

ALLIGATORS REBOUND IN THE SOUTHEASTERN U.S.

Until recently, the American alligator was threatened with extinction by a powerful adversary: the world economy. The lucrative hide trade provided a major financial incentive to scour the nation's swamps and bayous for the legendary alligator and its valuable skin. Land-use policies, water pollution and the demand for agricultural products also adversely affected the sensitive wetland habitats the alligator relies upon for food and shelter.

Federal protection and state management have afforded the alligator a second chance. Hunting regulations constitute one factor in the alligator's recovery. Even more importantly, the alligator's economic value -- the very trait that made it susceptible to over-hunting -- has become an ally to its restoration. State officials forged this relationship by allowing landowners to harvest a percentage of the alligators on their property. This innovative program creates an incentive to increase alligator populations through habitat restoration and protection. Landowners have enthusiastically endorsed this approach, protecting more than 500,000 acres of wetlands for alligator production.

Using a combination of traditional and innovative regulatory programs, federal and state officials have succeeded in saving this unique species, and in 1987 the American alligator was removed from the endangered species list.

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