

American Alligators and the Department of Defense

The American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) was once an endangered species. However, following state and federal management of this species, alligator populations have rebounded to an estimated total in the millions of individuals. It is the most abundant crocodylian species on military lands.



Picture by: Paul Block

Description: Adults are typically 6 to 16.5 feet (1.8 to 5 meters) in length. Males grow longer than females. They have a broadly rounded snout. Adults are dark gray, brown, or olive to black in color. The young have bright yellow stripes on the body and tail.

Range: The American Alligator resides on the southern Atlantic and Gulf coastal plains of the United States from North Carolina south through Florida and westward to southeastern Oklahoma and eastern Texas.



Source: IUCN

Occurrence on Military Lands	
Confirmed	Potential
Confirmed present on 14 Army, 13 Navy, 12 Air Force and 7 Marine Corps installation across its range.	Up to an additional 2 Army, 10 Navy, and 4 Air Force installations across its range.

Habitat: The American Alligator's primary habitats are freshwater swamps and marshes, but may also include lakes, canals, ponds, reservoirs, and rivers. In coastal areas, alligators may move between freshwater and brackish waters. Size and sex influences the habitat in which alligators reside. Both sexes dig dens in river or lake margins, where they may spend periods of cold and drought.

Behavior: Alligators are opportunistic carnivores. Adults eat a variety of animals, including large fish, turtles, snakes, birds, and small mammals. Hatchlings and smaller alligators eat insects, crayfish, snails and other invertebrates, small fishes, and amphibians. Female alligators protect nests during incubation, assist with emergence of young from nest sites, and remain with the young for up to a year or more to protect them from predation. Adult males and females emit bellowing roars. Females and juveniles can make a grunting noise. Alligators of all sizes hiss.

Military Interactions: The American Alligator is the most abundant crocodylian species on military lands. For your safety, do not swim, wade, or allow pets off-leash in areas known to be occupied by alligators. Feeding alligators on military lands may result in disciplinary actions.

Conservation Status: The American Alligator was listed as an endangered species in 1967 under a law that preceded the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In 1987, this species was declared no longer threatened or endangered. Moreover, all states in which the alligator occurs except North Carolina and Oklahoma have since opened a harvest season on it. However, to facilitate the ongoing necessary protections to the American Crocodile and other endangered crocodylian species, the American Alligator was reclassified under the ESA as "threatened due to similarity of appearance" to other crocodylians.

Threats/Planning Considerations: Alligator eggs and young are often preyed upon by raccoons, opossums, skunks, feral pigs, fishes, bears, fire ants, and other predators. Egg mortality due to flooding is also a threat to this species. Poaching (e.g., harvesting out of season) of alligators by humans as a source of food or for their hides is an additional threat to the adults.

