



Alligator Egg Harvest Better than Last Year

A unique partnership continued between the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida alligator farming community and University of Florida biologists with the close of the 2002 alligator egg collection. Egg collection was completed over a 12 day period in freshwater swamps, lakes, streams and rivers throughout central and south Florida. Last year drought triggered the production of fewer nests and this year flooding rains drowned quite a few nests. Farmers collected about 75 percent of the eggs they hoped, but it was a considerable improvement over last year.



Alligator farmers pay the costs of collecting eggs from public lands. In addition, farmers pay a \$5.00 fee for each egg which helps support the Commission's statewide American alligator management and research efforts.

Collection areas are dense stands of willow, cattail and other wetland plants. Fire ants swarmed over the nests and were defeated by rubber gloves and a heavy coating of petroleum jelly at the wrists.



Nests are spotted from the air by helicopter with location instructions radioed down to collection teams in airboats. Two-person teams excavate the nests while keeping an eye on the nearby female alligator. Luckily, the noise and disturbance created by the helicopter and airboats frightens most females away.

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Statewide Invasive Species Strategic Plan Completed

The Invasive Species Working Group (ISWG) composed of the Department of Environmental Protection, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, five water management districts, Department of Transportation and Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, have completed a strategic plan to trigger increased coordination and cooperation amongst the agencies and stakeholder groups.

The ISWG has reviewed and discussed public input accepted during a comment period that ran from March 6th to April 26th. As a result several changes were made. The agencies recognized the plan is a strategic approach to invasive species and not a plan to directly manage them. They changed the plan title to reflect its strategic nature.

The Division of Aquaculture is pleased to announce the employment of Dr. John Teem as an invasive species specialist. Dr. Teem will be working on; invasion biology issues; methods to prevent, control and manage invasive species; screening and risk assessment methods; policy development at the state and national level; and industry outreach.



John received a Bachelor of Science degree in Microbiology from Ohio State University and a Doctorate in Biology from Brandeis University. He joins the Division following a stint as a research scientist at Florida State University in the biomedical field.

The definition for invasive species was amended to “nonindigenous species that have the ability to establish

self-sustaining, expanding, free-living populations, and may cause economic and/or environmental harm as measured by a risk assessment accepted by the ISWG.”

In addition, new material will be included in the plan to recognize lag time (i.e., the unexplained delay between introduction and spread) and that private landowners must be recruited to eliminate relict populations.

As the next step the ISWG will begin the process of developing an agency Memorandum of Understanding to formalize cooperative activities and to form working committees to address specific topics.

For information about the ISWG and strategic plan, please visit <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/invaspec/index.htm> or call John Teem at 850-488-4033.

Pilot Red Tide Management Plan Implemented

A pilot red tide management plan for Gasparilla and Pine Island Sounds has been implemented for certified shellfish processors of hard clams from selected aquaculture lease areas. The Division and hard clam industry representatives reviewed the New Zealand and State of Washington programs to manage shellfish areas that experience hazardous algal blooms that contain marine biotoxins. If the pilot program works, then the Department’s rules regarding shellfish harvesting closures may be amended. The pilot program consists of three components that involve approximately ten certified shellfish processors:

- Closure of an entire Shellfish Harvesting Area for red tide remains unchanged for the current Florida Red Tide Contingency Plan.
- When a Shellfish Harvesting Area is closed for red tide, the Department may allow harvest of hard clams from selected aquaculture leases within a specific zone

under *controlled quarantine conditions* at the Shellfish Processing Plant Certification License level. This option would not be available if any Department-collected red tide cell counts in the specific zone exceed 200,000 cells per liter.

- If cell counts in all water samples fall to 5,000 cells per liter or less in the entire area, the Department will collect shellfish meat samples for toxicity testing and the entire Shellfish Harvesting Area will be reopened if results of all samples are <20 Mouse Units per 100 grams.

“Controlled quarantine conditions” consist of specific and stringent shellfish area identification, harvesting, handling, facility and testing requirements.

For additional information, contact David Heil at 850-488-4033 or heid@doacs.state.fl.us.

Apple Snail Technical Bulletin Available



Apple snails, especially the golden mystery snail which is a color variant of the spike-topped apple snail (*Pomacea bridgesi*), are popular aquarium species because of their colorful appearance and tank cleaning abilities. Unfortunately, the similarly appearing

channeled apple snail (*P. canaliculata*) is a recognized pest of rice and taro. Several states and Asian countries have been invaded by this snail and the USDA-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is considering national regulations for this species

The Division has developed a technical bulletin to assist tropical fish and aquatic plant producers with apple snail identification, taxonomy, biology and regulations. For copies, contact Ceda Rudd at 850-488-4033 or visit <http://www.floridaaquaculture.com/Pub/Pub.htm>.

New Program at the Inspection Stations

The Department's Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement is responsible for the monitoring and inspection of agricultural products moving in and out of Florida. Products are inspected for animal and plant pests or diseases, compliance with Federal-State Marketing Agreements and to insure compliance with regulations enacted to make certain the public receives quality food products. On an annual basis 11 to 12 million vehicles are checked at 22 stations.



In an effort to reduce traffic load at the inspection station off-ramps and the checking of carriers that are not handling agricultural products a Prepass program has been instituted at the three interstate inspection stations. Carriers pre-approved by the Department as non-agricultural carriers are supplied with a transponder that signals the driver to by-pass the inspection station. Approximately 5 percent of the Pre-pass carriers are stopped for a random inspection.

Agricultural carriers with regulated products, including aquaculture products, must always stop at the inspection stations. For additional information contact Captain Roger Pittman, 352-463-3130.

Spring Viremia in Carp

In early July a koi producer in North Carolina experienced the first outbreak of spring viremia of carp (SVC) in the United States. This is a viral disease that has been a problem in Europe, the Middle East and Russia. It can trigger significant mortality of young koi, common, grass, bighead, silver and Crucian carp.

The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, USDA-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service cooperated in responding to the disease. The facility was placed under quarantine.

A team of veterinarians has produced a SVC fact sheet that describes symptoms, transmission, diagnosis, treatments, prevention and regulatory information. Contact Dr. Denise Petty, pettyb@doacs.state.fl.us, 863-519-8663, or Dr. Roy Yanong, rpy@gnv.ifas.ufl.edu, 813-671-5230 ext.104, for a copy.



BMP Notes

Aquaculture Certification Renewals are Due

Florida Statute requires that the Department certify all aquaculturists in the state. Aquafarmers must complete an aquaculture certification application to be recognized as a commercial aquaculturist, sell their products legally and be entitled to other agricultural benefits.

Certified aquaculturists must comply with Aquaculture Best Management Practices to ensure compliance with the state's environmental goals.

Current producers were sent renewal notices for the July 1, 2002 to June 30, 2003 certification year. If you have not done so, please submit your renewal immediately.

To receive an application for a new farm or to get more information, contact Ceda Rudd at 850-488-4033 or ruddc@doacs.state.fl.us.

If you have a question about BMPs, call or send them to Kal Knickerbocker, 850-410-0875 or knicke@doacs.state.fl.us.

Alligator Egg Collection (continued from page one)

Commission and water management district biologists determined that 1,560 nests could be harvested this year. The Commission closely supervises all collection efforts which yielded 22,000 to 23,000 eggs.



from its attachment point and die.

Immediately following collection, eggs are “candled” in a shrouded box using a bright light to determine egg fertility or the stage of embryonic development.



Each egg is marked and packed in nest material. The marking helps prevent rotation during handling. If the eggs are rolled over the developing embryo will break loose

University of Florida graduate students working with Dr. Paul Cardielhac participated to gather biological data related to egg quality and hatchling survival.

The eggs are hatched in farmer-owned incubators and grown out on farms from Gainesville to Homestead. Last year 13 alligator farmers sold \$3.25 million worth of hides and processed meat.

Division of Aquaculture

The Division of Aquaculture’s primary responsibilities include certifying all legitimate aquaculturists through an annual registration, implementing a program of Aquaculture Best Management Practices to meet the State of Florida’s environmental goals, managing 1.4 million acres of coastal waters for the harvest or culture of wholesome shellfish, implementing the National Shellfish Sanitation Program through periodic inspection of shellfish processing plants and product, and issuing submerged sovereign land leases for the culture of shellfish or live rock.

The aquaculture and shellfish industry can acquire assistance through a variety of means. The Division can be contacted by telephone, 850-488-4033 and 488-5471, or fax 850-410-0893. Tallahassee and the seven state offices are open five days a week from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Offices are located in Apalachicola, Bartow, Cedar Key, Murdock, Orlando, Palm Bay and Panama City. Internet users can visit the Division’s web site at <http://www.FloridaAquaculture.com> for industry and program information.

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