

Alligator gar are one of the most unique fishes in Texas. Their prehistoric appearance, long lifespan, large size, and specific breeding requirements add to the mystery and majesty of this distinctive fish.

However, some of the unusual characteristics of the alligator gar also mean it is susceptible to overharvesting. For example, alligator gar can live more than 50 years, but they may only breed a few times during their entire life cycle. Alligator gar require shallow areas of flooded vegetation in order to reproduce, so flood control measures such as dams and dikes have largely eliminated their preferred spawning habitats across North America. As a result, populations have declined across much of the alligator gar's historical range, and they have been extirpated, or classified as threatened or endangered in several states. Growing human population and growing interest have increased the fishing pressure on this species.

Texas Parks and Wildlife fisheries biologists are concerned about the lack of harvest data, and an increasing interest in alligator gar fishing in the Trinity River driven in part by online videos and televised fishing shows. TPWD biologists estimate less than 5% of the alligator gar may be harvested annually and still maintain a healthy population. In order to protect this species, TPWD has recently proposed a 48-inch maximum length which would protect most adult, spawning-age alligator gar while still allowing some harvest. The fish are particularly vulnerable at night when they are easier to spot, and so a proposed statewide prohibition of nighttime bowfishing gives additional protection. In addition, TPWD is requesting that anglers report their alligator gar harvests within 24 hours. The one fish daily bag limit would remain, and the agency will also establish a drawing for a limited number of oversize harvest tags.

Alligator gar facts:

- The scientific name is "attractosteus spatula."
- Alligator gar have been measured at over 8 ft in length. Fish over 200 pounds are not uncommon.
- The Trinity River in Texas is known internationally for producing trophy class fish
- It's a native Texan—fossils closely related to our modern alligator gar date back 215 million years.
- Females reach reproductive maturity around 11 years of age, males around six years of age.
- Most alligator gars over 6 feet long are female.