

FWC
Division of Law Enforcement



Weekly Report
July 15 through July 21, 2016

This report represents some events the FWC handled over the past week; however, it does not include all actions taken by the Division of Law Enforcement.

Patrol, Protect, Preserve

NORTHWEST REGION

CASES

BAY COUNTY

Officers Hellett and Alsobrooks responded to a complaint of an alligator that had been shot in the City of Parker. Arriving on scene, they contacted a Parker Police Officer and located a dead alligator tied up to a seawall behind a house. The subject who owned the house stated that he saw the alligator in the water behind his house and got his brother, who lives next door, to shoot the alligator. After the brother shot the alligator, they both tied it to the seawall. Both subjects gave written statements of the incident and the alligator was seized. Charges have been filed with the State Attorney's Office.

ESCAMBIA COUNTY

FWC officers provided waterborne security during the annual Blue Angels Air Show on Pensacola Beach. During the three-day event, a total of 60 FWC officers conducted 589 hours of law enforcement patrol in and around Pensacola Beach providing security to the estimated 750,000 people attending the show by both land and water. An estimated 20,000 people attended the show by way of water aboard approximately 3,000 vessels. FWC officers conducted more than 250 vessel stops, checked more than 1,000 users and issued several citations and warnings for boating safety violations. Additionally, four boaters were arrested for BUI, two for underage drinking and two for assault.

JACKSON COUNTY

Lieutenant B. Allen and Officer Burkhead responded to a boating accident on Lake Seminole in which two vessels collided. Both vessels had one occupant/operator on board. The collision caused significant damage to both vessels and serious injuries to one of the operators. At the conclusion of the investigation, the vessel operator at fault was charged with violation of U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Navigational Rule Number 8 (action to avoid collision).

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Officer Pifer responded to a complaint of a vessel harvesting red snapper in state waters off the Gulf of Mexico during the closed season. The vessel name provided was one that Officer Pifer was familiar with as being a federally permitted charter vessel out of Destin Harbor. Officer Pifer launched his patrol vessel and located the suspect vessel with customers on board actively engaged in fishing in state waters. A saltwater fisheries and license inspection determined that the vessel had red snapper on board which were harvested from state waters. The vessel's captain was issued a citation for the violation.

Officer Pifer was on land patrol conducting fisheries and license compliance when he observed a vehicle with an expired tag parked in the parking lot. A computer check of the tag and registered owner determined that the owner had an active warrant out of Santa Rosa County for failure to appear. As Officer Pifer was leaving the parking lot, he observed an individual matching the driver license photo of the wanted individual. When asked, the individual provided his name which was that of the wanted person. Officer Pifer notified FWC Dispatch who confirmed the warrant. The individual was arrested and transported to the Okaloosa County Jail where the intake process was completed.

RESCUES

HOLMES COUNTY

Lieutenant Walsingham and Officers Yates and White responded to assist the Holmes County Sheriff's Office with a search and rescue on Choctawhatchee River at the Highway 2 boat ramp. A swimmer had become distressed and disappeared under the water in the strong current. Through a collaborative effort with Holmes County Sheriff's Office, Geneva County (Alabama) Sheriff's Office, Alabama Game and Freshwater Fish Commission, and Jackson County Sheriff's Office, the missing subject's body was located later that afternoon by the Jackson County Sheriff's Office Dive Team, using side scan sonar.

Officer Kinney assisted the Washington County Sheriff's Office with a search and rescue on Econfina Creek. Two adult females and a juvenile underestimated the arrival time at their destination and were stranded on the creek after dark. Officer Kinney responded and assisted the Sheriff's Office. Due to the very low water levels and numerous trees blocking the creek, Officer Kinney was unable to navigate the area by boat. Shortly after daylight, the subjects were located by land. They were unharmed and transported to their vehicles.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

WASHINGTON COUNTY

Officer Letcher participated in an outreach event at the Shepard's Gate Church in Sunny Hills during their Vacation Bible School. He spoke with approximately 50 children about boating safety and conservation. He showed the children his patrol vessel, handed out whistles, and answered numerous questions.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

BREVARD COUNTY

While on foot patrol, Officer Kearney observed a man catching undersized mangrove snapper and placing them in a nearby bucket. The officer approached the man and conducted a resource inspection. During the inspection, the officer discovered that the man was in possession of three undersized sheepshead and 28 undersized mangrove snapper, well over the legal bag limit of five mangrove snapper per person. Officer Kearney issued the man a notice to appear for over the bag limit of mangrove snapper, undersized mangrove snapper and undersized sheepshead. A warning was also issued for expired fishing license.

Officer J. Humphrey was working land patrol on the north end of Brevard County when she observed several subjects quickly loading their fishing tackle into a truck to leave. She conducted a marine resource inspection and found seven oversized black drum in the bed of the truck still on stringers. The fish were claimed by three fishermen, putting the group four oversized black drum over their limit. A further investigation revealed two goliath grouper in a cooler. One of the subjects claimed both grouper. Appropriate citations were issued.

While conducting patrols in the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Officer Hallsten observed a man pulling a large monofilament net into his vessel. A fisheries inspection was conducted on the vessel a short time later and it was discovered that the cast net measured over 16 feet long with a stretch mesh of five inches and was being used as an entangling net. The subject was arrested for fishing with an entangling net in state waters and also for possession of an entangling net in state waters.

PUTNAM COUNTY

While performing a freshwater commercial fisheries inspection at a boat ramp on the St. Johns River, Officer Jones found that one of the subjects was in possession of cannabis, drug paraphernalia, and was driving the tow vehicle with multiple driver license suspensions. The subject was charged and booked into the Putnam County Jail.

MARION COUNTY

Officer Rice was contacted by a Statewide Nuisance Alligator Trapper in reference to two subjects taking an alligator off of one of their traps. The subjects first denied taking the alligator but, when told that FWC Law Enforcement would be called, they admitted to having the gator. The trapper provided Officer Rice with pictures and videos of the subjects bringing the alligator back. Officer Rice was able to identify and locate the subjects. During an interview, one of the subjects admitted to the offense and was subsequently charged with possession of an alligator without a permit. A warrant was obtained for the second subject for possession of an alligator without a permit and for interfering with the lawful taking of game.

VOLUSIA COUNTY

While performing routine checks on commercial crab traps for compliance, Officer Ward found that nearly a dozen traps belonging to one particular crabber did not contain the required bio-degradable panel. The violator was cited and educated on how to bring his traps into compliance.

In mid-July 2016, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) issued a \$14,000 notice of violation as a result of a case made in 2015 by the offshore patrol vessel, *Osprey*. The *Osprey*, captained by Officer McDonough, was on patrol 35 miles offshore of Volusia County when they conducted a fisheries inspection on a commercial grouper/snapper boat. FWC Officers Yetter and Luce boarded the vessel and located 137 pounds of red snapper fillets. The officers also determined the vessel was over its bag limits for mutton snapper by 914 pounds and snowy grouper by 519 pounds. The grouper and mutton snapper were sold by NOAA for more than \$6,000. The seized/forfeited proceeds were in addition to the \$14,000 fine amount.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

ORANGE COUNTY

Investigator Wayne participated in a multi-agency table top exercise at the Orlando International Airport concerning the illegal import of wildlife. The exercise was successful with many positive lessons learned.

Public Information Officer Weber, along with Officers Maslo, Cogburn, Mendelson and D. Humphry, attended the International Convention of Allied Sportfishing Trades (ICAST) event in Orlando. According to the ICAST website, it is the world's largest sportfishing tradeshow and is the premier showcase for the latest innovations in fishing gear, accessories and apparel. The officers made contact with approximately 1,000 people over the three-day event. They answered questions ranging from new boating safety laws to hunting and fishing regulations. They also gave lessons on fish identification using a live fish tank that was on display.

Recruiting Officers Sweet, Howard and Public Information Officer Weber attended the Phi Beta Sigma Summit at the Gaylord Palms in Orlando. The Phi Beta Sigma fraternity is a National African American Fraternity. The officers made several positive contacts and were thanked multiple times for their service. Officers Sweet and Howard talked with several qualified candidates and represented the FWC in a positive and professional manner.

MARION COUNTY

Officers Sumpter, Sweet, Morro, and Taylor attended the City of Ocala Cops, Kids, and Firefighters field day. There were more than 500 kids from various summer camps in attendance. The officers spoke to each one about hunting, fishing, boating, wildlife identification and our natural resources.

OSCEOLA COUNTY

Officer Mendelson attended a public hearing at the Osceola County Commissioner's Chambers in Kissimmee alongside several FWC biologists and other employees. The meeting discussed Split Oak Wildlife and Environmental Area's management plans produced by the advisory group. The public was present to voice their opinions and concerns on the area.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

Officer Norris was on foot patrol at the Boca Grande Fishing Pier in efforts to conduct fishery and license inspections. While concealing himself in the mangroves, he observed a subject catch what appeared to be a snook and put in a cooler. After approximately 10 minutes, the two subjects packed up their things and appeared to be leaving the pier. Officer Norris made contact with the subjects and asked if they had caught or kept any fish. The subjects opened the cooler and pointed to several fish. Officer Norris identified one of the fish as a snook, which is currently out of season to harvest. During the conversation, it was unclear if they had any other coolers of fish as it was dark and both subjects kept looking back to a wooded area by the pier. Officer Norris contacted K9 Officer Stasko to assist with the investigation. K9 Officer Stasko arrived on scene and was able to confirm there were no other fish or coolers in the woods. Officer Norris explained the violations to the subjects and issued the appropriate misdemeanor citations.

Officers Norris and Stasko located several vehicles inside Gasparilla Island State Park after hours. None of the vehicles were displaying the appropriate after-hours pass and fishing equipment was observed in plain view in the vehicles. The officers were able to locate two groups of subjects fishing along the beach. Once contact was made, it was discovered that none of the subjects had the necessary after-hours passes to be in the park. The officers explained the process to obtain the after-hours pass and issued the appropriate paperwork for several resource and state park violations.

LEE COUNTY

Officer Wilkenson and K9 Officer Collazo arrested an individual who had provided false information during a recent traffic stop while enforcing speed violations along the Daniels Parkway panther zone. The subject was stopped for travelling 71 MPH in a 45 MPH panther zone and the driver provided a false name, date of birth and social security number to the officers. The officers were contacted a few days later with new information about the traffic stop which started an investigation into the newly provided information. The investigation resulted in the operator being arrested and booked into

the Lee County Jail without incident for providing false information to a law enforcement officer.

Officer Perry watched a subject cast netting at a local spillway. The subject left quickly in his vehicle and after committing a traffic violation, Officer Perry stopped the vehicle to address the violation and perform a resource inspection. The driver was found to be operating a motor vehicle without a driver license and had previous traffic history for failure to pay traffic fines. Officer Fogle arrived to assist and the subject was arrested and booked into the Lee County Jail without incident.

Officer Perry was watching snook fishermen at a popular night-time fishing spot on Sanibel Island, when he noticed a group of 8 individuals fishing from the beach. Shortly after, one of the individuals caught a small snook and buried it in the sand next to the group's cooler and fishing gear. Officers Thompson and Salem moved in and made contact with the group and located the buried snook along with several whiting and mangrove snapper. One individual was cited for the snook violation, three were cited for not having fishing licenses, and three written warnings were issued for undersized mangrove snapper.

Officers Thompson and Salem were conducting surveillance of several people fishing late at night at a popular pass. After watching one group for a while, the officers decided to conduct a resource inspection. During the inspection, the officers found several whiting and an undersized mangrove snapper in a cooler. The officers noticed that a tackle box was open and placed over an area of disturbed sand. When they removed the tackle box, the officers found a snook, taken out of season, buried in the sand. The group denied knowing anything about the snook. What they didn't realize was that Officer Perry was also at the pass that night, working in plain clothes, and had watched them harvest the snook. Appropriate charges were filed.

MANATEE COUNTY

In the area of Longboat Pass, Officer Berg observed a vessel approach the south Coquina Boat Ramp. There was evidence that led the officer to believe the subject was fishing. After questioning, the subject stated he had only caught a "ladyfish" in his cast net and other small bait. Officer Berg conducted a fisheries inspection which revealed one 20-inch snook in his fish box. The subject was cited for harvesting undersized and out-of-season snook. He was also given a warning for harvesting a snook by illegal method. The subject also had an active warrant and was transported to Manatee County Jail.

PASCO COUNTY

Officer Williams received information of individuals trespassing on private property in the Hudson area. Officer Williams, K9 Officer Wolff, and Lieutenant Parisoe responded to the property and set up a perimeter around any visible exits. The officers were able to locate the two individuals near a lake on the property without incident. The two

individuals stated they thought the lake was open to the public. Per the landowner's request, the two individuals were cited for trespassing and escorted off the property.

SARASOTA COUNTY

While Officer Brown was on land patrol in the area of Albee Road Bridge, he performed a fisheries inspection on a man who had been fishing around the bridge and was now packing up his gear. During the course of the inspection, Officer Brown found that the subject had caught and kept one 22-inch snook out of season. The subject was cited for possession of snook out of season and possession of undersized snook. He was also written several warnings for other fisheries violations.

Officer Brown was on land patrol when he got dispatched to a call off of I-75 near mile marker 199. Dispatch advised that a trooper with the Florida Highway Patrol had stopped a car for a traffic violation on I-75. During the stop, the trooper noticed that the subject was in possession of one undersized snook, 18 inches and one undersized spotted seatrout, 11 inches. When Officer Brown arrived on scene, he cited the subject for possession of snook out of season and possession of undersized snook. The subject was also given a written warning for the undersized trout.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

LEE COUNTY

Officer Stuart Spoede attended a kids fishing camp at the Pink Shell Resort on Fort Myers Beach. Officer Spoede spoke to the attendees about fishing ethics and regulations and about the job of an FWC officer.

SOUTH A REGION

CASES

BROWARD COUNTY

While Officer Brock was on water patrol near the Hillsboro Inlet, he responded to the mouth of the inlet after hearing a call on the marine band radio of a capsized boat in the inlet. He arrived on scene within minutes and found Sea Tow and TowBoatUS had already picked up five persons from the water and were towing the vessel to calm waters. Sea conditions were about 5-foot waves in the inlet. The boat was headed out of the inlet when a large wave crashed over the bow. As the operator turned the vessel to head back in, the boat was hit by another wave and turned over onto its side. The five occupants wearing life jackets were thrown into the water. Officer Brock took all of the people from the towboat onto his boat and proceeded to the 14 Street Boat Ramp in Pompano Beach to meet the other tow boat that had re-righted the boat. There were no injuries. Officer Brock will be completing a boating accident investigation.

Captive Wildlife Investigator Corteguera responded to an anonymous complaint of an individual possessing a “monkey.” The investigation revealed the subject was in possession of a coatimundi and a dwarf caiman without the required license. Captive Wildlife Investigators, FWC Reserve Officers Rubio and Delatorre arrived for assistance. The subject released ownership of the animals to the state and received warnings for the illegal possession. The animals were transferred to properly licensed facilities.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

FWC Captive Wildlife Captains, Lieutenants, and Investigators conducted inspections at twelve automotive mechanic shops in the West Palm Beach area. These inspections were in conjunction with personnel from Palm Beach Sheriff’s Office, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and Code Enforcement. These inspections targeted the potential illegal disposal of mechanical waste and other hazardous materials. Numerous environmental violations were documented during the inspections, and eight warnings were issued. Follow up inspections will occur to ensure the violations have been brought into compliance.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officers Guerin and Morrow conducted a presentation for the Jupiter Recreation Center’s summer camp during the camp’s Wilderness Week. The campers, a group of 23 five-year olds, were educated on a variety of topics, including wildlife identification, outdoor safety and FWC’s mission. During the presentation, campers were given the opportunity to see a hatchling alligator and learned about its habitat and natural defenses. At the conclusion of the presentation, campers were given the opportunity to ask the officers questions and share their experiences with wildlife.

Officer Brock visited a day care school in Boca Raton to educate them about the Florida Everglades. He brought a small, live alligator and snake to capture the kids’ attention. He presented information to the children on how to be good stewards of the environment and respect wildlife.

SOUTH B REGION

CASES

COLLIER COUNTY

Late one evening, Investigator Van Trees made contact with a group of people exiting Clam Pass Beach Park who he suspected had been fishing. A fisheries inspection revealed that there were four undersized snook and one undersized mangrove snapper

hidden in a paint bucket. One subject admitted to keeping the fish, although he did not catch them himself. As Investigator Van Trees was speaking with the group, the subject who admitted to keeping the illegal fish fled into the nearby woods. Local agencies assisted in the search, but were unable to find the suspect. With only a foreign ID to work with, Investigator Van Trees found out where the subject worked, what vehicle he would be in and where he got dropped off each morning. Along with Officer Osorio-Borja, the officers waited for the subject to be dropped off for work one morning and arrested him without incident. The subject admitted to fleeing because he thought he would be going to jail the night of the incident. The subject was booked into jail for the resource violations, resisting arrest without violence and an outstanding federal warrant via US Marshals for human smuggling.

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

The crew of Miami's Offshore Patrol Vessel was recently conducting a federal fisheries patrol mission east of Fowey Light when they attempted to stop an inbound, high-powered vessel. The officers observed the inbound vessel come to an abrupt but brief stop and then speed away toward Key Biscayne. The officers quickly approached the area where the vessel had stopped and recovered a bag of lobster tails that was still floating. The patrol vessel then took off in pursuit of the fleeing vessel and radioed for assistance. An FWC officer on land patrol was able to spot the incoming vessel and radioed an updated position. The three occupants of the fleeing vessel quickly tied up at Key Biscayne Yacht Club and fled on foot. The pursuing FWC officers caught the two adults, one male and one female, and the third occupant, a juvenile, was later found at his residence. After a thorough investigation, the male occupant, who was the vessel operator, was taken to jail and charged with multiple lobster violations, undersized hogfish, reckless operation, interference with the duties of an FWC officer, resisting arrest without violence and a manatee zone violation.

Two officers were on water patrol near the Venetian Causeway Bridge when they observed a vessel violating the posted manatee zone. The officers stopped the vessel and quickly suspected the operator to be under the influence of alcohol. After investigation, the operator was arrested for BUI and taken to jail. He was also cited for the manatee zone violation as well as multiple boating safety equipment violations.

Officers on park patrol at Cape Florida observed two men on kayaks in the harbor. Both kayaks were equipped with coolers, fishing nets and fishing poles. Underneath one seat of a kayak was a Bahamian starfish. A full inspection of the kayaks compartments revealed the two men to be in possession of four Bahamian Starfish. They were cited accordingly.

MONROE COUNTY

Officer Plussa was activated for an early morning call-out to respond to a conflicting report of a grounded vessel and possibly a boating accident off Knight's Key Bank in Marathon. Due to the conflicting information and multiple unknowns, Officer

Plusa classified the call as a search and rescue until otherwise confirmed, urgently responding with his patrol vehicle and vessel emergency equipment activated. Once on-scene, Officer Plusa determined it was not a search and rescue case, but a grounding with seagrass damage. Once the vessel was removed by Sea Tow, Officer Plusa conducted a safety and resource inspection of the vessel. The operator and his three passengers were less than cooperative and somewhat argumentative with the officer and Sea Tow captain. FWC records indicated the same vessel and operator had been issued multiple citations and criminal fisheries charges just several days prior. In addition to the operator receiving three warnings for multiple safety violations, Officer Plusa cited him for failing to maintain proper lookout to prevent the grounding, and scarring of the seagrass in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Officer Plusa ensured they made it back to shore safely.

Officer Hein was on land patrol in the Islamorada area when he noticed an individual fishing from a bridge not designated as a fishing bridge. Officer Hein conducted a resource inspection and asked the man if he had caught any fish and he replied he did not catch any fish. Officer Hein noticed the individual's belongings at the beginning of the bridge and asked to search his belongings, including a bucket, and the individual agreed. At the conclusion of the resource inspection, the individual was cited for possession of undersized mutton snapper, undersized schoolmaster snapper, and failure to land marine life alive.

While on vehicle patrol at Mile Marker 8 by the fishing culvert next to the trail that is managed by Overseas Greenways & Trail, an officer observed a group of persons heading back to their vehicles with fishing poles and buckets. One person put one bucket in his vehicle. The officer asked if they had caught any fish. One person said yes but he didn't keep anything. The officer asked to see what was inside the bucket. The officer found a clear bag with mangrove snapper and asked if he had any more fish. He said no. The officer looked inside the trunk and found another bag with more snapper. After measuring all 11 snappers, all were undersized. The suspect was charged with three misdemeanors and given a written warning for a fishing license violation.

Officer Hein was on water patrol in the Islamorada area just after dark when he noticed several individuals in waist-high water with lobster nets and flashlights looking into the water. Officer Hein approached the individuals and they explained they were just trying to catch fish and crabs. Officer Hein explained to them that they needed fishing licenses to harvest saltwater products and informed them lobster season was closed and told them not to catch lobster. The individuals began walking out of the water back to their vehicle. Officer Hein continued water patrol and docked the patrol vessel and began land patrol. Approximately 1 ½ hours later, Officer Hein returned to the scene where the men were warned and surveilled the area with night-vision goggles. Officer Hein noticed the same individuals in the water and conducted a resource inspection. At the conclusion of the resource inspection, one individual was arrested and transported to a detention facility for possession of undersized lobster, possession of lobster out of season, failure to possess a measuring device while actively harvesting lobster, and

failure to have a valid recreational saltwater fishing license with the proper lobster stamp.

RESCUES

MONROE COUNTY

Officer Plussa was conducting a vessel stop in Sisters Creek near Marathon when he observed what appeared to be a dog, run and jump from the sea wall, swimming deep into the mangroves on the other side of the canal. After searching for over an hour with the help of several concerned citizens, Officer Plussa found the Newfoundland canine trapped in mud under mangrove roots by the rising tide. Officer Plussa rinsed "Harvard" of mud and safely returned him to his caretakers on shore.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

COLLIER COUNTY

FWC staff were invited to attend Deputy Day, which was sponsored by the Collier County Sheriff's Office (CCSO). Deputy Day is part of CCSO's summer youth day camp program. FWC biologist, Hannah Bates, Lieutenant Bulger and Officer Araujo all participated. Ms. Bates provided a presentation on bear awareness and bear behavior while Lieutenant Bulger and Officer Araujo presented a talk on alligators. Approximately 200 youths from the community participated in Deputy Day.