Market for gator skins called strong

The alligator market appears to be bullish again this year, according to the people who will help hunters sell their hides at state-sponsored sale sites.

Hunters of the 25,000 alligators allowed by this month's state-controlled harvest will again have three public places to meet with buyers, who last year paid $40 to $50 a foot for much-valued alligator skin.

Organized by the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, the sales will be held on Oct. 9 in Cameron, Oct. 10 in Raceland and Oct. 12 in Abbeville, all starting at 8 a.m.

Buyers will submit written bids. Once the bids are announced and posted, hunters will be free to make their own deals with individual buyers.

"These are public sales that offer buyers and hunters an opportunity to do business at one site. Sales involve no fees or commissions," said Vermilion Parish fisheries agent Mark Shirley, who organized the first sale in Abbeville five years ago. He adds that the hide market again appears "bullish."

Hunters received record-high prices last year, and the continued popularity of alligator leather in European and Far Eastern markets also should help sales, he said.

The Cameron sale will be at the parish mosquito control barn and will be coordinated by Extension fisheries agent Paul Coreil. The Abbeville sale, headed by Shirley, will be at the Extension Service Exhibit Building on Port Street. The Raceland sale, coordinated by Extension fisheries agent Alan Matherne, will be at the Lafourche Parish Fair Building near the U.S. 90 bridge that crosses Bayou Lafourche.

The sale in Raceland was created for convenience of the large number of alligator hunters from large land companies in Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes, who had been taking their hides to the Abbeville sale. The sale at Raceland replaces one held for three years in St. Bernard Parish.

According to Shirley, last year's fourth annual sale in Abbeville had 2,275 hides on which buyers bid $777,714. He said the sale had grown too large, lasting in 1988 from early morning until midnight. The biggest group of hides numbered 455 from Gheens in Lafourche Parish.

According to Coreil, last year's inaugural sale in Cameron attracted 1,041 hides that sold for $324,507.

The St. Bernard sale, coordinated by the late Warren Mermilliod of the Extension staff there, attracted 131 hides in 1988. They sold for $42,237.

Mermilliod died in a skin-diving accident off the Louisiana coast earlier this year.

Anyone interested in knowing more about an individual sale should contact Shirley in Abbeville at (318) 898-4335, Coreil in Cameron at (318) 775-5516 or Matherne in Galliano at (504) 632-6852.