



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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ALLIGATORS RECLASSIFIED IN LOUISIANA TO REFLECT THEIR IMPROVED STATUS

The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that the alligator is no longer a threatened species in Louisiana. The announcement capped a 17-year effort by State and Federal wildlife officials to bring the alligator back from the brink of extinction.

In a Federal Register notice published August 10, 1981, the Fish and Wildlife Service changed the alligator's legal status in Louisiana from "threatened" to a less restrictive category under the Endangered Species Act. The reclassification gives Louisiana the option to permit a regulated alligator harvest throughout the State. The reclassification of Louisiana alligators does not affect alligators in other southeastern States, where they remain classified as "endangered" or "threatened."

"We have carefully reviewed the biological data and have concluded that it does not justify keeping the alligator listed as a threatened species in Louisiana," said G. Ray Arnett, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. "Alligator numbers in Louisiana are stable and have grown as large as the available habitat will permit. Habitat is abundant, and habitat destruction is not a serious threat because the prime alligator habitat is unsuitable for agriculture or other development. The species is also protected by strict Federal and State regulations that control commercial trade in alligator hides and other products."

Louisiana alligators will now be listed under a category of the Endangered Species Act called "threatened by similarity of appearance." This category is used for species that are not biologically in danger of extinction, but that so closely resemble other species that are listed as endangered that it is difficult for law enforcement officials to distinguish between the listed and unlisted animals. The "similarity of appearance" category is needed for Louisiana alligators to protect alligators in other States, where they are still listed as endangered or threatened.

The alligator's status has improved because of the success of strong State and Federal efforts to protect and manage the species. Louisiana ended alligator hunting in 1964 when the species was declining rapidly, mostly as a result of excessive hunting. The alligator was placed on the first Federal endangered species list in 1967, and Federal restrictions were subsequently placed on interstate and foreign trade in alligators. A vigorous law enforcement effort aimed at stemming the flow of illegal alligator hides and products was also undertaken by State and Federal wildlife agents. These actions, coupled with the alligator's high reproductive rate, attentive care of its young, and ability to adapt to a variety of aquatic habitats have resulted in the increase of alligator numbers in Louisiana.

The reclassification is one of several actions by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ease restrictions on alligators in areas where their numbers have increased substantially. In 1975, alligators in three Louisiana parishes were reclassified to "threatened by similarity of appearance" and a regulated harvest was allowed in those three parishes. In 1977, alligators were reclassified from "endangered" to the less serious "threatened" status in all of Florida and certain coastal areas of South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. In 1979, alligators were reclassified to "similarity of appearance" in nine more Louisiana parishes. Also in 1979, international trade in legally taken American alligator hides and hide products was permitted for the first time in a decade, and in 1980 the Service agreed to allow the nationwide sale of meat from legally taken alligators, if the sale was in accordance with State regulations.

Tight controls have been retained on all of these activities, however. Louisiana operates a licensing and tagging procedure for the alligator harvest already permitted in parts of the State, and the Fish and Wildlife Service closely regulates trade in American alligators, particularly in untanned alligator hides.

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