

SEABROOK ISLAND ALLIGATOR PROGRAM

Seabrook Island is home to a healthy population of alligators, a native South Carolina species. The primary purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for Seabrook Island Property Owner Association (SIPOA) staff to follow in response to alligator calls and complaints. It includes information on the general habits and biology of the American alligator which will be useful in explaining alligator behavior to residents and visitors. It also provides a step-by-step process for determining whether or not an alligator is a “nuisance alligator” and if it warrants removal under the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) Nuisance Alligator Program.

GENERAL INFORMATION ON ALLIGATORS

LEGAL STATUS

The American alligator is classified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as threatened due to similarity of appearance to other threatened or endangered crocodylians. This listing provides federal protection for alligators but allows states to legally harvest alligators by issuing permits, such as those provided through the SCDNR Nuisance Alligator Program.

FOOD HABITS

Alligators are opportunistic feeders and feed on a large variety of prey items, influenced primarily by the size of the alligator. Small alligators (<6 feet) will consume insects, frogs, snakes, and small fish. Larger alligators will eat wading birds, small mammals, fish, turtles, and even other alligators. Since alligators are cold-blooded, they only require about 1/10th the amount of food that a comparably sized warm-blooded animal would. If prey is in short supply, one meal can last an adult alligator almost an entire year. Alligators typically eat about 1 pound of food per week during their active time of year (spring-fall). Alligators typically stop feeding when average temperatures drop below 70 degrees.

LIFE CYCLE

Alligators become dormant during periods of cold weather (December-March) but can still be seen on warm sunny days during winter. Alligators breed in the spring, typically during April and May and females lay 30-50 eggs in a large mound of mud, sticks, and plant material. The female alligator will stay close to the nest until the eggs hatch, typically in July and August. The female will often take each of the baby alligators to the nearest pond one by one and stay close by to protect them. Alligator hatchlings grow slowly, about 6-8 inches a year until they reach sexual maturity in about 10-12 years. Survival of hatchlings is relatively low, and each nest of 35 eggs typically produces about 4 adult alligators.

Since alligators are cold-blooded, they cannot regulate their internal body temperature as humans and other warm-blooded animals do. For this reason, alligators are most active from March-November. Alligators spend a large amount of time basking in the sun on pond edges in an attempt to warm their body temperature, especially on cooler days.

WHAT IS A NUISANCE ALLIGATOR?

Generally, alligators are considered a nuisance when they are at least 4 feet in length and pose a threat to people or their pets or property. Alligators less than 4 feet in length are not generally capable of eating anything larger than a small turtle. They eat small fish, frogs, and other small animals. They are too small to be a threat to even small pets and pose no threat to people.

HOW CAN YOU DETERMINE THE SIZE OF AN ALLIGATOR?

The length of an alligator can be determined by estimating the length in inches between the alligator's snout and eyes. One inch equals one foot in overall length.



SEABROOK ISLAND ALLIGATOR PROGRAM GUIDELINES

1. SIPOA Security receives initial complaint and fills out log entry or other internal record of call.
2. If alligator is on a driveway, bike path, or roadway an officer should be dispatched to monitor situation as needed. Alligators can be safely encouraged back to water in many cases with a little prodding from a long catch pole. At other times, officers will need to direct traffic around the animal until it moves on. These animals are rarely nuisance animals and just need some help getting back to the water.
3. If the complaint concerns an aggressive or nuisance alligator, the details from the initial call should be referred to the appropriate staff member for follow up. **Exception: If the call is an emergency situation in which individuals or pets are in immediate danger it should be dealt with immediately by calling an alligator trapper or SCDNR.**
4. The designated staff member should contact complainant and fill out a Nuisance Alligator Complaint Form (attached).
5. Based on information received the complaint is classified into 1 of 2 categories: No action needed or monitoring required.

No action needed – These are typically situations when an alligator is sunning on a bank or otherwise behaving normally. In many cases, these types of calls can be resolved by simply educating the complainant concerning alligator behavior. If gators are sunning in a yard or other common area, a useful strategy is to encourage planting of a dense vegetated buffer to prevent alligators from using the area.

Monitoring required – These are situations in which the alligator is reported to be approaching individuals or pets or otherwise behaving in an abnormal manner. Staff should visit location and assess behavior of alligator.

6. “Monitoring required” complaints should be responded to within a business day to gather more information from the scene. These complaints should be monitored periodically until they are reclassified as no action needed or remove gator. The following criteria should be used to determine if an alligator warrants removal.

Nuisance Alligator Criteria (if an alligator meets any criteria below, removal is warranted)

Alligator greater than 4 feet in length approaches within 10 feet as you stand on the bank and does not move off in response to waving arms or other movement.

Alligator responds quickly to splashing of popping cork, will follow cork to pond edge, and does not move off when arms are waved.

Alligator has been documented taking fish off of fisherman’s line or staying in close proximity to fisherman while fishing.

Additional situations in which an alligator > 4 feet is consistently in close proximity to small children, pets, or recreational areas.

7. If staff determines that an alligator warrants removal, it should immediately be referred to an alligator trapper for removal and an SCDNR Nuisance tag should be used.

SIPOA Nuisance Alligator Complaint Form

Details from initial contact with complainant

Date _____	Time _____	Personnel _____
Complainant's Name _____		
Address _____		
Telephone No.	Home _____	Mobile _____
Location _____		
No. of alligators _____	Approximate size of alligators _____	
Description of situation _____		

Classification of complaint (circle one):		
No action needed	Monitoring required	
Reason(s) for classification _____		

Details from monitoring site visit

Date _____	Time _____	Personnel _____
No. of alligators observed _____	Size of alligators _____	
Behavior of alligators _____		

Classification after site visit (circle one):		
No action needed	Additional monitoring	Remove gator
Reason(s) for classification _____		

Condensed nuisance alligator criteria:		
Alligator > 4 feet approaches within 10 feet and does not move off in response to waving arms or other movement.		
Alligator responds quickly to splashing of popping cork, follows cork to pond edge, and does not move off when arms are waved.		
Alligator seen taking fish off of fisherman's line or staying in close proximity to fisherman while fishing.		
Alligator >4 feet is consistently in close proximity to small children, pets, or recreational areas.		