

# USACE Natural Resource Management Reptiles & Amphibians



## American Alligator

## FAST FACTS

**REASONS FOR LISTING STATUS:** A bit of a living fossil, the American alligator has been around for over 200 million years! In the 1950's this species reached all-time low population numbers as a result of market hunting and habitat loss. Consequently, in a 1967 law which preceded the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the American alligator was granted federal protections. (USFWS)

By 1987, the species was considered to have made a full recovery and it was removed from the list of endangered species. Although the American alligator is now secure, there are several related species of crocodiles and caimans which are still vulnerable. As a result, the USFWS has listed the American alligator as Threatened Due to Similarity of Appearance. (USFWS)

**MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION:** Because the American alligator is listed as Threatened Due to Similarity of Appearance, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service closely regulates the harvest and legal trade of alligators, their skins, and products derived from alligators. This is done to prevent the illegal take and trafficking of endangered "look-alike" species. (USFWS)

Alligators and related species benefit from the restoration of more predictable hydrological fluctuations in areas of water management. (NatureServe)

**HABITAT NEEDS:** Alligators depend on wetlands for survival. Wetland habitats used by this species include:

- Fresh and brackish marsh, ponds, lakes, rivers, bayous, canals, and large spring runs.
- Dens are often dug in marshes, lake margins, or rivers. These dens are used during cold winters or periods of drought.
- Access to air holes is necessary for survival in ice-covered ponds.
- Nests are built at the margins of lakes and rivers or in marshes. Females will lay their eggs in a mound of leaves, mud, rotting vegetation, rocks, and/or other debris. (NatureServe)

**Description:** The American alligator ranges from 6-14 feet long when fully grown. Alligators have large, slightly round bodies with thick limbs and a powerful tail. Alligators can be distinguished from crocodiles by their head shape and color. The snout of an alligator is wider than that of a crocodile. Furthermore, the lower jaw of an alligator has teeth that are visible even with a closed snout, while a crocodile does not. (USFWS)

Photo: Paul Block, DoD  
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### Natural Resource Management (NRM)

*This fact sheet has been prepared as an unofficial publication of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). This online publication is produced to provide its readers information about best management practices related to special status species. Editorial views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army. Mention of specific vendors does not constitute endorsement by the Department of the Army or any element thereof.*



**USACE ROLE:** According to the Engineering Research and Development Center's Threatened and Endangered Species Team Cost Estimates, the USACE has expended over \$564,000 on efforts related to the American alligator since 2005. Of that sum, over \$117,000 has been spent on protection efforts such as species relocation, habitat construction, creation, and restoration, and disturbance prevention.

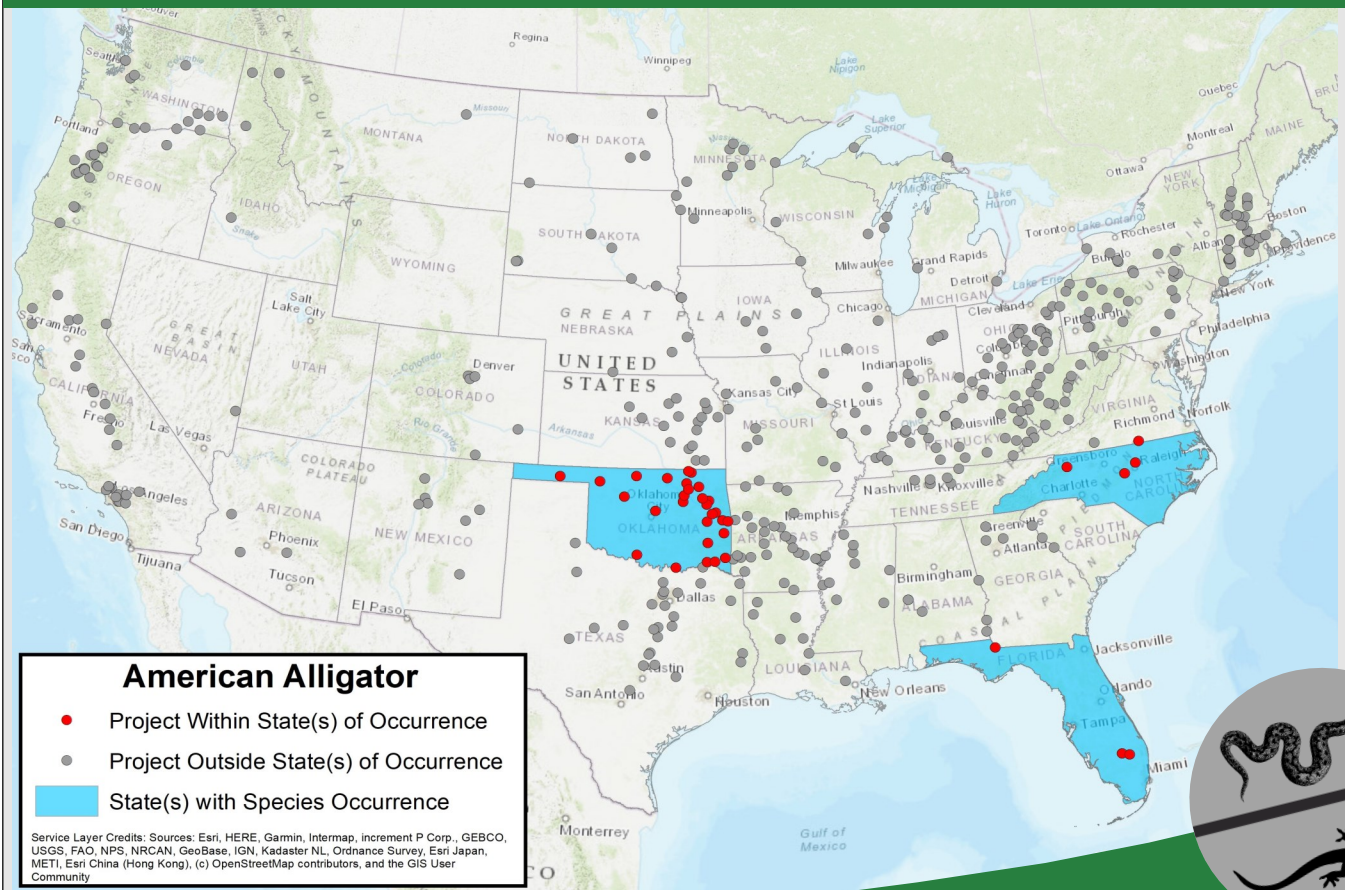
Photo: The USACE Galveston District, hosts an organized alligator hunt for combat injured veterans at the Wallisville Lake Project in 2016.



**WHAT IS USACE NRM DOING:**

The American alligator is a known inhabitant of several USACE's projects, and is considered common at most of them. Because this species is listed Threatened Due to Similarity of Appearance and is considered to be secure by USFWS, it is often managed as a game species.

Hunting is a vital wildlife management tool as it helps keep nature in balance by maintaining populations at levels which can be supported by a given habitat, a concept known as carrying capacity. Hunting also aids in maintaining populations at levels compatible with human activity and land use. At Wallisville Lake, the project staff has implemented this useful tool in a manner that also gives back to the community and builds partnerships. By partnering with Texas Parks and Wildlife, Chambers County Sherriff's Department and Lone Star Warriors Outdoors in 2016, Wallisville Lake was able to offer combat injured veterans the opportunity to participate in an organized feral hog and alligator hunt.



Source: Map provided by Ashleigh Boss, ORISE Fellowship, Institute for Water Resources

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