

NUISANCE ALLIGATOR PLAN

**Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve
Barataria Preserve
2001**

Submitted by: _____
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Reviewed by: _____
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Approved by: _____
Superintendent Date

Nuisance Alligator Plan

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve Barataria Preserve 2001

I. Purpose

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve was established to "...preserve and protect the natural and cultural resources of the Mississippi River Delta Region...". In accomplishing this mission, the Park must endeavor to preserve the natural processes while ensuring the safety of park visitors. The objective of this plan is to provide for visitor safety while preserving the alligator population at the Barataria Preserve for its ecological, aesthetic, educational and scientific value. This goal will be attained through an integrated program of education, preventative measures, enforcement and control, and will require the cooperation of all park staff.

Despite National Park Service (NPS) regulations, some visitors elect to feed park alligators and other wildlife. This activity is detrimental to wildlife, and can condition certain wildlife species to lose all fear of humans and view them as source of food. When this occurs, the conditioned animal may become aggressive towards humans, which places the safety of park visitors in serious jeopardy. The park must take decisive and appropriate action to reestablish natural behavior of habituated wildlife and protect the visitor. Therefore this document has been developed to provide park staff with authorized guidance and procedures for dealing with the situation and actions of nuisance alligators at the Barataria Preserve.

II. Problem Definition

A nuisance alligator is defined as an animal that has become habituated to humans to the extent that the alligator may present a danger to park visitors and/or park employees. One or more of the following behaviors ***must be documented*** in order for an alligator to be classified as a nuisance animal:

- a) alligator exhibits no natural avoidance behavior towards humans
- b) visitors are repeatedly observed feeding an alligator
- c) unsolicited approach or following a visitor or employee
- d) alligator displays a conditioned response to a human-related food source
- e) complaints are received from park visitors regarding aggressive alligator behavior
- f) no natural cause can be determined for any nuisance behavior

III. Responsibility

All park employees will be responsible for identifying and reporting situations involving habituated alligators within the park. Observations of aggressive alligator behavior that immediately threaten the safety of a visitor or employee should be reported immediately.

Animal behavior or visitor activities that indicate a potential problem will be reported as outlined below.

IV. Documentation

All park employees will notify the Resource and Visitor Protection (R&VP) or Visitor Center staff regarding any human/alligator interactions. A record of all interactions (Appendix A) will be maintained at each office, and will be summarized as necessary by the Natural Resource Management staff. Resource Education staff will record alligator/visitor interaction reports at the Visitor Center. Information recorded for each incident will include the date, time, observer's name, specific location of interaction, physical description of the alligator (including the approximate length and any distinguishing characteristics) and the activity observed.

V. Proactive Measures

Since people are the direct cause of alligator habituation, the ultimate solution to the problem lies primarily with changing people's behavior while visiting the park. Therefore, a combination of increased visitor education and law enforcement efforts are the primary mechanisms for minimizing the continued development of nuisance alligators. These proactive measures should be current and ongoing throughout the year.

A. Visitor Education

Park staff will prepare and maintain standard warning flyers to be posted at the visitor center, trailheads, and in conspicuous locations within areas of alligator-visitor contact. Signs should contain graphics and text relevant to the risks and penalties associated with feeding or harassing alligators and other wildlife. Additionally, permanent wayside exhibits will be developed to address the problems associated with feeding alligators and park wildlife. These interpretive wayside exhibits will be installed at strategic locations throughout the park where routine problems have occurred, such as the Twin Canals parking area, the Bayou Coquille trail, the Marsh Overlook trail platform, and at the Bayou des Familles canoe launch and/or bridge. Resource Education staff will recruit and train a core of volunteers to rove problem areas, make visitor contacts and document incidents of concern. Trained volunteers may also assist with aversive conditioning methods. Furthermore, messages of the problems associated with feeding alligators and other wildlife should be incorporated into all interpretive ranger programs.

B. Enforcement

Increased frequency of foot patrols in problem areas and enforcement of the "no food" policy on trails will be accomplished by the R&VP division as staffing allows. R&VP staff may also conduct "plain clothes" operations to observe and document alligator-visitor interactions.

All uniformed staff will be responsible for contacting people that are observed interacting with alligators or other wildlife. The minimal action in each instance will be an

educational message about the risks and danger associated with feeding and/or harassing wildlife. In aggravated cases, law enforcement rangers will be contacted to take appropriate enforcement action.

VI. Reactive Measures

All management actions pertaining to nuisance alligators will be coordinated through the Natural Resource Management office. When proactive measures fail, resulting in a nuisance alligator situation, the Natural Resource staff will evaluate the information available on the "Nuisance Alligator Activity Log" and other supporting evidence. Following this evaluation, a specific management action will be recommended which may involve the utilization of aversive conditioning techniques, area closures, or capture and relocation of the nuisance animal. The first management priority will be to attempt to reestablish the natural avoidance behavior of the nuisance alligator.

A. Aversion Techniques

Pepper spray and firearm discharges have been used at the Park to deter problem alligators in the past with very limited success. The Park has consulted with other NPS sites and wildlife refuges on the effectiveness of different aversion techniques used to manage nuisance wildlife species. Utilizing an electric stock prod was recommended as a successful aversion method for restoring natural avoidance behavior in nuisance alligators.

Therefore, the Park will use an electric stock prod to deliver repeated negative reinforcement to nuisance alligators. The stock prod will be utilized on a daily basis for a minimum period of two weeks for each nuisance animal. The R&VP division will schedule this field activity utilizing personnel from R&VP, Resource Management, trained volunteers and other park staff. If necessary, R&VP will establish temporary area closures around problem areas to ensure visitor safety during this time period. All actions involving the use of the stock prod will be documented on the Electric Prod Use Log (Appendix B) in order to evaluate the effectiveness of this technique. The Park will also continue to investigate the use of other wildlife aversion techniques as they are developed.

B. Area Closures

Establishing temporary area closures to avoid nuisance animal behavior is a direct and effective method for providing for visitor safety. Area closures will also allow park staff to administer aversion techniques and monitor the response of the nuisance alligator. The park superintendent will make decisions involving the use of temporary area closures on a case by case basis, based upon the advice of the management staff.

Female alligators may occasionally establish nesting territories along popular trails, resulting in displays of protective and/or aggressive behavior. These situations should be documented on the "Alligator Activity Log" to assist in recognizing seasonal nesting

areas that may require routine area closures. Attempts to capture or relocate nesting females will not be permitted under any circumstances.

C. Capture and Relocation

If previous techniques have not reduced or eliminated the problem behavior, the decision to remove a nuisance alligator from the park will be made by the Chief of Resources Management. Due to the risks involved with handling aggressive alligators, the reptile staff at the Audubon Institute will handle all capture and relocation efforts within the Park. A Memorandum of Understanding will be established between the Park and the Audubon Institute to provide capture and relocation services for nuisance alligators at the Park's request. If the Audubon Institute staff is unavailable, a private contractor will be hired for this service, with contracting provisions that insure and verify that the captured alligator is delivered safely to the specified destination.

The Park will provide logistical support in the form of transportation, boats, and fuel for relocation efforts. All nuisance alligators captured within the Barataria Preserve will be removed from the Park and transported to a nearby federal or state game preserve. Captured alligators will be marked by removing a ridge scale from the tail for identification purposes. All animal relocations will be coordinated with the recipient land owner or management agency.

APPENDIX A
Nuisance Alligator Activity Log – Barataria Preserve

DATE	TIME	NAME/PHONE #	OBSERVED ACTIVITY	SPECIFIC LOCATION	ALLIGATOR DESCRIPTION

APPENDIX B
Electric Prod Use Log - Barataria Preserve

DATE	TIME	EMPLOYEE NAME	BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION ACTIONS (describe behavior of alligator and your actions in detail)	LOCATION	ALLIGATOR DESCRIPTION