

Deepwater Gator Harpooning? Try a “BoneCrusher” Harpoon!

By Captain Phil Walters, GatorGuides.com

As with most hunting, terrain often dictates the methods & tools to be used to efficiently harvest our prey. This also holds true for gator hunting as well. While there is an overall lack of technical information available on the finer points of when & where to use key equipment while gator hunting, allow me to address a very popular style often used in many states to harvest trophy class gators.

The use of a rod & reel is often a very effective method used to attach an initial restraining line to an alligator as required by rule. This method is used in open water where there are few weeds or obstruction to foul your treble hook or distort your retrieval line.

The two principal styles are to sight a suitable gator and cast a hook over him while he's swimming (works best when there is enough light to actually see the gator) and the hooking of a target on the bottom while working a mud or bubble trail.

While the sight method is fairly self explanatory, the mud or bubble trailing takes a little more practice to perfect. For trailing, you are reading the activity of the bottom of the water body where your target has submerged by activity you are viewing at the surface. When they hit a suitable bottom, something other than rock or sand, they may leave either disturbed water, stirred mud/silt or better yet, in decaying vegetation, a trail of the gasses released from the bottom made from it's decomposition. Either way, if the water's surface is modestly flat and you have a good bottom to work, the submerged gator may be leaving you plenty of clues as to his whereabouts. Often, when I'm scouting new areas, I'll look specifically for soft mud bottom areas. When I can find a gator in this type of habitat, day or night, he could become an easy target. While he may submerge & think he's hidden from you, if he leaves signs of his location, that's where my hook goes and often it's onto a nice gator.

Once hooked, you now know where the gator is. The only problem is you still don't have “control” of the beast. Depending on the size and “attitude” of the gator, it may sit tight or it may run for a few hundred yards. My experience has been when you hook a true monster in the 12'+ class, they often don't run very far. I've had more than one 13'+ gator run no more than 20 or 30 yards. So if you think you hooked a log that's not moving, be prepared! If it's an athletic gator, he may burn line off the reel or may resort to towing you & your boat around for a short while, usually in the 5-15 minute range.

When it's determined it is a gator you have hooked, you now have two tasks; attach more lines for control and tire the gator out so you can dominate & dispatch him. I often use a spinning reel for the first line then switch to a heavy-duty bait casting type reel for additional lines.

Even when you have a few lines upon him, it is PRUDENT that you drive a harpoon into him for ultimate control. The reason for harpooning is the harpoon is attached to a rope which gives superior control over a fishing rod. The other key reason is once a harpoon is buried into a gator, they don't come out. With snatch hooks, especially on a rod, due to the toughness of the gator's hide, the hooks rarely penetrate. If you have a hook on a very lively gator & bring him boat side, once the gator starts to thrash a little, there is a high probability he will throw your hook back to you.



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I make it a habit to harpoon the gator for control at the very first window to do so. This all but guarantees the capture of the gator, especially if it's a very large one. The only issue is if the situation unfolds to where the gator runs to deep water and decides to play the game of “attrition” with your mind, spirit & body. This game plays well for the gator as he can sit comfortably on the bottom for extended periods of time, while inversely, the work, sweat, anticipation & pain is on your end of the line.

With weather, time constraints, boating traffic, your body's endurance and many other factors coming into play on the gator's behalf, there is a tool that could increase your ability to win over the brute and conquer HIM! This is the ability to harpoon him with a dominating line & quickly bring him boat side, even in deep water.

For this task, I use a "BoneCrusher" harpoon pole. This is a tool perfect for this situation. The "BoneCrusher" is made with 8' of $\frac{3}{4}$ " galvanized steel pipe with a driver attached to the end. This pole will accelerate on its path down to the gator, often with enough energy to punch through the armor on a big gator's back. This is the perfect tool to engage for negotiating a stubborn, deep water gator.

A few tips before using. If you can attach at least two fishing lines to the gator do so. Just remember if your boat is over the top of the gator, it's very hard to "jig" & hook him as you don't have any scope on your line & you're jigging his back. The best bet is to back away from the gator to gain scope or to work your line from the front of the boat to the stern. Should you not be able to attach two lines, you can still attempt to harpoon him however; give good thought as to how the gator is laying, which way he is facing & where you have the gator hooked as you'll need to guess where to drop the pole to hit him. (Hint: If the line zig-zagged when he ran, you hooked the tail.)

With two lines attached, place both lines perpendicular to your boat, (this is critical as if they are at an angle, then the "BoneCrusher" is not over the gator when you drop it.) with a portion of the gator obviously resting between the lines. Line up the "BoneCrusher" between the lines & drop her down, but be ready as hit or miss, the gator is going to run once the pole is dropped! If successful, the dart should be buried into the gator & you can now bring him to the surface. Should he be a monster or darted in the rear, put another dart into him for both control & insurance (You can NEVER have too many lines in a monster!). Once you have legal restraint/control of him, dispatch him, tape the jaws, sever the spine and proudly slip your tag in his tail!

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