

# More gator complaints may mean rule change

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Increased complaints about alligators encroaching on human activities prompted Florida officials to consider easing rules for trapping and killing the animals.

Some proposals would allow homeowners to trap the gators themselves, rather than call state-sanctioned trappers, The Washington Post said. Other ideas being considered would change alligators' legal status from "species of special concern" to "game," which would allow more extensive hunting.

The state's alligator population is estimated at more than 1 million. Florida wildlife biologists said they received about 18,000 complaints last year, the Post said.

Florida allows limited alligator hunts but the species is protected under state law, the Post said.

Officials said the larger number of complaints isn't because of an increase the alligator population but because of an influx of people into Florida, the Post said. The human population increased 11 percent -- nearly 2 million residents -- over the last five years.

"We build thousands of homes every year in the wetlands, and now we're up to our ears in alligators and we wonder why," Todd Hardwick, a state-hired trapper who handles complaints in South Florida, told the Post.

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