

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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ALLIGATOR TO BE TAKEN OFF ENDANGERED LIST IN SOME AREAS

The alligator is back. Once annihilated by hide hunters in most of its range, this country's largest reptile has made a comeback and is no longer thought to be threatened with extinction throughout its range.

America's alligator population is doing so well, in fact, that Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing three separate actions in the July 8 edition of the Federal Register that will affect different populations of this reptile throughout the Southeastern States. The actions, announced today by Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of the Service, include:

- (1) Remove the alligator from all Federal lists in three counties of Louisiana where its populations have attained a healthy balance.
- (2) Downgrade the alligator from the endangered list to the threatened list in seven States where populations are no longer in critical condition. The States are: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana (except Cameron, Vermilion, and Calcasieu Parishes), Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas.
- (3) Retain the alligator as an endangered species in three States where its populations are still in serious trouble. These States are: Oklahoma, Arkansas, and North Carolina.

When the alligator was first listed as an endangered species in 1966, many alligator populations had been either wiped out or seriously depleted in much of the 10 State range in the Southeast. Strict enforcement of Federal and State laws protecting the reptile are credited with being

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responsible for its recovery. In some areas of Louisiana and Florida alligators are so numerous that they have become public nuisances, crawling on golf courses, resting on roads, and, in one instance, killing a teenage bather.

The Fish and Wildlife Service began a review of the American alligator last July and found that population levels in parts of South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, and Texas are high and in many areas are considered to be ecologically secure. The study also found that the populations in Cameron, Vermilion, and Calcasieu Parishes in Louisiana were neither endangered nor threatened and would be best served by returning them to the State for management and protection. The populations in the other three States where the reptile is found are still considered endangered.

In those parishes where the alligator would no longer be under Federal control, alligators could be hunted in accordance with State law. The marketing of these hides would be strictly controlled under a Federal licensing and marking system which would ensure that alligators taken from other areas could not be placed in commerce.

The proposed regulations would also simplify many of the problems now encountered in moving nuisance or captive endangered species. Federal and State officers and certain other individuals could kill or remove dangerous alligators in areas where the species is listed as threatened. Certain populations of alligators, such as those bred in zoos or circuses would be reclassified into the threatened category, even in States where the alligator was still endangered in the wild, and could result in more flexible management of zoo and circus bred specimens.

Interested persons who have comments or suggestions on this proposal should submit them in writing to the Director (FWS/LE), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 19183, Washington, D.C. 20036, by September 5, 1975.

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NOTE: Prints of the attached photo of the American alligator are available to editors. (call (202) 343-8770)

