PEARL RIVER, La. (AP) — Dave Singletary said he probably won’t even pull his boat out of its slip today unless better weather promises more alligators.

Singletary and Joe Billiot worked together and bagged seven gators Thursday on the opening day of Louisiana’s month-long alligator hunting season — the only one in the country open to commercial and sport hunters.

“I’ll bet we’d have got 20, if the weather hadn’t been against us,” Billiot said while skinning the catch.

Nasty weather in the Gulf of Mexico pushed high water into the marshes along the Louisiana-Mississippi state line, and torrential rains dropped temperatures and raised water levels even higher.

Singletary and Billiot have licenses to take 92 alligators this season on a 6,200-acre tract of land bordering the West Pearl River.

“We’re going to be through here in about two weeks, if we get some weather — if this storm will let up,” Singletary said.

The seven gators averaged 7 feet in length, and hides sold for $17 a foot last year — a return of $833 for Thursday’s catch, if prices stay the same.

In addition, a seafood dealer is paying Singletary and Billiot $1 a pound for meat this year, gambling that federal regulations against interstate sale of alligator meat will be dropped or amended within a month.

At about 30 pounds per 7-foot gator, that’s another $210 return from Thursday’s catch for the hunters.

However, the meat won’t go on sale right away, while Battistella’s checks to make sure everything is legal.

“We don’t want to buy 10,000 pounds of gator meat and find out we can’t sell it,” said Frank Zuccarelli. “It’s such a new thing. We did it last year, a spur-of-the-moment thing, and this year we are going into it a little more and have a little more to take care of.”

He said the company found out the day before the season opened that yet another license was required, and officials are checking to see if they’ve missed anything else.

In addition, he said they will be certain that any meat they buy was caught legally.

“Anybody can go out and kill an alligator,” he said.

No estimate of the take was available for all 13 South Louisiana parishes where the month-long annual hunt is taking place. Some 18,000 gator tags were issued, and taking an alligator without permission or leaving it untagged can result in stiff fines and a federal jail sentence.

Singletary hoped Thursday to equal his catch of a 14-footer last season, but his biggest was about 8 feet.

Although the large patterns on the hides of the big gators make them less desirable for purses and boots, hunters like to cull them from the marshes. The big ones eat more, destroying other gators and furn bickers, and they’re generally past prime breeding age.

Wednesday night, the hunters baited big hooks with over-ripe chickens, then dangled the hooks a foot over the water on ropes tied to poles or trees near spots known to be inhabited by large alligators.

Thursday morning, they found one hook straightened out and one rope broken.

“I’d like to see the one that broke the rope,” Billiot said.

Most of the hooks were found baitless and gatorless — a misfortune blamed on high waters that let big garfish get to the bait.

The first gator boated was a 6-foot male.

Billiot pulled him alongside an aluminum flatboat, bopped him with the blunt end of a carpenter’s hatchet and made him mad. Billiot got in another