FWC Division of Law Enforcement



Weekly Report April 7, 2017 through April 13, 2017

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

CALHOUN COUNTY

Officers Hayes and Baber were working two separate baited food plots that Officer Hayes had previously identified. Although no subjects were seen at the baited areas, the officers heard a shot close by on the same hunting lease. The officers moved to investigate and located two subjects who had killed a gobbler. After a short interview and inspection of the area where the bird was killed, it was determined that the area was baited. Both subjects were cited for taking turkey over bait and the turkey was seized as evidence.

GULF COUNTY

Officer M. Webb was approximately 16 miles offshore on water patrol in the Gulf of Mexico, when he conducted a vessel stop and fisheries inspection. The captain of the vessel was in possession of four red snapper and was issued a citation for possession of red snapper in federal waters during a closed season.

Officers H. and M. Webb were on water patrol approximately 14 miles offshore in the Gulf of Mexico when a subject was seen dumping a fish from a vessel. The fish was recovered and determined to be a red snapper. The subject was issued a citation for possession of red snapper in federal waters during a closed season.

JACKSON COUNTY

Officer Burkhead was conducting land-based water patrol at the Jim Woodruff Dam when he noticed a vehicle with vessel in tow that had fishing equipment and several coolers on board. As he approached the vehicle, he noticed a chest containing live bait in the truck. Officer Burkhead received permission from the owner to inspect the cooler. 21 red drum were found in the cooler, 20 of which were under the legal size. The owner was charged with possession of over the bag limit of red drum and several counts of undersized red drum. The fish were taken as evidence.

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Officers Jarvis and Maltais were patrolling the coastal shoreline conducting state fisheries and license inspections. One of many resource stops involved two fishermen catching over the bag limit of pompano. The officers counted a total of 19 pompano. One of the individuals was issued a notice to appear citation and both individuals were issued a citation for no saltwater fishing license.

SANTA ROSA COUNTY

Officer Ramos received information that several men were fishing in Escambia Bay and keeping red snapper. After making his way to the area, the officer saw men actively fishing. When he asked the men if they had caught any fish, they replied that they had not. License and resource inspections revealed that one of the men had caught and kept two red snapper. The fish measured 11 and 10 inches, respectively. One of the men admitted he caught both fish. The fish were seized and the man was charged accordingly.

Officers Mullins and Hutchinson were patrolling the Yellow River Wildlife Management Area (WMA), when they saw a truck damaging the road by spinning out. They stopped the truck and approached the man driving it. While speaking with him, three more trucks with large mud tires pulled up to them covered in fresh mud. The officers discovered that they were all together. During interviews, the men driving the trucks admitted to riding along closed roads and mud riding in a closed clay pit. While the officers were driving back to the pit to access the damage to state lands, they saw more damage to the roadways that was caused by the four trucks. The officers issued each man a notice to appear citation for damage to public lands by a motor vehicle. They were also issued warnings for driving on closed roads.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

ESCAMBIA COUNTY

Officer Clark attended the Annual Kid's Fishing Clinic in Pensacola. There were approximately 400 kids in attendance, making it one of the largest in the state. The kids were taught the basic techniques of fishing and were given a rod and reel. Officer Clark answered many fish and wildlife questions from the parents.

Officer McHenry attended the Annual Firefighters Challenge at Pensacola Beach. He displayed a marked patrol truck in a first responder's area that was set for kids. He also handed out brochures and answered many questions.

HOLMES COUNTY

Lieutenant Walsingham and Officers Yates and Tison attended the At the Park Day at Ponce De Leon State Park. The Holmes County Public Library partnered with Holmes County 4-H Club, schools and the park to host a day of outdoor education for the elementary school children. Approximately 400 people were in attendance, including US Congressman Matt Gaetz. Students were educated on the importance of our environment, conservation and safety. The children learned about the role of FWC and the Division of Law Enforcement. They were shown Officer Yates' patrol vessel, truck, nature-related items and were provided informational handouts while enjoying the outdoors.

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Officer Nichols assisted the staff of Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park with the Annual Mattie Kelly Estuary Family Festival. Activities and exhibits included wildlife displays and shows, kayaking and paddle boarding tours, guided trail hikes by local experts, touch-tanks with Choctawhatchee Bay aquatic species, fish-print shirts, kid-friendly crafts and scavenger hunts. The event was free to the public with approximately 1,800-2,000 guests attending.

WALTON COUNTY

Officers attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the opening of the new boat ramp and park at the Highway 331 Bridge. The park was dedicated to Thomas Pilcher, a retired Florida Marine Patrol officer and a member of the Board of Conservation. The FWC representatives were Officers Jarvis, Trueblood, White, P. Rockwell, Lieutenant Clark and Captain Rondeau. The offshore patrol vessel *Vigilance* was tied to the new boat ramp. The FWC representatives provided an informational booth during the event.

Officer Tison participated in a West DeFuniak Elementary School outreach event. He spoke with approximately 15 students about the importance of fish and wildlife conservation and covered various topics, including the duties of an FWC officer.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

BREVARD COUNTY

Officer Maslo was on patrol when she received a call from FWC dispatch stating a man with an orange bucket was taking undersized mangrove snapper. The officer arrived at a local bridge and found a man fitting the description. A resource inspection revealed the man was in possession of 11 mangrove snapper, seven of which were undersized. The man was also in possession of one undersized spotted sea trout. The man was cited accordingly.

Officer Marroquin was on patrol at Sebastian Inlet State Park when an off-duty officer informed him about a man consuming alcohol in the park. Officer Marroquin approached the man, who was fishing, to address the alcohol violation and conduct a fisheries inspection. The officer's resource inspection revealed the man was in possession of three undersized sheepshead and confirmed he was violating the park's alcohol rules. A citation was issued for possession of undersized sheepshead and a warning for consuming alcohol in a state park.

ST. JOHNS COUNTY

Officer Aswall was conducting late afternoon Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) dockside patrols at the Vilano Boat Ramp north of downtown St. Augustine and

encountered a local fisherman in possession of scamp, a shallow-water grouper, among his catch. The shallow-water grouper season is closed annually in the Atlantic for recreational harvest and possession from January 1 through April 30 each year. Officer Aswall issued the fisherman a citation for possessing a scamp grouper during the closed season.

Officers Graves and B. Miller were on late afternoon patrol in Anastasia State Park and saw several commercial oystermen harvesting from the conditionally approved area just north of the park's boundary in Salt Run. A short while later, the officers met with some of the oystermen at the nearby Lighthouse Park Boat Ramp. During an inspection of two oystermen working out of the same vessel, the officers found six bags of oysters, two of which were full of undersized attached oysters. Furthermore, the oystermen admitted to the officers that they did not use nor carry a shellfish harvesting gauge of any kind and did not attempt to cull the attached undersized oysters. The officers issued each harvester a citation for the misdemeanor violation of possessing greater than the 15% tolerance for attached oysters measuring less than three inches.

VOLUSIA COUNTY

Officer North and Lieutenant Baer were on foot patrol in Clark Bay Hunt Club when they located a pop-up ground blind 43 yards from an active feeder filled with corn and soybeans. Closer inspection of the area revealed a turkey kill site, including feathers that had been cut next to shot, wadding and a shotgun shell just outside of the blind. As they were walking back to their vehicle, the officers were confronted by a man who claimed the hunting site was his. He told the officers that he had already killed his two-turkey limit on opening weekend and showed them pictures on his phone. He claimed he killed the turkeys at another location in the hunt club. After he was informed of his Miranda rights, the man was interviewed and presented with the evidence located at the scene. He then admitted to killing one of his turkeys on opening day out of the blind that was only 43 yards from the feeder. He also advised that the feeder was in working order and dispensing feed the day the turkey was killed. Officer North prepared a case packet antorney's office.

Acting on information provided by the FWC investigations section, Officer Sapp responded to Seville in response to the report of a man and woman who were advertising tilapia and catfish for sale to the public on Facebook. The man was issued a criminal citation for selling freshwater fish without a retail license and the woman was given a warning for the same offense.

RESCUES

LAKE COUNTY

A hiker called 911 because he was lost somewhere near Alexander Springs Run in the Lake County portion of the Ocala National Forest. He had been hiking for three days

and ran out of food and water. Officers Sapp, Belleville, Morrow, Scrambling and Shaw responded. Officers Belleville and Sapp located the hiker by vessel. The subject refused medical treatment and was returned to his vehicle.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

MARION COUNTY

Officers Dias, Hargabus, Sweet and Investigator Staub participated in the FWC Youth Turkey Hunt in Halpata Preserve. Prior to the hunt, the officers scouted the area for the optimal blind locations near roost sites and strut zones. In addition to scouting and setting up blinds, the officers sat with the participants and acted as their guides, teaching the kids different tips and tactics of turkey hunting, woodsmanship, and even found several antler sheds. This provided great interaction with the young generation and their parents while sitting with our FWC officers. Many questions were asked and answered while in the blind. The officers' hard work and dedication was rewarded with a 100% success rate for the youth hunters. All hunters harvested turkeys, with two having 11-inch beard length and one having 1½-inch spur length.

ST. JOHNS COUNTY

Officer Aswall presented the recreational fisheries laws and basic boating safety portions of the Women's Saltwater Fishing Clinic, sponsored by the agency's Division of Marine Fisheries Management and hosted by Biologist Heather Sneed. Officer Aswall spoke to approximately 25 women anglers at Miller's Boating Center in Ocala and touched on topics such as how to properly measure a fish, size and bag limits, species identification and proper stowage and wear of personal floatation devices.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

While on patrol in Ruskin, Officer Messman conducted a fisheries inspection on a shoreline fisherman. Through the course of the inspection, the fisherman revealed he caught a snook and placed it in a cooler in his vehicle. The fisherman admitted the snook measured towards the lower end of the slot limit. The snook was measured at 25 inches and the individual was cited for possession of an undersized snook.

The Tampa Police Department requested the help of FWC officers around the Courtney Campbell Causeway and the Hillsborough River due to the ongoing high numbers of jet skiers driving recklessly. Officers Ahlers, Baker, Bibler and Lieutenant Van Trees assisted and made numerous stops and contacts. Many citations and warnings were issued ranging from boating safety violations to possession of illegal drugs.

MANATEE COUNTY

While Officer Davidson was on land patrol around SR 64, he was backing up a Bradenton Police officer that was performing a traffic stop. The officers were parked on the side of SR 64 with their blue lights flashing, when another vehicle passed them at a high rate of speed and failed to move over. Officer Davidson performed a traffic stop on the vehicle that failed to move over and found that the driver was smoking cannabis. The driver was also found to be in possession of a felony amount of cannabis, and the passenger in the car had a warrant out for his arrest. Both the driver and passenger in the car were transported and booked into the Manatee County jail for their violations.

Officer Dalton was dispatched to a complaint that a subject was in possession of a gopher tortoise. After arriving on the scene, he indeed found that the subject was in possession of a gopher tortoise. The individual was cited criminally for possession of a gopher tortoise and given a notice to appear in court.

PASCO COUNTY

Officers Pulaski and Bergwerff were working commercial fisheries in the Hudson Beach area. From a concealed position, the officers monitored a local seafood dealer. They saw two individuals packaging and loading gulf shrimp into a minivan. When the subjects started to leave, the officers conducted a stop and determined the individuals were transporting commercial quantities of saltwater products (gulf shrimp) without proper documentation. The appropriate citations were issued.

PINELLAS COUNTY

While on water patrol near Tarpon Key, Officer Bibeau received a call from dispatch advising him of wade fishermen keeping undersized snook near Lassing Park. Officer Bibeau arrived on the scene a short time later and encountered a fisherman who said that he had caught a mangrove snapper, sheepshead and snook, all attached to a stringer. The fish were inspected and the subject was found to be in possession of an undersized sheepshead and snook. The subject was cited accordingly.

Lieutenant Van Trees responded to a call for assistance from the USCG about a vessel that had run aground near Boca Ciega. The USCG advised they were trying to get all the occupants off the vessel that ran aground. There were three individuals, some of which were intoxicated, that refused to leave and kept trying to get the vessel unstuck. Concerned for their safety, the USCG was worried about leaving the intoxicated occupants on the vessel and asked FWC and Pinellas County Sheriff's Office for their assistance. Lieutenant Van Trees, along with the deputies, convinced the remaining occupants they weren't going to move the boat, and they needed to come with the officers to make it back to shore. Lieutenant Van Trees could smell a strong odor of marijuana coming from one of the occupants, and a subsequent search revealed a felony amount of marijuana. The subject was booked into jail by the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office.

RESCUES

HERNANDO COUNTY

Officers from Hernando County assisted with traffic control in response to a 1,100-acre wildfire in the Weeki Wachee Preserve.

LEE COUNTY

Officers Rogers, Hardgrove, Perry, Furbay, Bell and Lieutenant Ruggiero responded to a search and rescue for a missing kayaker. The man failed to return from a fishing trip the night before. The officers worked closely with the USCG, Lee County Sheriff's Office, Cape Coral Police Department and Cape Coral Fire and Rescue, as they covered the area throughout the day, night and continued into the next day searching for the man. Unfortunately, the man was found deceased late that afternoon. This is an ongoing boating accident investigation.

Officers Perry and Salem were on water patrol near Bokeelia when a call for distress was received by FWC dispatch. Two kayakers along with two small children were out kayaking in the Matlacha area, when their kayak began taking on water and sinking. The officers arrived on the scene and took the family back to a local boat ramp. The officers also assisted in pulling the sunken vessel out of the water at the boat ramp.

PASCO COUNTY

Officers Pulaski and Bergwerff were in route to release an alligator on Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) lands when they encountered a K-9 deputy on the property. The K-9 deputy advised they were responding to three hunters lost in the woods. The hunters' approximate location was four miles away. The Pasco County Sheriff's Office personnel located the lost individuals and the K-9 deputy and FWC officers assisted the individuals with safely returning to their vehicle, and the alligator was released on the district lands.

PINELLAS COUNTY

Officer Bibler and Lieutenant Van Trees responded to a jet ski accident at the Courtney Campbell Causeway where an 18-month-old was struck by a jet ski. Investigator Freemon, Officers Bibeau and Ferguson also responded to assist in the investigation. The boating accident investigation is still ongoing with the investigations unit.

SOUTH A REGION

CASES

BROWARD COUNTY

Officer Tarr responded to a complaint of a fisherman catching and keeping undersized mutton snapper on the Dania Pier. Officers Tarr, Defeo and Seldomridge walked down

the pier and located a subject matching the description of the complaint. They spoke to the subject who advised that he did not have any fish and had not caught any fish all day. During a resource inspection, the officers found two undersized mutton snapper hidden in a bag. The subject had been previously warned for possession of illegal fish and was issued a criminal citation for possession of undersized mutton snapper and a warning for interference with an FWC officer. The fish were seized and submitted into evidence.

Officer Kuester, Investigator Warne and Lieutenant Carcasses responded to a boating accident involving a diver who was seriously injured when he was struck by the propeller of the commercial dive boat he was diving from. A USCG Investigator also responded since it involved a vessel actively involved in commercial activities. The USCG is handling the ongoing investigation.

The FWC received a delayed report of a boating accident which resulted in a fatality. A vessel with six passengers on board began taking on water and eventually capsized and sank. The USCG and a commercial tow boat company responded and retrieved the six occupants from the water. One of the occupants required CPR and was transported to a local hospital where he was pronounced deceased. The FWC is handling the boating accident investigation.

Investigator Warne, Lieutenant Ornold, Officers Defeo and Seldomridge worked an undercover livery inspection operation. Investigator Warne was operating in a plainclothes capacity and approached a personal watercraft rental company to rent a PWC. During the contact, an employee of the company assisted Investigator Warne with the exam. Officers Defeo and Seldomridge responded and issued the employee a citation for the violation.

GLADES COUNTY

Officer Alford responded to a request for an "other than homemade" vessel inspection. He found that the title for the vessel did not match the hull identification numbers and that this title had existed before the current owner had purchased the vessel. He denied the vessel for title reissuance and notified Investigator Lafoy to investigate possible title fraud.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officers Alford and Nasworth received a call from US Sugar Security involving four subjects trespassing south of Rogers Road. Officer Alford responded and found the subjects fishing near the cultivated field and confirmed that the subjects were not authorized to be on the property. He obtained trespass complaints, signed by a US Sugar representative, and cited the subjects for trespass.

Officers Alford and Worrell received a call from US Sugar Security that three subjects were trespassing in a cultivated field near Hwy 80 in Area 3. Officers Alford and Worrell responded and found the subjects hunting rabbits in the field. They confirmed that the subjects were not authorized to be on the property and obtained trespass complaints, signed by a US Sugar representative, and cited the subjects accordingly.

Officers Alford, Worrell, Nasworth, and Lieutenant Brown responded to a trespass complaint on US Sugar Property with nine subjects hunting rabbits. The officers located the subjects and escorted them from the property.

Officers Alford, Nasworth, Worrell, Toby and Lieutenant Brown all participated in special detail on Torry Island. The purpose of the detail was public safety, public outreach, boating safety and assisting the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office.

ST. LUCIE COUNTY

Officers Fretwell and Arnold were traveling Southbound on the ICW when they saw a vessel traveling in the opposite direction on a full plane in a slow speed manatee zone. A vessel stop was initiated and Officer Fretwell saw the operator having a hard time keeping his eyes open and using the console to keep steady and help him stand. He was also smiling and talking to himself. Officer Fretwell requested that the subject perform field sobriety tasks to determine if the subject was impaired. At a local boat ramp, the tasks were performed by the subject and the results indicated impairment. The subject was transported and booked into jail without incident. The subject was also issued a citation for the manatee zone speed violation and for refusing to provide a breath sample.

RESCUES

OKEECHOBEE COUNTY

A tornadic event occurred in the morning on April 6, starting in Kissimmee Prairie State Park campground and destroying two RVs. One female victim was transported to the hospital for breathing difficulties after her RV flipped over with her inside. Minor cuts and bruises were sustained by two male victims who both refused transport by EMS. The tornado then traveled in a northeastern direction and hit the Fort Drum Ranchettes, located North of Highway 68 along SR 441. Multiple mobile homes were destroyed or sustained significant damage. Several other houses sustained minor damage. Trees and powerlines were down across major and secondary roads and Florida Power and Light was on the scene dealing with the powerline issues. Officers from the FWC, Okeechobee Sheriffs' Office and Okeechobee Fire Department helped clear debris along roadways and went door to door checking on the welfare of the residents. No injuries were reported at the Ranchettes and all occupants were accounted for.

MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

HENDRY COUNTY

Officers Alford and Worrell responded to a panther complaint near Hwy 835 and Dooley Grade. A female panther was found in the road earlier that morning with fatal injuries from an apparent vehicle collision. Once on the scene, Officers Alford and Worrell found the deceased panther on the east shoulder of the road. The officers photographed the scene, took GPS coordinates and stood by for an FWC biologist to pick up the panther for further evaluation.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROLS

OKEECHOBEE COUNTY

Officer Allen attended court on his "taking turkey over bait" case that he made on the opening morning of spring gobbler season. The results were a plea of guilty and a fine, court costs and payment to the Wildlife Alert Fund totaling \$800.00 dollars.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officers Rogers, Carroll, Moss and Norbrothen conducted a detail on board an offshore patrol vessel during the full moon. The officers conducted fisheries inspections enforcing snapper and grouper species south of the Jupiter Inlet. As a result, the officers found multiple violations including undersized triggerfish, vermillion snapper, and out-of-season grouper. All violations were handled accordingly.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

PALM BEACH COUNTY

FWC officers were present at the annual Black Gold Jubilee to answer questions and educate the public about the agency's mission. Officers Alford and Toby were approached by a 9-year-old-girl who had lost her parents. The officers found the child's family and returned her to their custody.

SOUTH B REGION

CASES

COLLIER COUNTY

Officers Reams and Araujo responded to a complaint about a subject cleaning a deer out of season. They arrived on the scene and saw a male subject outside and deer fat on and around a table. When they got closer to the table, they found more meat and fat, along with fat on the knife. Looking through the screen on the back porch, they saw a closed trash can with dry blood and meat on it, a cooler with bloody water leaking out of the drain plug, and a pair of shorts with blood on them in another trash can. They searched the surrounding area and into the neighbors' properties and found more dry blood in several spots. Officer Collazo and K-9 Rosco were called for assistance and K-9 Rosco indicated at several areas. Officers Reams and Araujo then located the subject at another address where he admitted to killing three whitetail deer (2 does, 1 buck) that morning in the front yard. The subject was arrested for three counts of deer out of season and one count of trespass by projectile.

Officers Arbogast and Kleis approached two individuals who were actively fishing to conduct a resource and license inspection. The individuals told the officers that the people across the waterway were catching a lot of snook. The officers looked across the waterway and saw two individuals packing up their fishing gear, and quickly making their way towards a parking lot. Officer Kleis made his way to the parking lot, while Officer Arbogast kept visual on the subjects and radioed the information to Officer Kleis.

Officer Kleis saw the two subjects packing fishing gear into a car, and heard what appeared to be a fish thrashing in a cooler. Officer Kleis asked the subjects if they had caught any fish, to which they admitted to catching and keeping a large snook. Officer Kleis located an approximately 36-inch snook in the cooler. To be legal to keep, snook must between 28 and 33 inches. The subject was issued a notice to appear for the violation and the snook was returned to the resource alive.

Officer Kleis and Investigator White were on water patrol conducting BUI enforcement when they received a call about a grounded vessel with possibly intoxicated occupants. They responded to the scene and saw a vessel grounded on a mud bank that was exposed due to the low tide. There were two occupants on board the vessel, both of which were obviously impaired. Officers Plussa and Arbogast also arrived on the scene to assist and located multiple witnesses who provided sworn statements. The owner of the boat claimed to be operating the boat when it became grounded. The second occupant also stated that the owner of the boat was driving the boat. However, there were multiple witnesses that stated the other occupant was driving the vessel when it became grounded. The investigation determined that both occupants were operating the vessel, and both were highly intoxicated. Both subjects were subsequently arrested for BUI and refused to provide breath samples. The subjects were booked into the Collier County Jail.

Officer Curbelo received a call about individuals shooting in the Picayune Strand State Forest. Three subjects were located and were not displaying the use fee placard in their vehicle. They admitted they had been shooting in the forest and that their guns were in the rear of the vehicle. The rear hatch was opened and an AK-47 rifle and a shortbarreled shotgun were found. One subject was placed under arrest for possession of a short-barreled shotgun. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms is investigating where the subject acquired the short-barreled shotgun.

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

FWC officers conducted a vessel stop near the Gables Waterway while patrolling South Biscayne Bay. A resource inspection revealed the occupants had fish fillets on board. The occupants stated they had returned from the Bahamas and had filleted the fish in another location. The officers explained to the individuals that all fish returning from the Bahamas must have the skin intact. The operator of the vessel took responsibility of the filleted fish and was cited accordingly.

FWC officers stopped a vessel for a fisheries inspection while patrolling Biscayne Channel and discovered an undersized sailfish. The subject also did not have any federal permits to harvest the sailfish they possessed. The boat operator was cited accordingly.

An officer saw a vessel leaving the marina while conducting resources inspections at Matheson Hammock Boat Ramp. Approximately 45 minutes later, the same vessel returned speeding through the manatee zone and approaching the dock in an apparent emergency manner. The vessel had extensive damage to the port side. The officer approached the operator who stated he had been involved in an accident with a channel marker. The vessel was taking on water quickly while docked. The operator removed his vessel out of the water before it sank. The operator then provided a statement to the officer who cited the operator for operating the vessel in a careless manner.

MONROE COUNTY

Officer Mattson was on water patrol in Whale Harbor Channel when he saw a rental PWC doing doughnuts in the slow speed zone. Upon speaking with the 25-year-old subject, Officer Mattson learned the subject had not been given a boater's safety exam as required by law. Officer Mattson brought the PWC into the rental company and he cited the subject for a speed zone violation. He cited the rental operator the misdemeanor violation of not giving the operator the boater's safety test.