

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Inez Connor 202/343-5634

## TIGHT REGULATORY FRAMEWORK PROPOSED FOR RESUMPTION OF FOREIGN TRADE IN ALLIGATORS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed a "closed system" of import and export controls for monitoring the resumption of limited international commerce in the American alligator. The proposed rulemaking was announced in the July 18, 1979, Federal Register.

When adopted in final form, the rulemaking will effectively end the decade-long ban on international trade in the species. As a result of sound conservation and law enforcement measures, the alligator has been reclassified in 12 Louisiana parishes to a special category under the Endangered Species Act that allows trade. Under the proposed procedures, only lawfully taken hides from these 12 parishes (see list), from "nuisance" alligators taken under Florida's federally approved management plan, and from captive-bred alligators such as those bred on alligator "farms" could be exported to foreign markets.

The "closed system" proposed by the Service is designed to assure that only these legal hides enter the system and that only products made from them leave it. This would be accomplished through tagging and marking procedures, beginning when the alligators are taken under State supervision and ending only with the finished product. Only tagged hides can be sold legally and once the tags are attached by the State, they must remain on the hides through the tanning process.

Finally, after a product is made, the fabricator is to attach an engraved label and be able to account for the entire hide.

A second aspect of the "closed system" would limit access to the alligator trade to Federal permit holders who could do business only with each other until a finished product is completed. Federal permits for buyers, tanners, and fabricators would be available to applicants from any country. The advantage to requiring Federal permits of foreign as well as domestic dealers is that permittees could lose their permits, and thus their access to a reliable source of legal American alligator hides, if they violated the conditions of the permit.

Permittees also would have to agree to reasonable inspection of their business premises and would be required to keep complete and accurate records of their dealings in American alligator hides and similar reptile

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skins, such as crocodiles, caimans, gavials, and other alligators which are sometimes commingled with American alligators.

Exports of the American alligator must comply with the requirements of a 51-nation treaty, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). CITES countries recently voted to reclassify the alligator to allow controlled commercial exports. The proposal by the Interior agency differs in two respects from a proposal published earlier by the Endangered Species Scientific Authority (ESSA). The ESSA is an interagency committee of scientists which must issue a finding that exports would not be detrimental to the species before permits can be issued.

The ESSA has proposed to require indelible marking on the complete underside of alligator hides prior to export in order to protect other crocodilians, as opposed to the Service proposal of engraved labels that would be attached after a product is manufactured. The Service had considered requiring indelible marking but decided against it because it is easy to duplicate, cannot readily be seen on products that are lined with other leather, and may be shaved off in the fabricating process.

The second difference is that the ESSA has proposed to allow exports only to countries that are party to CITES and that have not taken reservations against CITES controls on trade in endangered species of crocodiles. Countries that would not be eligible to receive alligator hides under the ESSA proposal include Japan, Italy, Spain, and France.

The Service is proposing, on the other hand, to accept buyer, tanner, and fabricator permit applications from individuals in any country. Foreign applicants would be subject to more stringent application requirements and possibly, additional permit conditions.

The Service is also proposing to authorize the sale of alligator meat within a State when allowed by State law.

Comments are invited on the Service proposal and should be submitted by August 17, 1979, to the Director (LE), P.O. Box 19183, Washington, D.C. 20036.

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#### 12 Louisiana Parishes

Calcasieu  
Cameron  
Iberia  
Jefferson

Lafourche  
Plaquemines  
St. Bernard  
St. Charles

St. Mary  
St. Tammany  
Terrebonne  
Vermilion