

Amid Harvey chaos, fears of alligators escaping captivity

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Alligators, such as this one seen in Louisiana in April 2017, are freshwater giant reptiles that could easily attack humans and are native to Southeast Texas

As flood waters in Texas rose to unprecedented heights Tuesday, so did fears that hundreds of captive alligators may get loose and swim into populated areas.

Gator Country, an animal park and sanctuary located northeast of

Houston, was inundated with water close to topping its fences, which are the only things holding back 350 alligators.

"We're less than a foot from ([water](#)) going over the fences," the park's owner Gary Saurage told television station KFDM on Monday.

"We don't know what to do."

Alligators—the freshwater variety of the giant reptiles that could easily attack humans—are native to Southeast Texas, so they were not kept in containers, Saurage said.

Other potentially lethal animals, such as poisonous snakes and crocodiles—the alligators' saltwater brethren—had been removed from exhibits and put into enclosures.

The two biggest alligators, "Big Al" and "Big Tex," were also safely inside trailers, but the rest of the brood—mostly rescued from the wild—were roaming inside the park.

The television station's report about an impending jailbreak worried residents already grappling with record-shattering rainfall that's caused widespread flooding in Southeast Texas.

The state's chief scientist for alligators on Tuesday offered words that were meant to comfort.

"If some escape, it's still a drop in the bucket compared to the wild population," John Warren of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department told the Houston Chronicle.

"We understand it's a legitimate worry," he added, offering reassurances that the captive alligators would likely not go far from their food source,

even if they do manage to escape their enclosure in a rural area 15 miles (24 kilometers) from the nearest major city.

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