Gator Trappers Baiting Hooks for Louisiana's 1980 Season

GRAND CHENIERE — With the break of dawn, Louis Canik and his crew of alligator trappers took their last sips of coffee and left James ‘Teannie-Man’ Hebert’s house, located off La. 82 near Grand Cheniere.

They were ready to make the first run of their gator lines for the 1980 Louisiana alligator season.

The day was last Thursday and with the rising sun, they reached above thunderheads building deep on the eastern horizon, we motored west on La. 82 to check the first line of the season.

To catch alligators, trappers use baited hooks and a quarter-inch nylon or rope line. The bait is placed on a large hook which is attached to a leader fastened to the line. The leader is attached to a closepin tied to the pole.

Then the pole is stuck in the mud and pushed forward until the bait is hanging just above the water. When an alligator smells the bait it swims under it and snare it, swallowing bait and hook.

When the trapper sees a line, he pulls the cord, which is secured to a stationary object, and pulls the gator to shore where it is shot through the head. After the gator is killed, the trapper makes an incision across the hind legs, where the tail meets the body, on the back, and rolls on its back. Then the trapper pushes the tail forward to break the spinal cord, which prevents the tail from moving.

When the day’s hunt was concluded, we headed for Canik’s home to begin skinning the 13 gators caught. On opening day last season, Canik and his men trapped 37 gators. When asked why the count was down this season, he replied:

“We had an extremely dry summer this year. Plus, a lot of salt water was pushed inland because of Hurricane Allen, which forced the gators to migrate north some to find fresh water.”

Canik seemed optimistic about being able to sell alligator meat this season, thereby cashing in on extra bucks.

“Having the meat will mean extra income. Before this season we either sold it to friends, or to other hunters, or were forced to discard it.”

“This year we closed our facilities and bought a walk-in cooler to meet government regulations for storing the meat,” Canik explains.

Gator meat tastes different from each other, and most agree that its taste is similar to frog, turtle or chicken.

“We’re hoping that the public will treat gator meat as a delicacy. This would mean better prices for the meat,” Canik notes.

Federal regulations forbid interstate sale of alligator meat, and there are state and federal guidelines to follow when processing the meat. However, federal bans on interstate marketing of the meat may prevent consumers from buying gator meat, either in restaurants or over the counter.

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OVER THERE — Besides selling gator skins and meat, many Bayou State alligator trappers hire themselves out to sport hunters seeking a gator as a trophy. Here, Jerry Canik (right) points out a gator to a sport hunter from Wisconsin. Guiding sport hunters is an added source of income for the trappers.

GATORS — The day’s catch of alligators is piled up to be skinned and gutted. For a day’s work, Louis Cabilik and his crew of trappers took home about 13 gators caught near Grand Cheniere in Cameron Parish. Canik will harvest about 150 alligators during the month-long season which ends Oct. 4th.