

October 2006

The Istokpoga Newswire

Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.



Alligators in Lake Istokpoga

By Bill Dwinell with help from Blair Hayman, FFWCC biologist with the FWC Alligator Management Program and Deborah Rich, FFWCC Senior Clerk/Permit Specialist/Accreditation Liaison

How many alligators are there in Lake Istokpoga; when are they counted; and how is the count determined? Lake Istokpoga is surveyed annually in May or early June by Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) Alligator Management Program Staff. The 2006 survey was conducted over two nights; May 15th and 22nd. During the surveys, we count alligator eyes that we observe with a spotlight, and estimate the size of each alligator observed. The number of alligators in each size class is then put into a computer program along with such variables as water temperature and water level, and an estimate of the alligator population is derived. Our data indicates that there may be around 10,000 total alligators (from hatchlings to adults) on Lake Istokpoga. We estimate that there are over 5,000 alligators over 4 feet long. However, it is very difficult to determine the exact number of alligators that inhabit a given body of water; therefore, we make management decisions based on the trends we observe during the surveys.

Has anyone ever been killed by alligators in Lake Istokpoga? Since we began keeping records of alligator related fatalities in 1948, we have had no records of one on Lake Istokpoga.

What control measures used to insure alligator population does not get too big on Lake Istokpoga, if any. Lake Istokpoga is a lake in which participants in the Public Waters Alligator Harvest may be permitted to

harvest alligators. In addition, residents may call the Statewide Nuisance Alligator Hotline; 1-866-FWC-GATOR (866-392-4286), to report nuisance alligators.

Egg collection on Lake Istokpoga: Description of process. How often is it done? When was last collection on Lake Istokpoga done? Where do the eggs go? Who gets them, and does the state make any money at it? If so, what are the funds used for? Who does the collecting? The FWCC annually allows the collection of alligator eggs by permitted alligator farmers and their agents from public wetlands. The egg collection group generally uses a helicopter to locate nests and radios directions to the nest to airboats on the lake. FWCC biologists are on site to oversee the collection and gather biological information. Istokpoga has been an egg collection area since 1992, and eggs were last collected from Lake Istokpoga in 2006. The eggs are transferred to an incubator, and eventually to one of the 30 alligator farms which are permitted to receive eggs from public waters. The farmers' group pays the FWCC five dollars per egg that is retained, and the money goes into the FWCC's general fund which is used for a variety of fish and wildlife programs.

Hunting: How many permits are issued for Lake Istokpoga each year? How many alligators are harvested each year? What is the process for obtaining an alligator permit for Lake Istokpoga? What is the biggest alligator ever recorded in Lake Istokpoga? What are the rules for handling an alligator once you capture/kill it? How much of the alligator does the hunter get to keep? What happens to the rest of it? Where can you buy raw gator meat, i.e., and who is allowed to sell it? The number of permits available for a given Alligator Management Unit can vary from year to year,

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Special points of interest:

- Be sure to join our message group
- Be sure to visit our NEW Web site at:
www.istokpoga.org

based on the trend data we gather during our Nightlight Suveys. Since 2001, the number of available permits for Lake Istokpoga has ranged from 85 permits in 2002 to 195 permits in 2005. This year there were 94 permits available for Lake Istokpoga. Each permit allows the harvest of 2 alligators. The maximum number of gators that can be harvested via the Public Waters Harvest this year is 188. The largest alligator taken from Lake Istokpoga since 2000 was 12 feet 10 inches long. Permits go on sale on a first-come-first-served basis in early to mid June of each year. Check the website (myfwc.com/gators) in the spring for the exact date. Permits may be purchased online, by phone, at a tax collector's office, or anywhere hunting & fishing licenses are sold. A restraining line must be attached to the alligator before it is killed, and it must be tagged immediately upon killing. For more information on harvest techniques and alligator hunting regulations, check out the Training and Orientation Manual provided to hunters and available on our website (myfwc.com/gators). We also offer classes each year prior to the start of alligator season for new hunters. The hunter may keep the gator or sell it to a processor. Alligator meat may only be sold if it is processed in a licensed alligator processing facility. Additionally, hunters must fill out and return a harvest report form for each gator taken. The FWCC compiles that data annually.

Feeding alligators: What is the penalty for feeding alligators? Feeding alligators is a 2nd Degree Misdemeanor punishable with a sentence of 60 days in jail or \$500 fine.

Does cleaning fish in the Lake Istokpoga canals and throwing the scraps in the canals constitute feeding the alligators? Yes, but only if it can be proved (intent) to feed an alligator.

What happens when an alligator loses its fear of humans? Are the alligators killed or relocated? Throwing scraps in the water at boat

ramps (or any other location where scraps are routinely thrown in the same general location), certainly makes it more likely that the alligators in that area may come to associate people with food. It is always better to throw scraps in garbage cans, or if that is not possible, to avoid throwing scraps away in the same area. This could lead to alligators approaching people in search of a free meal, and could, perhaps, result in an alligator biting a person. Alligators that are approaching people, or otherwise appear to have been fed, should be reported to the Statewide Nuisance Alligator Hotline, 1-866-FWC-GATOR (866-392-4286).

What are the sleeping, and feeding habits of the Lake Istokpoga alligators?

What is their primary diet? Alligators on Lake Istokpoga do not differ in their habits in a large way from alligators in other bodies of water; they are primarily active during the evening, at night, and in the early morning. They are most active when temperatures are warm. They primarily eat fish, but will eat anything which is readily available and easily caught. Prey size increases as the size of the alligator increases.

What to do when you hook one while fishing. If you accidentally

hook an alligator while fishing, you should break or cut the line as close to the alligator as possible, but not so close as to endanger yourself.

How do you report nuisance alligators?

What is a nuisance alligator? A nuisance alligator is one that poses a threat to one's person, pet or livestock, or other property. If you think you have a nuisance alligator, you may call the Statewide Nuisance Alligator Hotline; 1-866-FWC-GATOR (866-392-4286), to request that a trapper be sent to remove the animal; or you may ask to speak to a biologist to discuss the situation if you are unsure whether the situation warrants removal. When a caller reports a nuisance alligator that meets our criteria for removal, the local Nuisance Alligator Trapper is issued a permit to remove the alligator. When he or she captures

the alligator it must be killed (if it is greater than 4 feet in length). [We generally do not do respond to alligators under 4 feet in length, as they are not large enough to be a danger to people or pets. Only in special instances (if the alligator has been fed and is coming close to people or if it is in a pool for example) would we respond to an alligator less than 4 feet long; those are relocated.] Larger alligators are not relocated for several reasons, among them; gators often return to the capture site, there are few places where an alligator can be taken where it would not ever come into contact with people and a problem gator in one area may be a problem at the release site, alligators are territorial with each other and releasing a new gator into an established population could result in fights. Larger alligators are instead harvested by the alligator trapper, and he or she generally sells the meat and hide. That is the trapper's primary compensation. The program is a tremendous savings to Florida's taxpayers.

I often hear of individuals just killing gators that are a nuisance to them.

What is the penalty for killing a gator without a permit, or out of season? Killing and alligator without a permit or out of season is 1st Degree Misdemeanor punishable with a one year jail sentence or \$1000 fine.

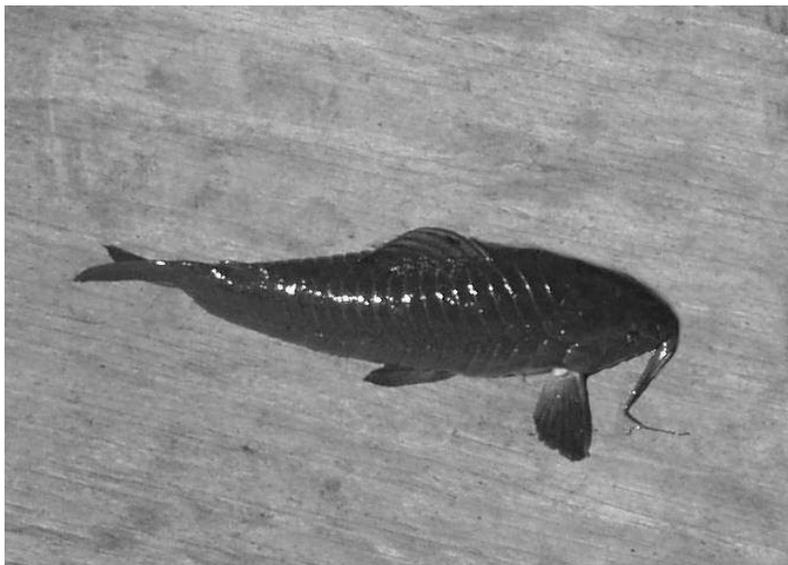
Why was the alligator hunting season extended this year? The season was extended because we allowed trappers to buy multiple permits this year (because in the past few years many were going unused) so we wanted to give trappers adequate time to fill those additional permits. Also in the past few years we've had problems with hurricanes interfering with hunt times, and wanted to give a big window for hunters to be able to fill their permits. The number of permits available is based defined management objectives and on our population surveys, that has not changed. The season extension has nothing to do with the fact that some people believe that there are "too many" gators in the state.

Feeding alligators is a 2nd Degree Misdemeanor punishable with a sentence of 60 days in jail or \$500 fine.

Armored Catfish in Lake Istokpoga

By Ray Gaiefsky, Director,
Friends of Istokpoga Lake
Association

While fishing on the north end of Lake Istokpoga I couldn't help but notice a man fishing with a cast net. I watched him for about an hour as he was catching quite a few fish. My cu-



iosity got the best of me and I finally had to ask what kind of fish he was catching. They turned out to be Armored Catfish. In about a six hour period he had caught two hundred (200) pounds of these fish. I asked him what he was going to do with all those fish. He replied that he was going to sell them. He thought he could get upwards of \$250 to \$300 dollars for his trouble and he didn't have to clean them.

There are over 50 species of armored catfish. They are becoming established in Florida because of people releasing them from aquariums. So far they don't appear to be causing a problem with any native species. They are members of the Callichthyidae family. The armored catfish has the capability of walking on land for quite a distance. They pull themselves along with their pectoral fins. They like the Gar, Bowfin, or Lungfish have a secondary breathing system, oxygen is taken from the air by fine capillary blood vessels in the walls of their intestines. These fish feed on small animals like

fresh water shrimp, small pieces of carion, and algae from hard surfaces.

Not much is known about their breeding habits. They do know that a female will lay as many as 250 eggs on a hard surface where they adhere. The eggs hatch in about a week.

How to prepare these fish:

1- Cut off the fins and heads and gut them.

2- Boil the fish. After boiling the skin will peel off.

3- Cook it up in a stew with salt,

pepper and curry powder. (curry powder was stressed)

A New Home For Florida LAKEWATCH

August 2006 was LAKEWATCH's 20th anniversary. Lakewatch volunteers have sampled more than 1000 lakes and coastal waters in 50 Florida counties. Lake Istokpoga is one of the 1000 lakes that have benefited from the efforts of Lakewatch. Volunteers have taken Monthly samples from 6 locations on Lake Istokpoga and compiled an impressive set of statistics about our lake. These statistics have been used by many agencies to track the water quality on Lake Istokpoga. Without these statistics we would not have been able to get some of the help to make Lake Istokpoga a better lake in the future. You can see some of these statistics if you go our web site (www.istokpoga.org) and click on the links to LAKEWATCH.

Florida LAKEWATCH needs a better home that can improve program services now and in the future. The facilities can-

not be expanded to meet their growing needs. The new 10,000 sq. ft. complex will include a bacteriological lab, a toxic algal lab, a fish tissue laboratory and a general fisheries lab, to provide state of the art resources needed to continue critical water quality analyses. You can help in this effort by giving a tax free donation to the University of Florida Foundation, Inc. Please include a note or memo on the check indicating that you would like this gift designated to the Florida LAKEWATCH building fund. The money contributed to LAKEWATCH will be matched dollar for dollar by the Florida Legislature. So please give if you can, LAKEWATCH is a good volunteer organization. Thanks for your Help.

Please mail any donations to:

IFAS/SHARE Development Office
1001 McCarty Hall D
PO Box 110170
Gainesville FL. 32611-0170
Attention: Josh McCoy

New Friends of Istokpoga Website!!

By Bill Duinell

We are delighted to announce our new website is now up and running. We believe that you will find it much easier to navigate and much more appealing to the eye. So far, much of what you will see is based on our old website. We have a number of things we are working on to make it even better. We are looking at a members only area where we can provide additional items for our members, like current versions of our newsletters to make it easier for you to view online and help the "Snow birds" when their newsletters are not forwarded by the USPS.

You can take a look at the new site by going to www.istokpoga.org.

If you used this addresses in your bookmark for our site you won't have to change anything. But, if you used our Homestead address you will have to update it to one of those above.

We hope you will stop by for a visit soon. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

Mail completed Application to address at bottom of form with your membership fee or bring it to our meeting.
Remember that numbers count, so please consider all members of your household when joining.

Membership Application Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.

Annual membership fee \$7.00 per person
Annual Family Membership fee \$12.00 per family*
Annual Associate membership fee \$25.00

Annual dues are valid Jan. 1 to Dec. 31

*Family Membership is for a couple and their children under 18 years old living at home

Name(s) or Business name _____

1st Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (____) ____-_____

2nd Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Send all mail to address 1 ___ 2 ___ other _____

Phone:(____) ____-_____

E-mail address _____

Circle Correct Answer: Yes/No I am willing to work on a committee below?

Committees: Finance, Legislative, Newsletter, Membership, Publicity, Weed Control (Circle one)

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Is business name EXACTLY as you would have it appear in the newsletter/Website? _____

Primary Contact _____

Description of Business for website _____

Web Address _____

Fax Number (____) _____

Signature: _____

Additionally, I would like to donate \$10 ___ \$15 ___ \$25 ___ other _____

All Donations are tax deductible

Make Checks Payable to: **Friends of Istokpoga**

Mail to: P.O. Box 205, Lorida, FL 33857

For additional information call: 863-219-0082 - Voice Mail

Or email us at: friends@istokpoga.org

Please visit our web site: www.istokpoga.org

What's Happening on Istokpoga

by Bert Galloway, President,
Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association

There are many projects and events happening on Istokpoga at this time. We will try to bring you up to date on things that your board of directors is working on and other projects that are being performed by some of the state and local agencies. Also we will try to give you some insight into events that have happened in the last few months.

Avon Park Correctional Inst. Waste water treatment plant modification status

The Friends Of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. received a copy of the draft permit for the Avon Park Correctional Inst. waste water treatment plant from the State of Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP). Your board of directors responded with a letter, noting that they had not addressed the Phosphorus (P) that the treatment plant was discharging into Arbuckle Creek. As you know, P is a big problem in Lake Istokpoga. We will advise you when we get a response from DEP and what they are going to do or not do about this pollution problem.

Arbuckle Creek monitoring of water quality

Currently Paul Ritter from the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), is conducting a water quality assessment for the Arbuckle Creek watershed. He is trying to track down the areas in the watershed that contribute the most phosphorus loading of Arbuckle Creek and subsequently Lake Istokpoga. After he finds a problem he will work to eradicate the problem with better management practices, retention ponds and the like. We hope to hear from Mr. Ritter and learn about the progress that he is making. We will keep you informed.

Aquatic Plant Management

The Friends of Istokpoga Board of Directors has decided to monitor the spraying activities on Istokpoga by all agencies that are permitted to spray. We will be in touch with the different agencies and get their spraying schedule. We have volunteers that will then check on the spraying operation and try to determine its effectiveness. Please understand that the State of Florida mandates the control of invasive plants like water hyacinths and water lettuce. This is a new endeavor for the Friends of Istokpoga and we will let you know what we find out.

Aquatic Plant Resistance to Herbicides

The herbicide that is used to control hydrilla on Lake Istokpoga can no longer be used. Fluridone also known as Sonar, that has been very effective in controlling hydrilla in the past, can no longer be used, because the hydrilla on Istokpoga has become resistant to it. At this time we are fortunate that we have only a small amount of hydrilla in the lake. There are some new herbicide products that are now being tested to see if they can do the job and control hydrilla. We are told that these new products are looking good but it is still too soon to pass final judgment on them, and they have not yet been approved for aquatic use. We will keep you abreast of any developments that we learn about.

Canal Maintenance Dredging Evaluation

SFWMD has completed phase 1 of a multi-phase undertaking for dredging and disposal of sediments from canals around Lake Istokpoga. Phase 1 was intended to identify contaminants of concern associated with sedi-

ments, quantify the volume of sediments to be removed, and provide information for bidders on this project. SFWMD has identified approximately 58 canals on Lake Istokpoga that could be candidates for dredging. The next step in this process is the funding to do the actual dredging. We are told that this will be two to three years before SFWMD will be able to fund this project. We are glad that the project has started and we hope that SFWMD will see fit to totally fund this dredging project.

Friends of Istokpoga Fall Meeting

Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. will hold our fall general membership meeting at the Lorida Community Center on Thursday, November 16, at 7:00 PM. We will have two speakers who will bring you up-to-date on some of the programs that are happening on Istokpoga. We will also have representatives of some local and state agencies who will be able to answer some of

you questions and concerns about the lake.

Please bring your friends and neighbors to this informative meeting. Also have them fill out our membership form (page 4). If they join now their single years dues are good through December 2007. We need their help in our efforts to keep Istokpoga the Jewel of Highlands County. Remember, Friends of Istokpoga, as a large group, has a voice for Istokpoga that can be heard in the County and the State.

There will be refreshments served beginning at 6:45 PM. You will also be able to pay your 2007 membership dues. So come out with your neighbors and participate in our effort to make Istokpoga the true Jewel that it deserves to be. See you Nov. 16.

Mark your calendar now!

Join Friends of Istokpoga now and your dues are good through December 2007

Friends of Istokpoga Lake
Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 205
Lorida, Florida 33857
Pager: 863-219-0082
Email: friends@istokpoga.org

Help us protect Lake Istokpoga

Were on the Web —
www.istokpoga.org



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Cypress Isles RV Park, Lake Placid
Graig D. Graybill, Security Service, Sebring
Glades Electric Cooperative, Moore Haven
Heartland Marine, Lake Placid
High Hopes Guide Service, Sebring
Highlands Airboat Association, Inc.
Home & Office Essentials, Lake Placid
J & H Supply, Lake Worth
Jeanette Shaw, Realtor, Lorida
Jet A Service, Lake Placid
Lake Istokpoga Marina, Lake Placid
Lake Placid Marine Inc., Lake Placid

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