'Gator Hunter Recalls Killing 100 Per Night*

CREOLE, La. (AP) — Garland Richard's family hauled in 20 alligators Saturday, in the first hours of the nation's only 'gator season. But he said he can remember when you could shoot 100 a night.

"I started as a kid," said Richard, who has lived in this southwest Louisiana community for all of his 58 years. "When we first started, years ago, you'd sell them for 75 cents a hide. But then, you could buy a sack of flour for 25 cents."

This year, Richard hopes to get $17.50 a foot for the 90 his family is allowed to take during the season, which ends Oct. 3. It's under tight controls to prevent the indiscriminate killing that almost wiped out the species by the 1960s.

Back when Richard was a boy, hunters would take their flatboats into the bayou at night and play a light across the still water until they saw the red glow of a 'gator's eyes.

"You just creep up on him slowly and shoot him. You got him right there. With a light there's no miss," Richard said.

"I killed a many of them. I'd hate to throw a number. But it was a big one."

In 1963, the federal government banned all alligator hunting, and 'gators began an amazing resurgence.

Hunting resumed 10 years later in three southwest Louisiana parishes, including Cameron Parish, where Richard lives. It was expanded to a dozen parishes in 1979, and to all 64 last year.

Florida, which doesn't have a formal 'gator hunting season, is holding a brief hunt Sept. 4-24 on three lakes near Gainesville.

Richard has been in charge of all of the hunts since 1973. But this year, he said, his son Joseph is in charge.

Quotas are set by acreage, and only six of the alligators may be trapped on the Richard's land.

Another 54 may be taken from wetlands belonging to the Miami Corp., which owns a good deal of Cameron Parish land and leases hunting rights. Alligator hunters pay 35 percent of the money received for hides. The rest of the family's quota is in the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge, Richard said.

They were up at 3 a.m. Saturday to be out on the marsh by 6:30 a.m.

He said his family set out 52 lines Friday, but a cold north wind kept the 'gators from swallowing the liver with which he baits his sturdy hooks.

"They'll try to go to their holes, instead of just standing there and feeding, until it warms up again," he said.

"Actually, the alligator's going on a diet right now, you see. They might eat twice a week. They're getting prepared for the winter."

Most of the 20 caught Saturday were 4 to 6 feet long — 4 feet is the minimum. Three or four were 7 feet long, about five were 8 or 9 feet, and there was one 10½-foot, Richard said.

He said his family took four 20-foot flatboats in different directions so all of the lines could be checked and re-baited before it got hot. A line with a 'gator on the other end is hauled up and the reptile is shot in the (Continued on Page 6, Col. 1)

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head, then hauled into the boat.

The bullet eventually kills the alligator, but it can thrash around for a good while, so hunters often chop the spine to still the muscular tail.

Richard said this year's skinning instructions — they change every year to prevent stockpiling of skins — make that difficult, because a flap of skin must be left behind the rear legs.

"Where the flap is, it's kind of dangerous
to cut it with a hatchet. You might cut your flap. Our boat is big enough you can just put them away from the people and let him die right there. A little time, it's finish. He'll stop the wriggling."

Other strict controls against poaching include a ban on night hunting and special tags which must be fixed into the hide four inches from the end of the tail. The state Department of Wildlife & Fisheries handed out 18,000 of those tags this year.

Richard said the family was allowed 90 alligators last year, too, and had filled the quota within five days. That will probably happen again this year, he said.

He said he's feeling his age, and may not be able to make it out every day.

"I'll be out if I can, because I just love the marsh."