# Human-Alligator Incidents

## Fact Sheet

**(Updated October 2018)**

## General Information

Alligators are considered fully recovered in all of their native-range states but are still included on the federal endangered species list within the category of "Threatened Due to Similarity of Appearance." Alligators are listed this way because they closely resemble the American crocodile, which is threatened.

Alligators occur in all 67 counties in Florida and can be found in practically all fresh and brackish water bodies and occasionally in salt water. Although exact population figures are not known, Florida has a healthy and stable population of about 1.3 million alligators of every size. This population estimate is based on an estimated 6.7 million acres of suitable habitat.

Alligators are opportunistic feeders and will eat animals that are readily available to them. They prefer to go after prey they can overpower easily. Opportunity is the primary factor that causes an alligator to pursue prey.

Most alligators are naturally afraid of humans but may lose that fear when people feed them. Feeding alligators teaches them to associate people with food. For that reason, it is illegal to feed wild alligators.

Alligators seldom bite people for reasons other than food. Female alligators may protect their nests by hissing and opening their mouths to frighten intruders but rarely bite people.

Alligator bites are most likely to occur in or around water. Bites on humans have occurred in a variety of water bodies, many of which are small and not regularly used by alligators.

Although alligators can move quickly on land, they are not well adapted for capturing prey out of the water. However, they can lunge at prey within a few feet of the shoreline.

Alligator bites can result in serious infection. Victims should seek immediate medical attention if bitten.

The FWC allows an annual alligator harvest, and this carefully regulated opportunity has been nationally and internationally recognized as a model program for the sustainable use of a renewable natural resource. Florida's statewide alligator harvest program provides commercial and recreational hunting opportunities and helps achieve population management objectives. Alligator hides, meat and their parts can be sold from legally harvested and tagged alligators.

## Safety Tips

- If you encounter an alligator that is believed to pose a threat to people, pets or property, call the **FWC's Nuisance Alligator Hotline, toll-free at 1-866-FWC-GATOR (392-4286)**. The FWC's Statewide Nuisance Alligator Program (SNAP) uses contracted nuisance alligator trappers throughout the state to remove alligators 4 feet in length or greater that are believed to pose a threat.

- Be aware of the possible presence of alligators when in or near fresh or brackish water. Negative alligator encounters may occur when people do not pay close attention to their surroundings when working or recreating near water.

- Closely supervise children when they are playing in or around water.

- Never swim outside of posted swimming areas.

- Swim only during daylight hours. Alligators are most active between dusk and dawn.

- Do not allow pets to swim, exercise or drink in or near waters that may contain alligators or in designated swimming areas with humans. Dogs are more susceptible to being bitten than humans because dogs resemble the natural prey of alligators. The sound of dogs barking and playing may draw an alligator to the area.

- Never feed or entice alligators – it is dangerous and illegal. When fed, alligators overcome their natural wariness and associate people with food.

- Inform others that feeding alligators is illegal and creates problems for others who want to recreate in or near the water.

- 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.

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

- Leave alligators alone. State law prohibits killing, harassing or possessing alligators except under permit.

- 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.

- If an alligator bites you, the best thing to do is fight back, providing as much noise and resistance as possible. Hitting or kicking the alligator or poking it in its eyes may cause it to release its grip. When alligators seize prey they cannot easily overpower, they will often let go and retreat.

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

## Risk of Being Bitten by an Alligator

Florida has experienced tremendous human population growth in recent years. Today, many residents seek waterfront homes, and water-related recreational activities are popular. As more people are drawn to the water, more alligator-human interactions can occur, creating a greater potential for conflict. But, alligators seldom bite people and fatalities from such occurrences are rare.

Over the last 10 years, Florida has averaged 7 unprovoked bites per year that are serious enough to require professional medical treatment. The frequency of these serious bites is variable but there has not been a significant trend in the past 10 years. The likelihood of a Florida resident being seriously injured during an unprovoked alligator incident in Florida is roughly only one in 3.1 million.

From 1948 to 2018, 410 unprovoked bite incidents have occurred in Florida. Twenty-five of these bites resulted in human fatalities.

**For more information on alligators, visit www.MyFWC.com/gators**