Alligator Season Successful

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PEARL RIVER, La. (AP) — Dave Singletary never did catch the monster alligator he was after on opening day, but he and his partner did catch and skin 93 of the valuable reptiles during the nation's only legal gator-hunting season.

The month-long season opened on Sept. 4, and the state's Department of Wildlife and Fisheries issued permits for 18,000 alligators to be taken in the 13 coastal parishes where the hunt is legal.

All the returns aren't in, but Singletary said he and all the other hunters in his part of the state got their limits. Officials said about 17,500 gators were taken.

Singletary and Joe Billiot manage an 8,000-acre tract of marsh and bayou near the Louisiana-Mississippi line, paying a percentage of trapping income to the owner, but keeping what they make off shrimping and other endeavors.

Last year, they caught an alligator measuring 14 feet, 4 inches. Singletary said the one he was after this year was at least that big.

"We never did get him," he said. "I've seen him again. I saw him day before yesterday. He'll go 14 feet easy. "But every time we hook him, he gets the rope against something and chafes it against something and gets away.

"He's just been lucky. You hook him in the mouth or jaw, and he's going to get loose every time."

"There's little sport — but still some danger — in the commercial hunting of alligators."

Trappers suspend baited hooks above waters where alligators are known to live, then run their sets in small boats the next morning as they would run a trap line, reeling in the alligators, dispatching them with a hatchet blow or gunshot, then taking their catch back to land for skinning.

"You shoot an alligator in deep water, and he sinks and you never see him again," Singletary said.

"The big ones eat up so much more than the little ones, and they're past the breeding age."

"A big one, when he gets hungry, is going to eat anything that comes around."

This year, in addition to the payoff on the hides, alligator hunters were able to sell the meat, netting another $25 or so for an average-size alligator. "We could have sold 10 times as much, if we'd had it," Singletary said.

"It's still not legal to sell the meat in interstate commerce, but at least one seafood dealer said. Mostly for the damage is gambling that the rule will be changed.

"We had two or three 12-foot ones this year, the rest were 7- or 8-foot ones, with a few 9-foot ones," Singletary said.

"We had 11 that ran from 9 feet to 12 feet."

Hides in the 7-foot range brought about $17 a foot last year, with lower prices for larger hides. The big patterns on the large hides make them unsuitable for anything but luggage, golf carts and the like.

So why are Singletary and Billiot so intent on getting the big one?

"A little pride," Singletary said. "Mostly for the damage is gambling that the rule will be changed.

His 93 hides are neatly salted and compactly rolled, awaiting a buyer.