

PROTECTION OF THE ALLIGATOR IN FLORIDA IS A MAJOR LAW ENFORCEMENT PROBLEM

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Mr. Chairman, Fellow Officers, Ladies and Gentlemen:

One of Florida's major wildlife enforcement problem is protection of alligators. This is a many-sided problem that can be only lightly covered in the time allowed for this paper. To cover as much ground as possible in explaining our problem, I am departing somewhat from the rules for submitting papers in this Conference, and am submitting mostly an outline of what I plan to say. Also, I prefer not to put in writing the explanations of some of the cunning devices and methods that the alligator violators use.

This enforcement problem is a major one for many reasons that do not apply to other wildlife. Following are a number of these reasons, which are not listed in any order of importance. Yet, I can tell you that all of them are real headaches:

1. Hunting alligators is a lucrative business. Prime hides are bringing \$4- to-\$5 per running foot to the hunter, and much more to the buyers step-by-step up the line.

2. Taking alligators, for any reason whatever, is a misdemeanor in Florida, and carries a maximum penalty of a \$300-fine and/or 90 days in the county jail. Very, very seldom is the maximum sentence imposed on violators we apprehend, and often are not stiff enough to stop them from killing again.

3. Primarily, protection of the alligator in Florida is provided for three reasons: (1) As a tourist attraction, (2) for its commercial value as leather, and (3) because of the fact that without some protection alligators soon would be extinct.

4. The Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission is a Constitutional agency, and as such is self-supporting, deriving its funds from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. No revenue is or can be forthcoming to the Commission at this time from the protection of the alligator, except the small sums received from the sale of confiscated hides taken from violators.

5. Adequate patrolling is difficult, since average state-wide Florida Wildlife Officer assignment is two officers per county and approximately 276,500 acres of territory, of which 34,500 acres is water.

6. Through close watch and good law enforcement we can dry up and have dried up the use of alligator skins in Florida, yet 99 per cent of the hides taken in the State are smuggled out to buyers and manufacturers in other states which permit the possession and use of alligator skins.

7. Because of the high profits made in bootlegging "gator" hides, this illegal traffic is a well-organized operation. With drivers equipped with late model, souped-up, whiskey-running-type automobiles, often further equipped with two-way, citizen-band radios, and sometimes with receivers tuned to our Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission frequency, buyers can get the hides out in a hurry and in comparative safety.

To elaborate on some of these seven reasons why the law enforcement problem is so tough, it is well to note that the buyer or head "gator hide" bootlegger of each ring usually operates from his home where, by law in Florida, he is safe from search by warrant,

or otherwise. Search of one's domicile for alligator hides is not included in the causes of legal search in the State.

I understand that my fellow officer and Regional Manager, Louis Gainey is to speak to you later on this subject and he will discuss more fully many of these problems. I have touched on them only briefly as a sort of introduction concerning the cunning methods and devices used by these outlaws in taking alligators. And, as stated at the beginning, I prefer not to elaborate in writing on their use, since it is my considered opinion that to do so possibly would be detrimental to enforcement should one of these papers fall into wrong hands. It is wise, I believe, to discuss some of these things in a sort of off-the-cuff manner.

Many of the devices and methods used in Florida are the same as may be used in your states where there are alligators. However, I am listing eight devices and nine methods, which, with some changes, may be adapted to situations in your home state. They are offered for whatever consideration and assistance they may be to you.

I have apparatus here to illustrate the following:

1. Gigs.
2. Crab grabbers.
3. Straightened hook and float.
4. Cave rod.
5. Ball-pean hammer, and lathing hatchet.
6. Shark or jewfish hook and line.
7. Headlight and gun.
8. Peg and line.

Often, the methods used to evade detection and apprehension by Wildlife Officers are even more cunning than the devices used. Following are some worth noting and remembering:

1. Hides, after being salted, may be left in the woods for several days to be picked up and brought out by the hunters at his convenience. They may be put in sacks and hung in trees, or in cans perforated for good drainage and placed in the shade.

2. Hunter may use the life-saver method of disposing of incriminating gun, and retrieve it later.

3. He may bring hides out under his clothing, wrapped around his body.

4. He may dispose of incriminating gun via a screw eye in the bottom of his boat.

5. He may put hides inside airplane-type tires on swamp-buggy, then reinflate tires and come out openly.

6. Often he escapes detection by a "lookout" system, particularly effective if two or more airboats are working together.

7. He may send a "decoy" ahead in hopes that officers will stalk the decoy and expose themselves.

8. He may relay guns, hides, or other contraband to a pick-up person at a pre-arranged time and place different from entry point, then return clean and carefree at his convenience to the point under surveillance.

9. He may use citizen-band radio and be operating with little chance of any surprise from officers.

In summarizing these remarks, let me repeat that one of Florida's greatest law enforcement problems is protection of the alligator. The violator is cunning and well organized and draws heavily on a Wildlife Officer's time and effort before he is apprehended; yet, no revenue whatever is derived from this phase of our work. Finally, the fines

and penalties meted out to hunters and dealers in this lucrative, illegal business generally are not stiff enough to slow them down.

I am pleased to tell you that our problems in Florida are under serious consideration by our Game and Fish Commissions who may seek an early remedy from the Florida Legislature, which reserves to itself the right and power of setting fees for possible licenses and permits to take specified alligators, and providing penalties for violators.

Thank you.

JOB:jb

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FLORIDA GAME AND FRESH WATER FISH COMMISSION

PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR THE WILDLIFE OFFICER

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South Florida Region

Public relations are nothing more than a wildlife officer's conduct and demeanor during his daily life and while performing his duty as a wildlife officer.

When he leaves his training school he is assigned to an area somewhere in the state. When he arrives at his assigned area, he will no doubt be a total stranger. Most people are not going to accept him immediately, but will take a "wait and see" attitude. His conduct during his first six months will be the most critical. During this period of time, his every action will be carefully analyzed.

He must present himself in an acceptable manner, taking care to accept his new surroundings cheerfully. He must avoid taking the attitude that a transfer back to his home county or parish is foremost in his mind. Most people are proud of their community and will resent any unkind or disparaging remarks concerning it, particularly from a newcomer. It is easy to build up a "Yankee, go home" atmosphere, but exceedingly difficult to dissipate this attitude once it has developed.

If he is accepted his job will be made much easier. You can readily see how important it is for him to win the confidence of the local citizens. If he is not accepted and fails to win the confidence of the local citizens, his job becomes an almost overwhelming task. The purpose of this very brief talk is to point out some of the pit falls that he should avoid.

Public relations is inseparably linked with the efficient and effective performance of your assigned task. Public Relations alone may carry you for a while, but sooner or later, the public that you serve will begin to look a little closer into your activities. If you don't have a sound efficient program, the smoke screen that you have thrown up will be of little service to you. It's like a gift. It would be foolish to giftwrap an empty package with the thought in mind that the person to whom you gave the gift would fail to notice that the very nicely wrapped package was empty.

You have no doubt noticed that the trend in examinations to qualify for the eligible list to become a wildlife officer are stressing more and more aptitude and common sense. We are concerned least