

ALLIGATOR FARMING IN TEXAS



Requirements and Guidelines for Alligator Farmers
and Persons Interested in Handling Live Alligators



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Alligator Program

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

10 Parks and Wildlife Drive

Port Arthur, Texas 77640

(409) 736-3625

amos.cooper@tpwd.state.tx.us

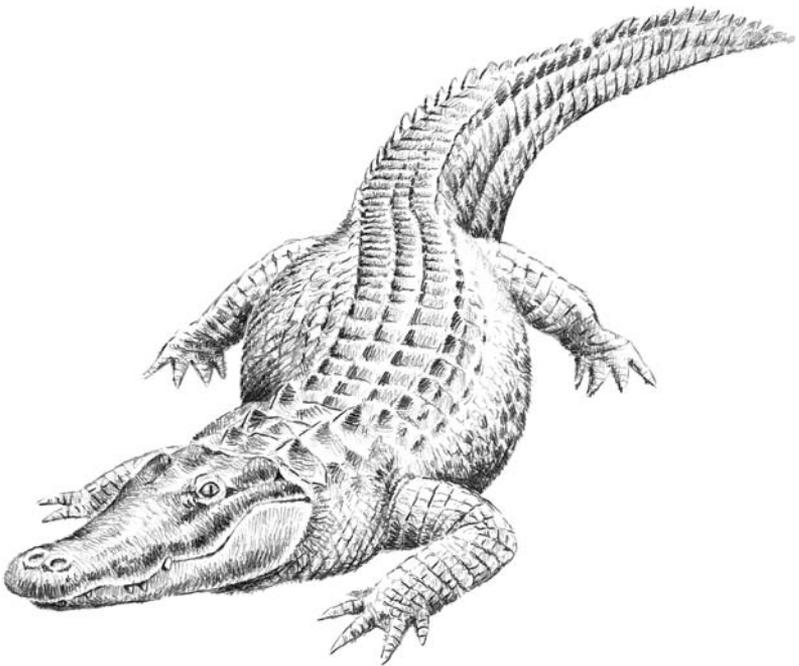
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IS ALLIGATOR FARMING FOR ME?

GENERAL

This pamphlet is designed to inform interested persons and potential alligator farmers about requirements for obtaining and possessing live alligators under the statewide alligator regulations. The requirements that affect alligator propagation activities include possession and sale limitations, farm facility requirements, tagging requirements, import and export requirements, and reporting requirements. Important considerations in the decision to becoming an alligator farmer are discussed, and sources of additional information are identified.

An alligator farmer is any person who holds one or more live alligators in captivity for commercial purposes including selling of alligators, eggs, hides, meat or other parts of an alligator. **No person may possess LIVE alligators without first possessing an Alligator Farmer Permit (License Type I49), issued by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). This permit is valid from September 1 of one year through August 31 of the following year.** The annual permit is \$252.

BACKGROUND CONSIDERATIONS

The foremost consideration is, **WHAT IS YOUR OBJECTIVE?** Are you profit motivated? Are you simply interested in alligators? It is crucial that you seriously consider these factors because attempts to get involved in alligator farming without clear plans can be costly, time-consuming and potentially dangerous to you. Only you can determine the potential risks and costs associated with becoming an alligator farmer based on your objectives and facilities available from the start.

ALLIGATORS ARE NOT PETS! Although many people may remember former times when small alligators were sold as pets, those activities were often detrimental to alligator populations. Also, such handling was a disservice to both the alligator and the people involved when the animal outgrew its confinement or

overstayed its welcome. Provisions for alligator farming in the statewide alligator management plan are not intended for “pet trade” or establishing “pet alligators.” Rather, alligator farming is viewed as a process that, when conducted under strict controls, can produce animal products (hides, meat, parts or crafts, etc.) for commercial use without impacting wild populations.

IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ALLIGATOR BIOLOGY

The American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) inhabits the coastal marshes, freshwater rivers, swamps, marshes, lakes and ponds of about 125 counties in East Texas and along the Texas Gulf Coast.

The alligator is a reptile, a cold-blooded animal whose body temperature fluctuates with the environment. Much of the alligator’s annual cycle is based on changes in seasonal temperature. Alligators will continue to grow throughout the year if the temperature remains above 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Below this temperature the animals become inactive. On sunny days, they will attempt to raise their body temperature by “sunning” themselves. In the wild, alligators will grow to 4 feet in length in about five to eight years. In a controlled environment, with the temperature kept above 80 degrees Fahrenheit and food provided, they can be expected to grow to 4 feet in 18 months. Growth rates vary depending on the facilities, diet and capabilities of the individual farmer.

Alligators breed during the months of May and June. After breeding, the female builds a mound of mud and vegetation about 3 feet high by 5 to 6 feet wide. She lays 30 to 70 eggs, depending on the alligator’s age and body conditions. The sun and decaying vegetation provide heat to incubate the eggs. In about nine weeks (typically late August), the eggs hatch and the young attempt to make their way to suitable cover and feeding areas. The female often opens the nest when the cries of the new hatchlings are heard. The small alligators eat crabs, spiders, insects, crawfish and shrimp. Larger alligators will eat anything they can catch, including each other, but turtles, snakes, fish, crustaceans, aquatic mammals and birds comprise their primary diet.

PERMITS AND REQUIREMENTS

ALLIGATOR FARMER PERMIT

The Alligator Farmer Permit (License Type I49) \$252

Entitles a person—under the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Code, Chapter 65, Subchapter P—to purchase and hold live alligators, purchase alligator eggs from an authorized egg collector, sell live alligators to another farmer or to the holder of a permit, and sell dead alligators or parts thereof to anyone. New permits and renewals are available from TPWD headquarters in Austin or from the J. D. Murphree WMA in Port Arthur.

An application may be sent to TPWD in writing to either the Austin or Port Arthur location. The applicant must provide the following information, which is required for any permit issued:

- Name
- Address
- Driver's license number
- Phone number
- Height
- Weight
- Hair color
- Eye color
- Sex
- Date of birth

If the applicant's address is a P.O. Box, the physical location of the facility is required. Also specify the type of permit(s) requested and the permit year desired (a farmer permit year extends from September 1 of one year through August 31 of the following year). Permits for any year will not be issued more than one month prior to that permit year.

Permit fees are payable to TPWD by check or money order and must be included with the request. Requests for an Alligator Farmer Permit should be addressed to:

License Branch
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
4200 Smith School Road
Austin, Texas 78744
(512) 389-4704

or

Alligator Program
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
10 Parks and Wildlife Drive
Port Arthur, Texas 77640
(409) 736-3625

An alligator farm facility inspection is required before an Alligator Farmer Permit is issued to ensure that the holding facility meets required standards. Please allow three to four weeks for processing time and return mail.

NOTE: Be advised that prospective farmers should not apply for permits until they have made all of the other very important decisions and preparations related to becoming an active alligator farmer.



Sample of form used by TPWD staff to evaluate farm facilities:

ALLIGATOR FARM FACILITY EXAMINATION	
Name (Owner) _____	Examination Date _____ Time _____
Business Name _____	Facility Location _____
Address _____	_____
_____	_____
<p>The Parks and Wildlife Commission adopted minimum facility specifications for alligator farms on June 15, 1989. To ensure compliance with those requirements a facility inspection is required prior to issuance of an Alligator Farmer Permit. This inspection report reflects minimum requirements of current regulations.</p> <p>Approximate number of alligator(s) to be held _____</p>	
1. Is the holding facility secured with adequate barriers to prevent escape of enclosed alligators and entry by alligators from outside the facility?	YES NO
2. Is a reliable source of clean, fresh water available?	YES NO
3. Is there provision for both dry ground and pooled water within the secured area?	YES NO
4. Is there provision for winter protection, either through adequate denning space or an enclosed, controlled-temperature environment?	YES NO
5. Will alligator eggs be possessed outside alligator nests? If so, is there provision to house such eggs in identifiable original clutch groups in an incubator providing constant temperature and humidity conditions?	YES NO
6. Hatching rearing tank(s) contain ample dry and wet areas sufficient for alligators to completely submerge in water and completely exit from water enabling them to orient in any direction, without touching side of tank(s)?	YES NO
7. Is there provision for housing alligators into at least three groups, providing separations for all alligators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less than two feet in length; • two to four feet in length; • over four feet in length? 	YES NO
8. Do both wet and dry areas allow ample space for complete submersion and complete exit from water for each group of alligators?	YES NO
9. Is there provision for keeping complete written records of all alligator transactions including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nesting activity of captive alligators with daily account of nests constructed and eggs collected; • shipping tickets, invoices, bills of lading; • all changes in alligator stock? 	YES NO
DEFICIENCIES AND COMMENTS _____	
<p>Certifying Officer: please check applicable boxes</p> <p>Facility passes inspection <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Facility passes inspection pending corrections of deficiencies as noted <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Facility does not pass inspection <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Name _____ <small>please print</small></p> <p>Title _____</p> <p>Signature _____</p>	<p>Permit Applicant:</p> <p>I agree to correct the deficiencies noted above, if any, within _____ days and maintain facility at or above Department requirements.</p> <p>Signature _____</p> <p>I understand that all facilities, alligator stock, and records are subject to examination by Department personnel prior to permitting and thereafter during alligator farming operation.</p> <p>Signature _____</p>
<p>PWD 230-W7100 (2/87)</p> <p>Send original copy to: (1) Alligator Program - TPWD, 10 Parks and Wildlife Drive, Port Arthur, TX 77640, and (2) Roy Lawrence at Austin Headquarters.</p>	

ALLIGATOR FARM FACILITY REQUIREMENTS

1. Applicant for an Alligator Farmer Permit must show evidence of the following minimum facilities during a required facility examination by Department personnel **prior to permit issuance**:
 - (A) Secure premises with adequate barriers to prevent escape of enclosed alligators, entry by alligators from outside the farm, and to deter theft of alligators.
 - (B) A reliable source of clean fresh water (each facility).
 - (C) Provision for protection from the cold—either available denning space or an enclosed, temperature-controlled environment.
 - (D) Pooled water sufficient to allow complete submersion of alligators and dry ground sufficient to permit alligators to completely exit from the water.
2. Alligator farmers possessing alligator eggs outside an alligator nest shall house such eggs in identifiable original clutch groups in an incubator maintaining air and water temperature of 85 to 91 degrees Fahrenheit.
 - (A) Alligator farmers are required to report the number of alligator eggs in their possession at the end of each quarter.
 - (B) Alligator farmers must utilize temperature monitors and maintain a backup power system.
 - (C) Alligator farmers must use alarm systems to alert them when temperatures are outside prescribed range.
 - (D) All alligators 4 feet and under must be kept inside a controlled environment maintaining a minimum constant temperature of 80 degrees Fahrenheit.
3. All alligator farmers possessing alligators under 48 inches shall house such alligators in rearing tanks containing dry and wet areas of sufficient size to allow all alligators to completely submerge in water and completely exit from the water and orient in any direction, without touching the sides of the tank(s). The minimum recommended space requirements for alligators housed in sheds is that for each alligator 12 inches

in length, a space of 12 inches in length by 12 inches in width is required. For example, a 4-foot alligator would require a space of 4 feet in length and 4 feet in width per animal.

4. Farmers must house alligators of different lengths in at least three groups, providing separation for all alligators less than 2 feet in length, 2 to 4 feet in length, and over 4 feet in length. Land and water areas sufficient for complete submer-sion or complete exit from the water shall be provided for each group of alligators held.
5. No alligator eggs collected or obtained under authority of this subchapter may be shipped out of state.
6. No live alligators shall be exported from Texas without specific Departmental authorization.
7. The Department reserves the right to deny permits to:
 - (A) Any incubation facility with less than a 70 percent hatchling survival (hatch to harvest) over any period of two consecutive years.
 - (B) Any farm facility with less than a 70 percent hatchling survival (hatch to harvest) over any period of two consecutive years.
8. **SALE OF MEAT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION:** All alligator meat processed in this state must be packaged in containers which identify the content as alligator meat and are marked with a properly completed Alligator Parts Label (Form PWD 373). Copies of this form may be used. The sale of meat must meet USDA requirements as well as any and all other state health agency requirements.
9. Complete written records of all changes in alligator stock shall be kept and made available for examination by Depart-ment personnel. Shipping tickets, invoices or bills of lading shall be maintained to show source of supply or disposition of alligator stock. Nesting activities of captive alligators shall be recorded, with a daily account of nests constructed and eggs collected.

10. All facilities, alligator stock and records are subject to examination by Department personnel prior to permitting and thereafter during farm operation.
11. No farmer may transport live alligators for exhibition purposes unless authorized by a permit issued under Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Code, Chapter 43, Subchapter C. Interested parties should contact TPWD Austin Headquarters Wildlife Diversity at (512) 389-4491 regarding this permit.

Past and currently active alligator farmers can be an excellent source of information about alligator propagation and care. Appropriate contacts can be obtained from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in Port Arthur or by email at amos.cooper@tpwd.state.tx.us.



POSSESSION AND SALE LIMITATIONS

A person holding an Alligator Farmer Permit may possess one or more live alligators. A permitted alligator farmer may legally possess a tagged and documented raw or salted hide of an alligator. All alligators, parts of alligators, or goods manufactured from alligators possessed, sold, purchased, exported or imported shall be accompanied by documented evidence that they were legally taken. Documented evidence shall consist of a valid hunting license or permit number that allows possession and take of alligators and identifies the state or country of origin. A tag or label affixed to any package or container of alligators or alligator parts must specify the contents, quantity contained, and applicable license or permit numbers. A properly completed Alligator Parts Label meets these requirements. Individual skulls with a premaxilla/parietal length of 9 inches or greater shall be legibly marked with indelible ink on the lower jaw with the hide tag number of the alligator from which it originated.

An alligator farmer may sell processed or green alligator parts to another alligator farmer or a wholesale dealer. An alligator farmer may sell processed or manufactured alligator parts to a permitted wholesaler or retailer. A retail dealer permit is required for each place of business, mobile or permanent.

SALE OF MEAT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION: All alligator meat processed in this state must be packaged in containers which identify the content as alligator meat and are marked with a properly completed Alligator Parts Label. The Texas Department of Health regulates alligator meat sold for human consumption to ensure that processing conditions minimize potential for disease transmission. Facilities for processing alligator meat must meet state regulations similar to those applicable to any meat processor. Specific information on these requirements may be obtained from Texas Department of Health, Food Control Division, 1000 W. 49th, Austin, Texas 78756.

SOURCES OF LIVE ALLIGATORS

Texans interested in starting alligator farm operations have four basic sources for obtaining live alligators.

1. Purchase from alligator farmers in other states, usually Florida or Louisiana.
2. Purchase from other permitted alligator farmers in Texas.
3. Purchase live nuisance alligators which are occasionally available through the TPWD nuisance alligator control program.
 - Prospective farmers should be aware that wild alligators obtained as nuisances typically are more aggressive and require much more space than alligators reared in captivity.
4. Purchase alligator eggs from a landowner, landowner's agent or the farmer who receives the eggs. The rules for egg collection are outlined on the following page. **Only someone who holds a valid Alligator Import Permit may bring alligators obtained outside of Texas into the state.**

EGG COLLECTION

Provisions have been developed to allow limited collection of eggs from the wild. An alligator egg collector is defined as a licensed alligator hunter who collects alligator eggs from the wild nest and delivers them as prescribed by Department authorization. Collection rules are as follows:

1. Landowners and agents may receive nest stamps upon application to the Department on forms provided for nest stamp issuance. **Nest Stamp (Form PWD 378)** cost \$63 (one for each nest collected in the wild).
 - (A) The Department shall determine maximum nest stamp issuance to individual landowners or their agents. Landowners or their agents shall certify total acreage owned or represented on a form prescribed by the Department at the time of application.
 - (B) Agents must present a notarized document from the landowner verifying their selection to represent that landowner and the total acreage represented to obtain nest stamps. Alligator farmers may be an agent for landowners.
 - (C) Landowners or agents may transfer nest stamps only to permitted egg collectors.
2. It is unlawful for a landowner or agent to issue a nest stamp for a tract of land or water other than the tract for which the stamp was originally issued, and an egg collector shall collect only on tracts designated for the stamps he or she possesses.
3. When collecting, at least one person in a collecting party must possess a current Nest Stamp (Form PWD 378) and an Alligator Nest Stamp Authorization (Form PWD 453). Landowners are not required to be permitted as egg collectors to accompany authorized egg collectors on their property.
4. Alligator eggs shall be collected from the wild by hand and must be appropriately marked as prescribed by these rules to identify them as being legally collected.

- Each clutch of eggs must be accompanied immediately upon collection and throughout transportation and incubation by a nest stamp which indicates the location of collection, the date and time of collection, and the number of eggs collected. It is recommended that the nest stamp be placed in a sealable plastic bag in the incubator to keep it handy and intact during incubation.
5. Alligator eggs may be collected from the wild only during time periods specified by the Department as indicated on the egg collection authorization form.
 6. Egg collectors shall notify the game warden or district supervisor in the area of egg collection no less than 24 hours of the date, time and location of the collection.
 7. An alligator egg collector may sell alligator eggs only to a farmer(s) designated by permit.
 8. No alligator eggs collected or obtained under authority of this subchapter may be shipped out of state.



IMPORT AND EXPORT REQUIREMENTS

Alligator Import Permit (License Type 148) \$105

Entitles a person to import alligators into Texas (including alligator, alligator eggs or alligator parts). Available from any license sales location.

Alligator Export Fee (License Type 165) \$5 per animal

Upon Department authorization, allows a farmer to export live alligators. Available from the J. D. Murphree WMA, TPWD Port Arthur location.

1. Permitted alligator farmers who hold a valid Alligator Import Permit may sell **live alligators only** to permitted alligator farmers. An import permit holder may sell hides or alligator parts to anyone who may legally purchase them.
2. No **LIVE** alligators can be exported from Texas without specific Departmental authorization, thereby requiring an Alligator Export Permit, except for alligators accompanied by a valid Department- issued CITES Hide Tag.
3. Permitted alligator farmers may export legally tagged and documented parts of alligators taken in Texas.
4. All imported or exported alligators and alligator parts must be accompanied by proper documentation including a copy of the import permit. Items constituting sufficient documentation are described in the section on POSSESSION AND SALE LIMITATIONS in this pamphlet.
5. NO alligator eggs will be transported out of state.

It is wise to contact wildlife officials in the state where you may plan to obtain and or ship live alligators to be aware of their requirements. These contacts should occur as early as possible to ensure that sufficient time is allowed to meet regulations.

NOTE: The Texas Animal Health Commission requires that live animals brought into Texas must be accompanied by a veterinarian's certification that each animal has been examined and is judged to be free of disease.

HIDE TAGGING REQUIREMENTS

Hides of all alligators harvested in Texas shall be tagged with **CITES Hide Tags** issued by the Department. Licensed farmers may purchase tags for the harvest at a fee of **\$5 each**. Alligator farmers may obtain tags by applying to the Department (use Form PWD 372) 15 days prior to harvest (except for unexpected mortalities). Tags will be issued based on the number of alligators in stock as verified by Department personnel. Tags also may be obtained upon approval from the Department for individual alligator stock that have died unexpectedly, provided Department personnel are notified before the alligator is skinned.

- Immediately after alligators are killed, a CITES Hide Tag must be attached and permanently locked onto the last ten inches of the tip of the alligator's tail.
- Verification of the tagging procedure by Department personnel will take place when the alligators are processed. This is recorded on the Alligator Farmer Quarterly Report (Form PWD 371) for later submission to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.



REPORT REQUIREMENTS

Report forms provided by TPWD must be completed by permitted alligator farmers, permitted alligator importers, and egg collectors, and filed with the Department by the due date discussed below.

- I. Permitted alligator farmers must submit quarterly reports within 15 days of the end of each quarterly period (November, February, May and August). Each report shall include the following:
 - (A) The number of live alligators in possession on that date
 - (B) The number of alligators harvested
 - (C) The type and number of alligator parts sold during the previous three months
 - (D) The license number of persons purchasing alligators or alligator parts
 - (E) The number of live alligators purchased
 - (F) The number of alligators hatched during the previous three months
 - (G) A record of the complete seven-digit number of each CITES Hide Tag applied

This information should be entered on PWD Forms 371, 303 and 306, and submitted within 15 days following the end of each quarterly period. Any unused CITES Hide Tags must be returned with the report.

2. An alligator import permit holder shall submit an annual report specifying the number of alligators imported, place of origin and destination. This information should be entered on Form PWD 307 and submitted within 30 days following permit period termination.
3. An alligator nest stamp recipient shall submit a completed Form PWD 455 and return all unused nest stamps by August 31 of each year.
 - A farmer receiving eggs from the wild for incubation shall submit a completed Form PWD 371A by September 30.

Any person who is delinquent in returning unused hide tags or nest stamps, or filing a required report commits an offense. All due dates are stated on each form.

TPWD forms associated with Alligator Farming may be requested from amos.cooper@tpwd.state.tx.us.

PWD 230-W7000 Alligator Farm Inspection

PWD 303-W7000 Alligator Farmer's Harvest Report

PWD 306-W7000 Alligator Transaction Report

PWD 307-W7000 Import Permit Report

PWD 371-W7000 Alligator Farmer Quarterly Report

PWD 371A-W7000 Alligator Farmer Egg Collection Report

PWD 372-W7000 Alligator Farmer Hide Tag Request Form

PWD 373-W7000 Alligator Parts Label

PWD 378-W7000 Nest Stamp

PWD 378A-W7000 Captive Breed Alligator Nest Stamp

PWD 453-W7000 Alligator Nest Stamp Issuance Form

PWD 455-W7000 Alligator Nest Stamp Report

PWD BK W7000-1011 Alligators in Texas - Rules, regulations
and general information



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