

Living with **River Otters**

General information

River otters are a water-loving member of the weasel family. They weigh 15-30 pounds, are usually dark brown, and have long and narrow bodies. River otters can be found throughout Florida, except for the Keys, and are most often seen in or near water. They are powerful swimmers and eat a wide variety of prey including crustaceans, amphibians, reptiles, fish, birds, insects and small mammals. River otters are a valuable furbearer resource worldwide and play an important role in Florida's ecosystems as a top predator in their habitats. River otters can occasionally create a nuisance by eating fish in hatcheries and stocked ponds, or by digging dens in pond banks.



What can be done to prevent problems with river otters?

- Add structures such as sunken trees or cinder blocks, to a stocked pond and help fish hide from river otters and other predators, including larger fish, raccoons and birds.
- Install an electric fence or 3X3 inch mesh fencing to prevent river otters from entering ponds.
- Lethal control should be considered a last resort.



USFWS

Legal status

River otters are a native species that may be legally trapped and hunted in Florida. River otter hunting and trapping regulations and seasons can be found at MyFWC.com/hunting. A river otter can be taken as a nuisance if it causes or is about to cause property damage, presents a threat to public safety, or causes an annoyance in, under, or upon a building, per **Florida Rule 68A-9.010**.

Legal options to take a nuisance river otter

River otters are beneficial as an important part of river, lake and stream ecosystems. River otters generally prey on non-game fish but it is best to prevent problems with river otters by providing fish with hiding places or excluding river otters from stocked ponds. Removing individual river otters does not prevent others from moving into or using the same areas in the future. However, if a river otter is a nuisance, it can be trapped or shot using legal and humane methods.

- Nuisance river otters can be shot on private property during daylight hours with landowner permission. Check with your local police department or sheriff's office for firearm ordinances before discharging a firearm.
- Cage traps and snares can be used to capture nuisance river otters without a permit as long as they are checked in intervals of less than 24 hours. Remember: snares are not species-specific. The trapper is responsible for any animal caught in a snare.
- Steel traps can only be used with an FWC-issued Steel Trap Permit. These permits are normally issued for situations where there is significant livestock loss or property damage and other alternative options have been tried or are not feasible. Apply at the appropriate FWC regional office for this permit.



Please note: All traps must be checked at least once every 24 hours. Captured non-target species are required to be released on site. All live-captured river otters must be euthanized, released on-site, or released on a property within the same county of capture that is 40 acres or larger with written permission from the landowner on-site, or released on a property within the same county of capture that is 40 acres or larger with written permission from the landowner.



If you have further questions or need more help, call your regional Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission office:

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Regional Offices

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Panama City, FL 32409-1659
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North Central Region

3377 East U.S. Highway 90
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Northeast Region

1239 S.W. 10th Street
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Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Regional Offices

