligator harvest permit.** The selected hunter may have as many assistants or helpers as desired. Others assisting a permitted hunter must be in the same boat, on the bank, or in another (secondary) boat within sight and voice contact. *Secondary boats are not allowed to shine for alligators in an effort to hunt for or find an alligator at night unless: a permitted hunter is on board, the alligator was first found by the permitted hunter's boat, or the permitted hunter's boat is actively engaged in trying to capture the alligator.*

**Everyone must apply & purchase permits online at [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov)**

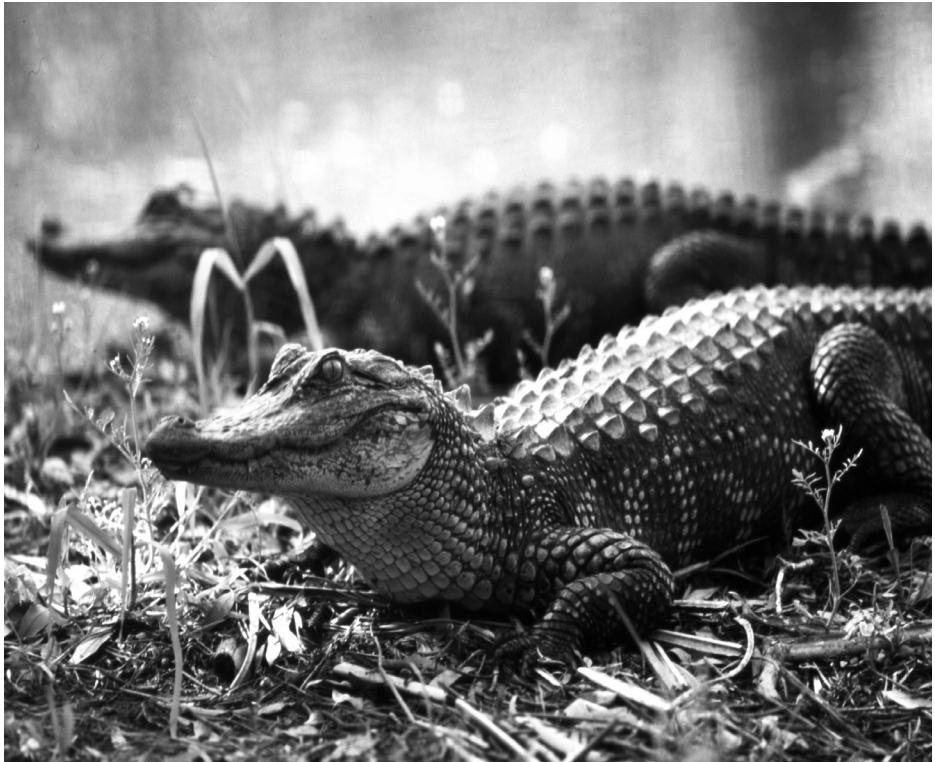


Selected hunters will receive this booklet, an alligator harvest permit and alligator harvest tag by mail. Permits and tags *are not transferable and must be in possession while hunting*. Hunters not selected for a hunt will have their quota hunt account credited with a preference point. Preference points are used with future applications to receive priority status in the selection process. Applicants will continue to accumulate preference points until selected to participate in the alligator hunting season. Once selected, all preference points revert to zero.

**Note:** *Alligator hunting permits and tags are assigned to a specific individual and thus cannot be sold, transferred, or used by anyone else other than the person to whom it was issued.*

*At the SCDNR's discretion, successful applicants who do not complete the purchase of their permit and tag may be prohibited from participating in the following year's alligator hunter selection process.*

A slide show related to safe and legal alligator hunting in South Carolina is available on the SCDNR website at [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov).



Phillip Jones, SCDNR

# PREPARING FOR THE HUNT

## LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

No license is required for anyone **to apply** for the Public Alligator hunt.

### **SOUTH CAROLINA RESIDENTS AND RESIDENT PARTICIPANTS**

Successful SC *applicants* MUST:

- purchase the \$100 Alligator Hunting Permit
- possess a valid SC Hunting License (Big Game Permit not required)

SC Resident *participants/assistants*\* MUST:

- possess a valid SC Hunting license if 16 years of age or older (Big Game Permit is not required)

### **NON-RESIDENTS AND/OR NON-RESIDENT PARTICIPANTS**

Successful non-resident *applicants* MUST:

- purchase the \$100 Alligator Hunting Permit
- possess a valid SC Hunting License (Big Game Permit is not required)
- pay the \$200 Alligator Hunting Fee before going afield

Non-resident *participants/assistants*\* MUST:

- possess a valid SC Hunting license if 16 years of age or older (Big Game Permit is not required)
- pay the \$200 Alligator Hunting Fee if 16 years of age or older before going afield (this fee may be paid at any license vendor location, online [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov) or by phone at 1-866-714-3611)

\* includes all persons accompanying a permitted alligator hunter and actively participating in the hunt (i.e. anyone who tries to find, seek, obtain, pursue, or diligently search for alligators).

*All licenses and fees may be purchased/paid at any license vendor location, online at [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov) or by phone at 1-866-714-3611.*

**SPECIAL NOTE: The \$200 Nonresident Alligator Hunting Fee applies to ALL permitted nonresident hunters and ALL non-resident hunting assistants 16 years of age or older.**

## PRE-HUNT TIPS

- Familiarize yourself with the information contained in this booklet.
- Review the slide show related to safe and legal alligator hunting in SC on the alligator hunting page at [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov).
- Purchase your hunting equipment and become familiar with it in advance.
- Obtain maps of the zone where you were selected to hunt and familiarize yourself with the area.
- Determine who will accompany you on the hunt (i.e. select a guide if desired) and ensure that everyone has appropriate licenses. Determine who will handle each responsibility during the course of the hunt (i.e. drive the boat, snare, dispatch, etc.).
- If you plan to hunt on private property, it is recommended that you obtain written permission from the landowner to be on the property and have it in your possession while hunting.
- Develop a plan on how you are going to cool the alligator as quickly as possible once it is harvested.
- Because boating at night inherently involves risk, inform a reliable person of your plans, including boat and vehicle descriptions, expected boat launch site(s), other people who are hunting with you, when you are generally expected to return, and whom to contact if you do not return when expected (similar to a boating “float plan”). If someone needs to look for you it helps to know where to start.
- Keep your hunting permit and tag in a safe place. Replacements ***cannot*** be issued. *Do not allow children or others to handle the harvest tag as once it is locked, it cannot be opened without breaking the tag.*

## AREAS OPEN TO HUNTING

In each alligator management unit, hunters are allowed to hunt in the navigable public waters of the state that are normally open to public hunting. Hunters are also allowed to hunt on private property with permission of the landowner (written permission is recommended) as long as the private property is not enrolled in the Private Lands Alligator Program.

Other water bodies owned by or within the control of other governmental entities may or may not be open (e.g. Goose Creek Reservoir, Charleston Naval Weapons Station). Check with the controlling entity before entering these areas as hunting access may change from year to year. Additional site specific licenses may also be required.

## AREAS NOT OPEN TO HUNTING\*

- Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) *including any WMAs accessible by boat. (Lake Moultrie hunters are cautioned to stay out of the Hatchery WMA boundaries).*
- Do not cross dikes onto WMA properties.
- Avoid any part of the Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center (Georgetown County) *including areas accessible by waterway, ditch, or canal.*
- National Wildlife Refuges and any of the jurisdictional waters surrounding these refuges not normally open for public hunting.
- Any other bodies of water not normally open for public hunting.
- Private lands adjacent to public waters where permission has not been granted to the hunter.

\* For areas near WMA's and Wildlife Refuges, check with those locations to make sure you are aware of the boundaries, some of which may extend into the water. Check the alligator hunting section on the SCDNR website for more information about certain WMAs that may cause confusion.

## HUNTING CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Alligator hunting permit, alligator harvest tag, and state hunting license.
- Non-resident hunters* and *all non-resident participants* 16 years of age and older, must pay the additional \$200 Non-resident Alligator Hunting Fee.
- If hunting on private land, written permission from landowner.
- Boat and all required boating safety equipment such as functioning running lights, fire extinguisher, signaling device, and life jackets. All children under 12 are required to wear a life jacket in a boat under 16 feet. (Please note that SCDNR strongly encourages all hunters to wear a life jacket while in a boat).
- Lighting equipment and spare lights.
- Capture equipment: snatch hook, snare, gig, harpoon or arrow.
- Restraint equipment: snare for neck and snare for snout.
- Preferred dispatch equipment: handgun or bangstick (no other firearms are allowed to be in your possession while alligator hunting).
- Knife to cut into alligator's tail to insert the alligator harvest tag.
- Plans for cooling harvested alligator.
- Processing plans.

## AIRBOAT RESTRICTIONS

It is unlawful to operate an airboat from the freshwater/saltwater dividing line seaward. This line's location varies along the coast (see §50-5-80).

It is also unlawful to operate an airboat on the waters of:

- The Waccamaw, Great Pee Dee, Little Pee Dee, Black, and Sampit Rivers in Georgetown and Horry Counties from one hour before legal sunset to one hour after legal sunrise and anytime during the season for hunting waterfowl\*.
- The portion of Lake Marion and Santee Swamp west of the I-95 bridge upstream to the confluence of the Congaree and Wateree Rivers during the season for hunting waterfowl\*.

\* Please check early season waterfowl dates (early teal and Canada Goose seasons) as they traditionally occur in the month of September.

## ALLIGATOR CAPTURE & HARVEST TECHNIQUES

This section will discuss and review effective and legal capture and dispatch methods for harvesting an alligator.

**IMPORTANT SAFETY NOTE:** *There are several effective techniques available for capturing and harvesting alligators. Keep in mind that while these techniques have proven effective in alligator harvests, an element of danger is involved with the process. The techniques, equipment and practices described are provided to demonstrate practical techniques that agent alligator trappers have used in conjunction with the nuisance alligator program. Hunters should be aware that many experienced agent alligator trappers, using similar techniques, have been bitten and some seriously injured. You are urged to use extreme caution when handling alligators. If you are inexperienced in handling alligators, SCDNR encourages you to obtain the assistance of an experienced hunter or guide.*

All effective alligator hunting techniques have a few common elements:

- Alligators are usually hunted after dark (although some hunters use snatchhooks on animals during day and twilight hours).
- Alligators are located at night by their reflective eye shine, which has a characteristic red glow.
- Alligators should be approached quietly keeping the beam of the spotlight directly in or just above their eyes.

## OPENING AND CLOSING OF ALLIGATOR SEASON

The start of the alligator season begins at 12:00 p.m. (noon) on the second Saturday in September. Hunting parties may launch boats before this time, *but cannot leave the immediate vicinity of the landing or launch site if alligator hunting gear is in the boat.*

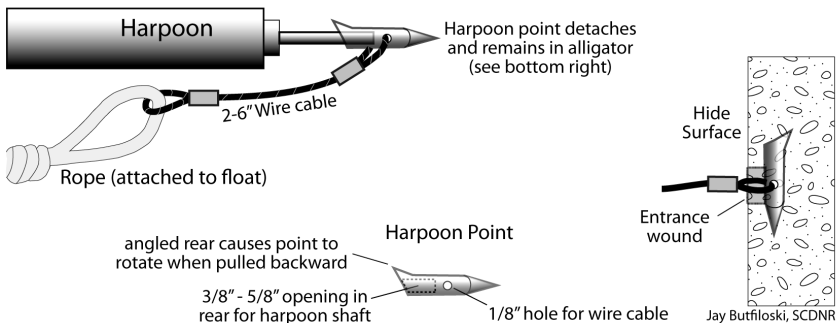
The close of the alligator hunting season is at 12:00 p.m. (noon) on the second Saturday in October. Hunters that are “hooked-up” with an alligator may reasonably continue past 12:00 p.m. provided that at least one line remains secured to the animal and the amount of time past noon is reasonably appropriate for the size of the alligator. At any point at which the alligator becomes detached from the securing line, all capture efforts must stop and the hunt and the season is over.

## CAPTURE METHODS

*It is unlawful to kill or attempt to kill an unrestrained alligator during the Public Alligator Hunting Season.* Alligators must first be captured alive prior to shooting or otherwise dispatching the animal. In order to capture an alligator, the hunter must first secure a restraining line to the animal. Several methods may be used to attach a restraining line to an alligator, including handheld snares, harpoons, gigs, arrows or snatch hooks. It is up to the individual hunter to decide which method will work best for their situation and skill level. Successful hunters often have more than one capture device onboard in order to be able to select a device best suited to the immediate capture opportunity. Also, having a secondary device can allow a hunt to continue when the primary capture device malfunctions or if it is inadvertently dropped overboard.

Once the restraining line is attached, the alligator should be retrieved with moderate pressure applied to the line. It is important to note that pulling too hard on the restraining line will often cause it to pull loose. A snare should be cautiously attached to the alligator once it

Diagram of a Commonly Used Harpoon Point



is adjacent to the boat. It is best to use a snare that has been attached to a pole with either a rubber band or a piece of tape so that it will “break-away” upon pulling the snare secure around the animal’s neck. Alligators typically thrash when the snare is applied, but should calm down after they tire from struggling.

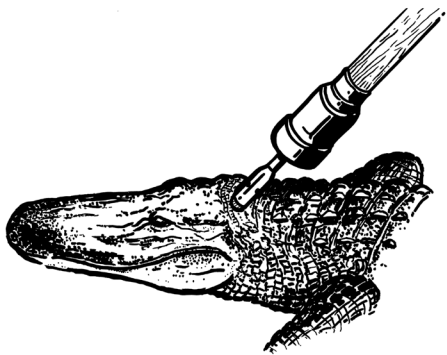
### DISPATCH METHODS

Once the alligator has been captured and brought adjacent to the boat it may be dispatched. *Hunters are required by law* to bring the animal boatside or to shore before attempting to dispatch the alligator. The animal may be killed with the use of a bangstick or a handgun (any caliber). To use a bangstick, the hunter should first allow the alligator’s head to go below the water’s surface. The hunter should then discharge the bangstick just behind the base of the skull/neck junction. The animal also may be dispatched by discharging a handgun at the base of the skull. Both the bangstick and the handgun should be aimed at the brain, angled slightly forward from just behind the rear of the skull. Hunters should note that the improper placement and discharge of the handgun or bangstick can occasionally only knock the alligator temporarily unconscious. Remember to only discharge a bangstick underwater.

Alligators **may not** be transported in a boat or vehicle alive.

**NOTE:** *No other firearm, except a bangstick or handgun, may be in possession while hunting alligators (no rifles or shotguns).*

**Do not shoot an alligator between the eyes or on the top of the skull.** The skull is very thick and a bullet may ricochet off of the skull. To humanely kill an alligator, a shot must be directed to that portion of the neck/head juncture where the neck meets the top of the skull plate and angled slightly towards the skull (see illustration). The alligator needs to be directly alongside the boat and the shot should be directed downward.



*Bangstick placement  
(Artwork courtesy of GADNR)*

**NEVER ASSUME THAT ANY ALLIGATOR IS DEAD!**

Using the snare, carefully pull the alligator's snout up against the side of the boat (to the edge of the gunnel) and press the top of the snout closed with a stick to secure. A gaff can also be used to pull the head against the boat's gunnel. Never place your hand or foot next to an alligator's jaw because they can snap sideways very quickly and cause serious injury. A rope (tossed or guided by a stick rather than your hand) can be used to temporarily secure the jaw. Once this temporary method is applied, the jaw should then be completely secured by wrapping it several times with high quality duct tape or electrical tape. It is a good idea to have more than one roll of tape in case one tape roll is dropped in the water. As a final measure, the spinal cord should be severed at the base of the skull before placing the alligator in the bottom of the boat. Remember, the jaws should always remain taped shut when handling or transporting an "apparently" dead alligator.

## **CAPTURE AND DISPATCH TOOLS**

Snares: Wire snares attached to a restraining line that is loosely mounted (using a small rubber band or piece of tape) to the end of a pole are most commonly used to secure the alligator once it has been harpooned or snagged and brought under control near the boat. Snares also may be used as an initial capture technique. Snares must be hand-held or attached to a hand-held device and cannot be left unattended.

Harpoons and Gigs: Harpoons or gigs may be used for attaching a restraining line to an alligator. Harpoons or gigs consist of a penetrating point such as a straightened fish hook, detachable dart, fish gig or spear point that is attached to a restraining line. The harpoon point is typically mounted on a pole, arrow shaft or spear and is thrown. A gig (a pronged instrument with a metal or wooden pole) is jabbed.

Snatch Hooks: Snatch hooks may be used to attach a restraining line to an alligator. A snatch hook is a weighted treble hook that is attached to a restraining line. The hook is either hand-held or used in conjunction with a long, stout fishing rod and reel and heavy line. The hook typically is cast over the alligator or over the area where it last submerged. The hook is then retrieved until it makes contact with the alligator, at which point it is set with a strong pull. The line should be kept tight until the animal tires, as the hook often falls out of the alligator if the line is allowed to go slack. *Baited hooks are not a legal capture method.*

Handgun: Any caliber handgun may be used to dispatch a captured alligator, but larger calibers are recommended. Rifles are not allowed to be used as a dispatch tool and *may not be in possession while hunting alligators*. Alligators may not be shot until captured and restrained.

**Bangsticks:** Bangsticks are a safe and effective tool for humanely killing alligators. Bangsticks or power heads, typically used by divers to kill fish, discharge a firearm cartridge upon contact. For a humane kill, the shot should be centered immediately behind the skull cap and angled toward the brain. It is recommended that the bangstick be used in compliance with the manufacturer's safety recommendations. When killing an alligator, the bangstick *should be discharged below the waterline* to reduce the potential for aerial dispersal of bullet and bone fragments. Keep in mind that to legally dispatch an alligator using a bangstick, the animal must be attached to a restraining line using methods such as those previously described.



**WARNING:** *A bangstick is a firearm under the laws of South Carolina, and should be treated at all times with the respect due such a device. While these materials are offered to familiarize participants with the appropriate and safe use of a bangstick, SCDNR cannot warrant that such use will be safe under all circumstances, nor is this brief introduction intended as a substitute for the degree of experience and knowledge necessary to safely utilize such a device. In the event you choose to utilize a bangstick to harvest alligators, you should select a model, which the manufacturer deems appropriate for such use, and should, at all times, comply with manufacturer's safety recommendations and specifications for use.*

## **AVAILABILITY OF CAPTURE AND DISPATCH TOOLS**

Please see the SCDNR website ([www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov)) for availability of capture equipment and other alligator hunting-related equipment vendors. A listing of alligator processors is also provided.

**Disclaimer:** SCDNR neither endorses these companies nor receives any compensation for placing these names on the alligator hunting portion of the SCDNR website. Equipment purchased through these companies is done so at the buyer's own risk and of their own free will.

**Note:** *Alligator hunting equipment may also be available from your local outdoor sporting goods store or from other online vendors not listed on the SCDNR website. Inclusion on the list is voluntary.*

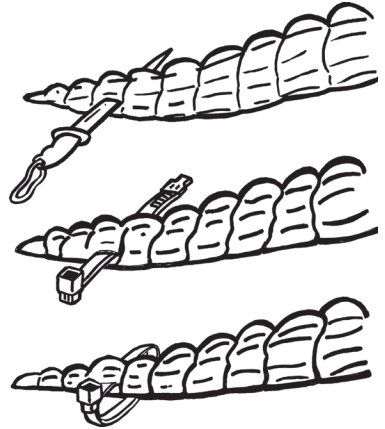
# WHAT TO DO AFTER YOUR ALLIGATOR IS HARVESTED

After the alligator is harvested, you must be prepared to do the following:

- Immediately attach the harvest tag to the alligator's tail.
- Complete the harvest permit within 24 hours.
- Cool the harvested alligator.
- If CITES validation is desired, you must make prior arrangements with a SCDNR Regional Office at least 24 hours in advance of the need for the tag (see section on CITES).

## ATTACHING THE HARVEST TAG

You must attach the alligator harvest tag to the alligator carcass within six (6) inches of the tip of the tail (see diagram) immediately after it is killed *and before it is transported by boat or vehicle from the site of capture*. The harvest tag must remain attached to the alligator hide at all times. Please note, it is difficult to cut through an alligator's hide, so take your time and be careful not to cut yourself. Also, be sure to clamp your harvest tag across the underside of the tail to avoid jeopardizing the ability to skin the hide.



*Attaching the Harvest Tag*  
(Artwork courtesy of GADNR)

## COOLING THE HARVESTED ALLIGATOR

To maintain meat and hide quality, take necessary steps to cool your harvested alligator to 45 degrees Fahrenheit within four (4) hours after harvest.

## COMPLETING THE HARVEST PERMIT REPORT

The alligator harvest permit report must be completed within 24 hours of harvesting the alligator. The completed harvest report must be mailed or faxed no more than five (5) business days after harvest. A copy of the alligator harvest permit must accompany the alligator hide at all times. Please be sure to read and follow the directions carefully and fill the permit out completely.

Mail completed harvest report to:

SCDNR  
Alligator Program  
PO Box 167  
Columbia, SC 29202

or Fax: (803) 734-3691

## VALIDATING HIDES FOR CITES TAGS\*

Arrangements must be made in advance for hunters desiring to obtain a CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) tag. Because the American alligator is *similar in appearance* to some endangered crocodylians, the US Fish & Wildlife Service requires all

alligator hides destined for export from the United States to be tagged with a state-issued CITES tag. All alligator carcasses or hides needing a CITES tag shall be taken during normal working hours (M-F, 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Some locations’ hours may vary so you should call first.) to a SCDNR Regional Office (locations and phone numbers listed on front cover of booklet), or other designated location, for CITES validation no later than October 20. Prior notification is required and an appointment must be scheduled in advance. The harvest tag must remain locked onto the alligator’s tail until validation. CITES tags issued by SCDNR must remain attached to the hide until it is tanned, taxidermy mounted or exported from the state. The possession of any untagged alligator hide (without either a harvest tag or a CITES tag) is prohibited. Alligator hides processed by a taxidermist or tannery in South Carolina do not require a CITES tag unless destined for export from the U.S. ***Prior arrangements for CITES tags must be made by appointment with a SCDNR office (see the map of these locations on the back cover of this booklet).***

*Alligator parts other than hides do not require a CITES tag unless destined for export from the U.S.* Any alligator skulls that are not discarded must be permanently marked “SC Alligator” with the corresponding alligator harvest tag number and year taken. Alligator skulls or other parts that have not yet been processed into a finished product can be labeled with a temporary hang tag or otherwise labeled with the owner’s name, the words “SC Alligator” and the corresponding year and harvest tag number (see illustration to right).



*Temporary tag with harvest information*

## **SKINNING, PROCESSING, CURING AND TANNING**

### **SKINNING**

Skinning an alligator is a delicate process if the hunter wishes to retain the beauty of the hide. Patience and special care must be taken to prevent accidental knife cuts in the hide (*Scutes or osteoderms are the bony plates embedded in the back skin of an alligator. They give the alligator the bumpy appearance and protect the alligator.*).

Alligators may be skinned in two different ways:

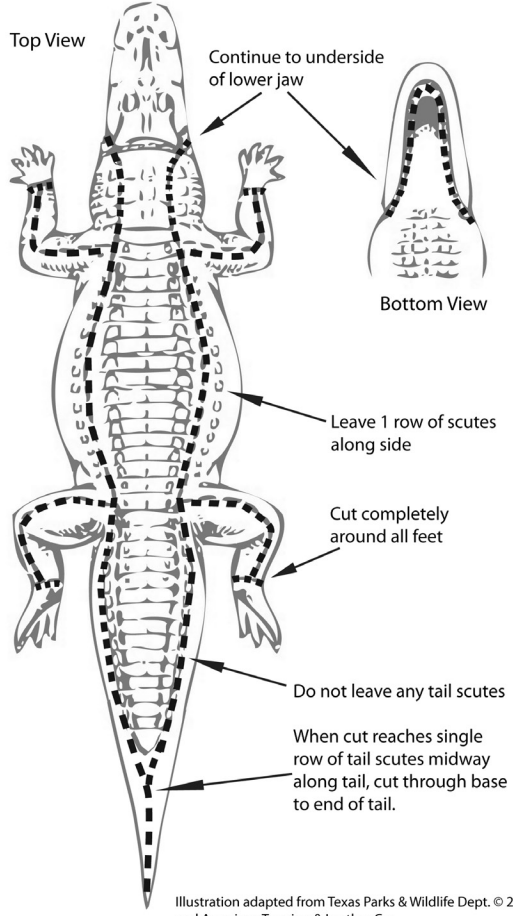
#### **Method 1**

This method leaves the belly skin of the alligator intact and is the preferred method if the hide is to be sold or tanned and made into leather

goods. This method consists of making an incision on each side of the alligator (leaving one to two rows of osteoderms or scutes along the belly side) and on the top of each leg and then removing the hide with the belly skin intact. The underside of the skull also should be skinned with the rest of the belly. The back skin of the alligator with the osteoderms or scutes in it can then be removed and discarded or kept according to your wishes. Because of the difficulty of tanning the osteoderms, the back skin is not considered very useful and most often is discarded (see illustration).

**Method 2**

This method produces a more natural looking hide, but generally is more costly to tan due to the osteoderms remaining in the hide. This method is similar to skinning a deer or a hog by making an incision up the belly of the alligator and on the underside of each leg. The hide can then be removed in its entirety and saved for tanning or selling. *Alligator skulls and skeletal parts not discarded must be permanently marked with the alligator harvest tag number of the hide from which it was taken.* This marking may be written on the palate of the mouth after preservation. The skull and skeletal parts may be kept by the selected hunter, transferred or sold. Records must be kept indicating to whom skulls and/or other skeletal parts were transferred.



**Note:** *Although not legally necessary, a tannery may require a CITES tag in order to process an alligator hide that you intend to keep.*

## PROCESSING

Alligator meat may be processed and stored in a fashion similar to that for deer, hog and other game animals. While the tail meat is the most popular consumable meat of alligators, it is not the only edible portion. Many people find the ribs, legs, etc. very good. All packages of alligator meat transferred, transported, or stored, must be labelled “SC Alligator” and have the harvest tag number prominently displayed on each package.

## PROCESSORS

Anyone can process alligators for personal use. Alligator meat taken under the public harvest program cannot be sold.

**Note:** *SCDNR recommends that alligator meat be processed at an approved processing facility. Approved facilities are required to meet the same standards as seafood processors and are inspected and regulated by the SC Department of Agriculture.*

A listing of alligator processors is located in the alligator hunting section of the SCDNR website ([www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov)). Please note that this list may not be a comprehensive list of all alligator processors in the state.

## RECOMMENDED CONSUMPTION GUIDANCE FOR WILD ALLIGATOR

In conjunction with the limited harvest of alligators, the SCDNR is issuing recommendations on the consumption of wild alligator meat. Alligators are long-lived, may grow to large sizes and may accumulate significant amounts of mercury. Information on mercury in alligators harvested in South Carolina is limited and does not appear to be linked to alligator size. However, certain people may be at risk if consumption of alligator meat occurs.

SCDNR recommends that the general population eat no more than 1 meal per week (8 ounces or ½ pound) of alligator meat. Pregnant women, nursing mothers and young children may be especially sensitive to the effects of mercury. For this potentially sensitive population, SCDNR recommends that no more than 1 meal per month be consumed. This recommendation may be particularly important if you are a frequent consumer of locally caught fish, which also may contain mercury. For further information, contact the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) Bureau of Water Division at (803) 898-4300.

## **CURING**

Two methods may be used to temporarily preserve and/or cure alligator skin until sold or sent to a tannery. Method one is through repeated salting of the hide and storing it in a cool, dry location. Method two (which utilizes some similar techniques to method one) is through the use of a brine solution. *Always roll and store hides with the tail and harvest tag on the outside of the roll where it is visible. This is especially important if a CITES tag is needed.*

### **Method 1**

After an alligator has been skinned, the hide should be scraped thoroughly using a knife, a piece of metal pipe or another appropriate object until all bits of meat, fat, etc. are removed. After scraping, salt the hide with approximately one inch of white, fine grade table or mixing salt (available at most feed and seed stores). Thoroughly rub the salt into the hide, then roll the hide tightly, secure it and store it in a cool place. After 3-5 days, unroll the hide, discard the salt and repeat the salting procedure as described above. Re-roll the hide tightly and band with a one-inch rubber band or other rubber tubing. Store the rolled hide in a cool, dry place until transported for validation.

### **Method 2**

An alternative to Method One is to utilize a brine solution. Hides cured in brine solutions often remain more supple, suffer less shrinkage and are viewed as more attractive by hide graders and buyers. For these reasons, the use of a brine solution to cure an alligator hide is highly recommended.

Ingredients or Materials Needed:

- 50 gallon covered plastic drum
- 50 pounds salt
- 1 pint bleach (assists in keeping bacterial growth to a minimum)
- 25 gallons water

In order to be effective, the solution must be carefully prepared and maintained. A plastic or other non-corrosive covered container of sufficient size should be used. Heavy, 50-gallon plastic drums used for shipping produce are best, but large plastic covered garbage cans are good substitutes. The solution must remain saturated with salt. Too little salt will cause damage to a hide. Fill the 50-gallon container half-full of water, then add the salt and the bleach and mix thoroughly.

After complete mixing, a 2-3 inch layer of salt should remain on the bottom. Hides should be properly scraped and salted with a one-inch layer of salt, tightly rolled and secured with a rubber band prior to placing in the brine. When submersing a hide in the brine, it should be rotated to allow most of the air pockets to escape. If properly salted, the layer of salt in the rolled skin will act as a wick to draw the brine solution throughout the skin. The hide should be entirely submersed in the brine at all times and the container should be kept tightly covered to keep insects and airborne contaminants from entering the solution. The hide should remain in the brine solution until sold or sent to a tannery. If you plan on selling the hide, it must be removed from the brine and entirely re-salted prior to being shipped or placed in refrigeration. The brine should be discarded and a new solution made after each use. Disposal of the salt brine should be done properly and carefully since it is harmful to plants and aquatic animal life.

## TAXIDERMISTRY AND TANNING

If you wish to have the alligator mounted, contact one of the many commercial taxidermists in the state for assistance. If you wish to tan the alligator hide for leather products or similar purposes, contact one of the contract alligator tanneries listed below.\* The tannery can best provide assistance on the proper hide preparation and packaging as well as determining the color of the finished product.

American Tanning and Leather - [www.amtan.com](http://www.amtan.com)

730 Pimento Avenue, Bldg A, Griffin, GA, 30224 (770) 228-4433

Specialty Leather Processors - [www.specialtyleather.com](http://www.specialtyleather.com)

2135 Industrial Park Rd, Boone, IA 50036 (515) 433-0176

Sebring Custom Tanning - [www.sebringcustomtanning.com](http://www.sebringcustomtanning.com)

429 Webster Turn Drive, Sebring, FL 33870 (863) 655-1600

*\*There may be other tanneries or even individuals throughout the US that will process alligator hides. Your local taxidermist may be able to assist you in having your alligator hide tanned.*

**Note:** *A tannery may require a CITES tag in order to process an alligator hide. You should contact the tannery prior to shipping any alligator hide as the facility may refuse delivery of your package without a CITES tag attached.*

## SALE OR TRANSFER OF ALLIGATOR PRODUCTS

Alligator meat from animals taken under the Public Harvest Program cannot be sold or bartered. Any meat given to others must be clearly labeled “SC Alligator” with the corresponding harvest tag number.

Alligator hides and parts taken under the Public Alligator Harvest Program can be sold under the following conditions:

- Hides must be tagged with either a CITES or SC Harvest tag before being sold, transferred, bartered or given to another person. *Prior arrangements with a SCDNR Office must be made in order to obtain CITES validation tags.* Because of the sheer volume of hides received, most tanneries or hide buyers may require a CITES tag in order to process or purchase an alligator hide.
- Alligator skulls must be permanently labeled or marked “SC Alligator” with the year taken and corresponding alligator harvest tag number. A “Sharpie” or other type of permanent marker can be used to write this information directly on the part. Markings on display items (i.e. skulls) can be written on the bottom (ventral side) of the skull so that it is not immediately visible. Other parts destined for export from the U.S. may require CITES tags and labeling of the individual parts.



*Alligator Skull (ventral view) showing required harvest information and year taken, lower jaw is not shown.*

- Other alligator parts may be sold, but records must be maintained indicating whom the parts were sold or transferred to.

***Prior arrangements with a SCDNR Office must be made in order to obtain CITES validation tags. A map of the SCDNR offices issuing CITES tags is provided on the rear cover.***

# SUGGESTED TIMELINE FOR YOUR HUNT

As with other hunting excursions, there are many details to consider when embarking on an alligator hunt. SCDNR has put together the following suggested timeline to help you review when and how these details should be handled:

## May 1-June 15

- Apply online at [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov) by 5:00 p.m. on June 15. You can apply online annually beginning on May 1.

## July

- Applicant status notifications will begin in late July.
- Successful applicants will have until **the last Sunday before the close of the season** to purchase their permit and alligator harvest tag online. After this time tags can only be purchased in the Columbia SCDNR Office. You must purchase the \$100 permit & tag online at [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov).

## July-August

- If selected, determine who will accompany you and ensure that each member of the hunting party has valid SC hunting licenses and all nonresidents pay their \$200 hunting fee.
- Assess equipment needs and hunting locations.

## 2nd Saturday September-2nd Saturday October (Season)\*

- Restrain, capture and harvest your alligator.
- Once harvested, immediately attach the temporary alligator harvest tag within six inches of the tip of the tail.
- Complete the alligator harvest permit within 24 hours of harvest.
- Cool the alligator within four hours of harvesting.
- Properly skin and process the alligator as desired.
- Fax or mail the completed harvest report within five (5) business days to:

**Fax#: 803-734-3691**

**SCDNR  
Alligator Program  
PO Box 167  
Columbia, SC 29202**

## October-November

- If a CITES tag is needed, schedule an appointment with a SCDNR Regional office during normal business hours (M-F, 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.), no later than October 20. Office locations and numbers are listed in the front of this booklet and a map is located on the back cover. Arrangements for CITES tag validation at other SCDNR Wildlife Section field offices may be possible with prior notification.

## November 1

- All hunters, whether successful or not, must submit a completed harvest report *postmarked by November 1* in order to participate - in any way - in the following season's alligator hunt.

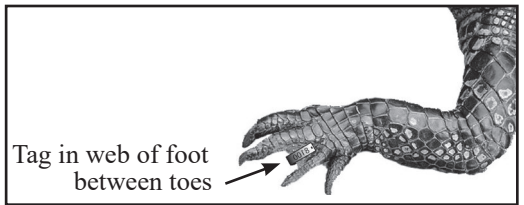
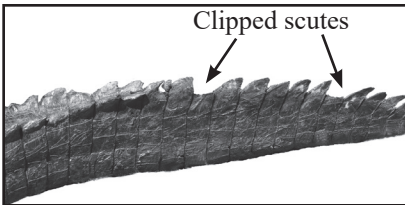
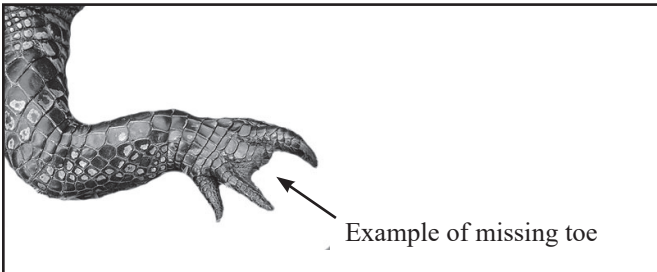
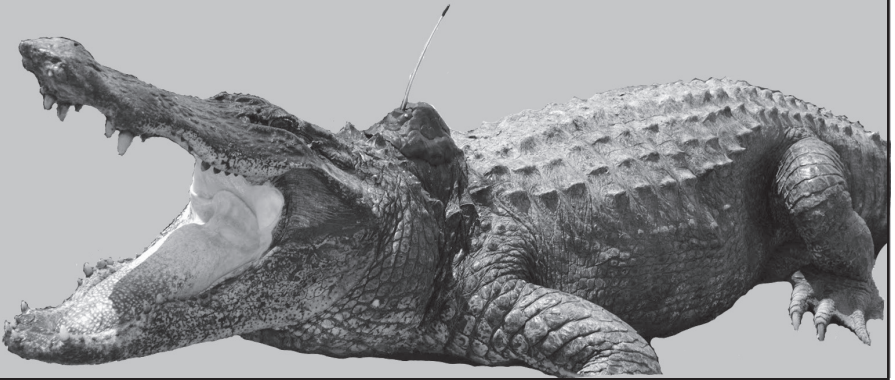
**ALLIGATOR HUNTERS ARE URGED TO  
REPORT ALL TAGGED OR GPS-EQUIPPED  
ALLIGATORS**

### **GPS-equipped, tagged or marked alligators - what to look for:**

- SCDNR and Clemson University may have a limited number of adult alligators with a GPS telemetry package attached directly to the back/neck area of the alligator. Contact SCDNR immediately at 1-800-922-5431 to inquire about the status of the transmitter from any harvested alligator. In some cases, transmitters can be refurbished and used again, or even redeployed if significant life remains in the on-board battery.
- Missing toes (no longer used, but marked animals still exist).
- Plastic or metal tags attached to scutes along the tail.
- Obvious missing tail scutes, starting with the two tall rows of scutes along the tail to the end of the tail.
- Metal tags between toes with numbers (many marked with the letters MUSC by the Medical University of South Carolina).
- Take pictures of any potentially marked alligators.
- Record and report tag numbers along with exact location of harvest.
- Note locations of missing scutes and/or toes and which side of the animal these marks are located.

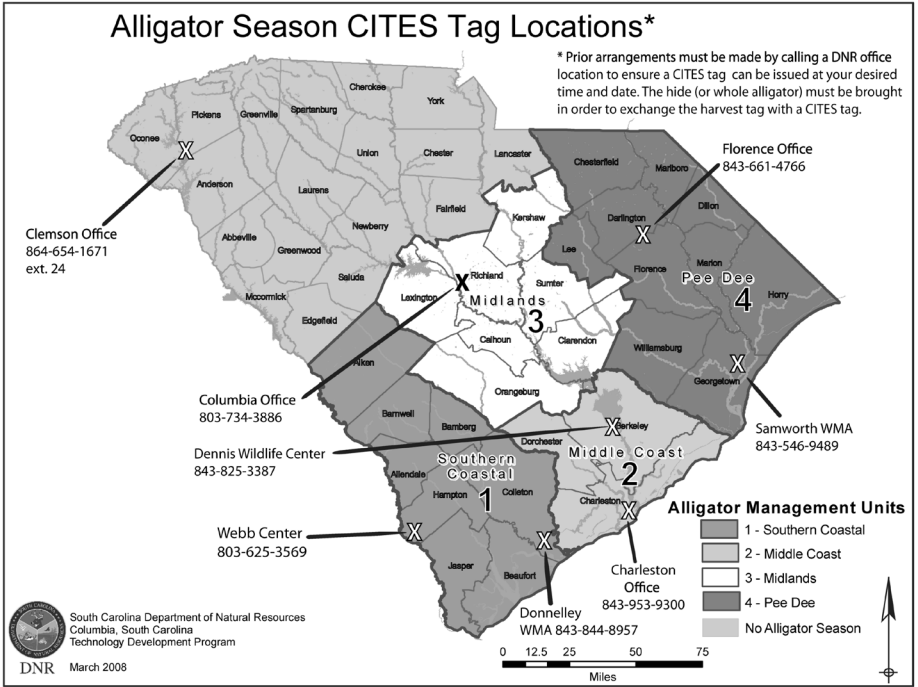
# EXAMPLES OF MARKED ALLIGATORS THAT MAY BE ENCOUNTERED BY ALLIGATOR HUNTERS

GPS Transmitter (with antenna) attached behind neck on dorsal surface and embedded in a mound of epoxy for protection



For more information regarding alligators or alligator research, please contact the SCDNR Alligator Project in McClellanville at (843) 546-6062

*SCDNR protects and manages South Carolina's natural resources by making wise and balanced decisions for the benefit of the state's natural resources and its people. Find out more about SCDNR at [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov).*



Phillip Jones, SCDNR

*The cost of this publication is paid for by the hunters who apply for and participate in the Public Alligator Hunting Program.*

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