

FWC
Division of Law Enforcement



Weekly Report
July 28, 2017 through August 3, 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

BAY COUNTY

Officers Alsobrooks and Hellett responded to a complaint about a vehicle running over a gate and riding around on a private hunting lease. The officers arrived at the scene of the damaged gate and talked with the complainant, who was a leaseholder. He gave them a description of the suspect vehicle and the officers started searching the property. The officers quickly located the vehicle and conducted a stop. The officers also saw one of the passengers throw a beer can from the interior of the vehicle into the woods. The driver admitted to running through the gate with his vehicle because they just wanted to ride through the woods. The driver was cited for damaging the gate and trespass. The subject who threw the beer can into the woods was charged with littering and open container. All the other passengers were issued written warnings for trespassing.

Officer T. Basford was conducting plain-clothes patrols at the Dupont Bridge when he noticed two men fishing. One of the men caught a fish and asked Officer Basford about it. The individual was informed that it was a flounder and needed to be 12 inches to be legal. Officer Basford saw the men for a brief time until they started to pack up and leave the area. As the men were leaving, Officer Palmer stopped the two men to conduct a resource inspection. During the inspection, the men were found to be in possession of undersized flounder, spotted seatrout, red drum, and gray snapper. One

of the men took responsibility for the undersized fish and was issued the appropriate citations.

GULF COUNTY

Officer Alsobrooks received a tip about a group of individuals that were possibly poaching alligators on Howards Creek. Officer Alsobrooks proceeded to the area in hopes of finding the suspects' vehicle and boat trailer. Once at the ramp, he located the truck with the empty trailer. After a short wait from a concealed location, Officer Alsobrooks saw the vehicle back down towards the ramp. He approached the truck/vessel and spoke with three individuals. While speaking with them, the officer noticed blood on the carpet/deck of the vessel. A detailed investigation, with assistance from other officers, revealed nine alligators had been poached within the last 24 hours and an additional subject was involved that was not present. Appropriate charges were issued for the violations.

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Officer Pifer was on land patrol conducting saltwater fisheries and license inspections when he contacted an individual fishing from a pier at a county park. Upon inspection, an egg-bearing blue crab was found in the individual's bucket. Photographs of the crab were obtained and it was released alive. The individual was cited for possession of an egg-bearing blue crab.

Officer Pifer was on routine water patrol when he saw a PWC operating in a reckless manner. The operator was seen driving towards another PWC and turning away at the last minute to splash the occupants of the other PWC with water. A vessel stop was conducted during which indicators of impairment were observed and during which the individual stated he had consumed alcohol. Field sobriety tasks were conducted and the individual was placed under arrest for BUI. At the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Station Destin, the individual refused to provide a breath sample. The individual was charged with operating a vessel with normal faculties impaired, reckless operation of a PWC, and refusal to submit to a breath test.

Officer Maltais and USCG personnel were on vessel patrol in the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) in the Santa Rosa Sound enforcing boating and public safety during the Billy Bowlegs Pirates Festival. The officer saw a rental pontoon with 12 persons on board. A male individual on board shoved a female individual, with whom he was verbally arguing, to the deck of the pontoon. The officer immediately stopped the boat while USCG personnel quickly boarded the vessel. The aggressive male individual was separated from the female and placed in handcuffs. Officer Maltais obtained all pertinent information from the occupants/witnesses. It was later determined the aggressive male had an active warrant out of Okaloosa County. Officer Maltais completed an arrest affidavit for a criminal summons for battery.

Officer Pifer was on land patrol conducting state fisheries and license inspections in the Shalimar area and saw an individual wading at a local boat ramp. The officer waited until the fisherman returned from fishing and conducted a fisheries inspection of the subject's cooler. The individual was found to be in possession of over the bag limit of red drum (redfish), possession of undersized red drum (redfish), possession of over the bag limit of gray/mangrove snapper and possession of more than one spotted seatrout over 20 inches. The individual was issued notice to appear citations for the resource violations.

Officer Corbin responded to a single vessel boating accident involving a rented personal watercraft (PWC) that occurred in Choctawhatchee Bay near Crab Island. There were two occupants on the PWC. The investigation revealed that the PWC was going at an unknown high rate of speed when it struck a wake causing the operator to lose control, ejecting himself and the passenger on the PWC. The passenger sustained an injured shoulder when she struck the PWC during the fall. The passenger was later transported by ambulance to a local hospital and treated.

SANTA ROSA COUNTY

Officer Hutchinson was pumping gas in his patrol vehicle when a truck pulled up next to him pulling a boat. He asked the driver if he had been fishing and he stated that they had caught some bass in Hurricane Lake. When Officer Hutchinson asked if he could see them, they were hesitant to show him the fish. The subject was in possession of 11 bass, which is over the daily bag limit. The subject was charged with taking over the daily bag limit of black bass.

Lieutenant Hahr was patrolling in the Blackwater State Forest when he saw four subjects around a campfire in a primitive campsite. The subjects were drinking from fountain drink cups and a jug of orange juice was sitting near a cooler. An older man was present, but two young women and one young man appeared to be under the age of 21. The younger man took a bottle of vodka from the cooler and was drinking from the bottle in front of the older man. When Lieutenant Hahr approached the subjects and identified himself, the young women immediately dumped out their drinks. The younger man was 18 years of age and the two young women were 17. Two cannabis cigarettes and an additional container of cannabis was found, which the younger man claimed. The older man was charged with giving alcohol to a person under 21 and the others were charged with possession of alcoholic beverages by a person under 21. The younger man was also charged with possession of not more than 20 grams of cannabis.

WALTON COUNTY

Okaloosa and Walton County officers assisted multiple agencies with a joint detail to detect illegal outdoor marijuana grow sites which included an FWC aircraft, pilot and ground crews for both counties. During the three-day multi-agency detail, 65 grow sites were detected with 2,692 plants removed and destroyed, with an approximate value of \$5,384,000.

Officers Brady and Rice were conducting offshore patrols in federal waters near the Madison Swanson area, which is closed to the harvest of reef fish. The officers noticed a vessel coming towards their location. After a few minutes, they noticed the vessel come to a stop and several of the passengers begin to fish. The vessel was approximately two miles inside the Madison Swanson area. The officers conducted a resource inspection of the vessel. During the inspection, appropriate federal citations were issued for fishing in the closed area.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

BAY COUNTY

Officer Rice attended the National Night Out event that was held at the Panama City Mall. The event included all the law enforcement agencies and first responders in the surrounding area. The weather was nice and the event was a great success with more than 200 people in attendance. Local news agencies covered the event.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

CASES

ALACHUA COUNTY

Officers Troiano and Reith were working a trespass complaint on a private property in the High Springs area when the officers saw three individuals fishing in the lime rock pits off County Road 236. FWC officers have been requested by the landowner to issue trespass citations due to liability concerns. Officers Troiano and Reith issued trespass citations and fishing license citations to all three individuals. The suspects were escorted off the property after receiving their citations.

DUVAL COUNTY

Environmental Investigator Terrones was contacted for assistance after management personnel of a Jacksonville shopping center found numerous items illegally discarded on their property. A dozen tires, trash bags, car parts and cardboard boxes with the name of a nearby business were some of the items that were dumped. The owner of the business was interviewed and eventually confessed, agreeing to properly dispose of the items. Appropriate criminal charges were filed with the state attorney's office.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROLS

ALACHUA COUNTY

Officers are working area lakes for boating and resource compliance. Officers continued their patrol efforts in the Lochloosa Wildlife Management Area (WMA) to gain compliance with mudding and alcohol-related violations.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

ALACHUA COUNTY

Officer Mims attended a grand-opening event at the new Rural King in Gainesville. Saturday was dedicated to Kids' Day. During the event, Officer Mims had a live alligator on display from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Hundreds of people attended this event and Officer Mims answered questions about FWC's role in resource protection and boating safety.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

BREVARD COUNTY

Officer Lejarzar was working in plain-clothes when he saw a fisherman taking stone crabs out of season and catching undersized red drum in the Merritt Island area. He continued surveillance and as the fisherman was leaving, a marked FWC vessel intercepted the fishermen. An inspection was conducted and the fisherman was found to be in possession of stone crabs and undersized red drum. The suspect was cited accordingly.

Officer Eller was on land patrol when he noticed a vehicle stopped in the middle of a busy highway. Vehicles traveling at high speeds were swerving drastically to avoid the vehicle that was parked in the roadway. Officer Eller noticed that the driver of the vehicle was unconscious across the steering wheel. Fearing that a medical emergency had taken place, Officer Eller opened the vehicle's driver door to check the well-being of the operator. It became immediately apparent that the operator was highly intoxicated and had passed out at the wheel in the middle of a busy highway. The operator was arrested and charged with DUI.

Officer Eller and Lieutenant Bonds were on water patrol in the Atlantic Ocean outside of Port Canaveral due to the increased activity of the mini spiny lobster sport season. Inspection of a vessel revealed numerous legally harvested lobster and some speared reef fish. A closer inspection of the reef fish revealed that one of the gag grouper was undersized. The subject was made aware of the violation and cited accordingly. Later that day, two separate saltwater fisheries inspections offshore revealed subjects attempting to return to Port Canaveral with egg-bearing spiny lobster. All violators found in possession of egg-bearing spiny lobster were cited accordingly.

Officer Eller and Lieutenant Bonds were on water patrol in the Atlantic Ocean outside of Port Canaveral. The officers noticed a larger vessel returning to Port Canaveral in an unusual manner and running south right off the beach. An inspection was conducted and the occupants of the vessel told officers that they did not catch any fish that day. A bag of freshly filleted fish was discovered underneath numerous food and drink items. The fillets appeared to be fresh red snapper. The occupants were made aware of the discovery, interviewed and cited accordingly.

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

Officers Eller and R. Miller performed a saltwater retail/wholesale inspection on a fish house in Sebastian. During the inspection, the manager stated that the business did not purchase any saltwater products from Saltwater Products License (SPL) holders due to the fact they were only retail and not wholesale. While sorting through the business documentation, the manager answered a call in the presence of the officers where he discussed purchasing saltwater products from a fisherman and SPL holder. Further inspection and interviews with the owner validated that the business had been purchasing saltwater products from SPL holders without a valid Wholesale Dealers License. The officers also learned that the business had been operating for some time without a valid Retail Dealers License. The officers also inspected the freezers where the saltwater products were stored and discovered that numerous species of fish were being stored in the freezer without documentation. The officers informed the owner of these violations and he was cited accordingly.

Officers Lejarzar and R. Miller were working near the Sebastian Inlet in the Atlantic Ocean during the spiny lobster sport season. They identified a lobster harvester and conducted an inspection. The inspection revealed a large queen conch hidden deep inside a cooler. The captain of the vessel was interviewed and a citation was issued.

PUTNAM COUNTY

Officers Bernard and Wester responded to Lake Myra to investigate an unlawful fishing complaint. Upon arrival, they found a subject fishing without a freshwater license and using bush hooks that were not properly tagged. The subject was issued citations for no fishing license and using improper fishing gear. A warrant has been issued because this also violated the subject's probation on a prior FWC charge.

SUMTER COUNTY

Officer Teal was on patrol shortly after sunset in Lake Panasoffkee WMA when he noticed a truck drive by on a dead-end county road that divides the WMA. From a hidden position, Officer Teal saw a spotlight being shined from the vehicle into the WMA pastures. After watching the truck continue to stop and shine for about 10 minutes, a vehicle stop was performed. A loaded .22 rifle and spotlight was in between the two occupants of the vehicle. Both occupants confessed to trying to kill a buck deer after a

post Miranda interview. The rifle and light were seized and both men were issued a notice to appear for hunting from a county road and hunting with gun and light.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

While on patrol on the Picnic Island Fishing Pier, Officer Lehman saw an individual fishing near a bucket. During a fisheries inspection, the man was asked if he caught anything. The man advised he caught a snook. The snook was discovered in the bucket under a towel. The individual was cited for possession of a snook during a closed season.

LEE COUNTY

While on water patrol in the Caloosahatchee River, Officer Winton conducted a stop on a vessel returning from offshore fishing. A fisheries inspection revealed two undersized red grouper. The subjects were written a resource citation and warnings for related violations.

While Officer Sehl and Lieutenant Cox were on water patrol near Long Key Bridge in the Keys, they saw two subjects in wetsuits gutting a fish. Officer Sehl exited his vessel onto land and conducted a check. The subjects were in possession of an undersized nurse shark that they both speared within 100 yards of the bridge. Both subjects were charged with possession of undersized nurse shark and spearing within 100 yards of a bridge in state waters.

Officer Hardgrove acquired information leading him to believe that a local commercial fisherman was routinely harvesting fish with a gill net. He believed the fisherman was operating in the Matlacha Pass area, and was hiding his net in the mangroves nearby. Acting on this information, Officer Thompson and Lieutenant Barrett were out during the day searching nearby creeks and coves for the stashed illegal net. As they exited one cove, they were surprised to see their suspect deploy a large net on the flat right in front of them. As the officers attempted to approach the suspect, he fled from them. The pursuit lasted approximately 20 minutes and the suspect was eventually able to make it under a very low bridge and get away temporarily. His vessel was recovered and seized a short time later. The suspect was arrested for multiple criminal violations, including use of a monofilament gill net in state waters, fleeing or eluding law enforcement in a vessel, resisting arrest with violence, and aggravated assault on a law enforcement officer.

MANATEE COUNTY

Officers Gonzales and Hinds were on land patrol near the Palma Sola Boat Ramp when they noticed a boat approaching the boat ramp. As it came closer to the boat ramp, they noticed the captain of the vessel reach down and pick up a five-gallon bucket and proceed to dump the contents into the bay. The two officers could tell that it was fish the captain had dumped out, and retrieved one 8-inch hog fish. The captain was cited for possession of undersized hog fish and given a notice to appear in court.

PINELLAS COUNTY

While on land patrol near Blind Pass, Officer Bibeau saw an individual that was actively fishing from the seawall. Officer Bibeau contacted the individual to conduct a fisheries inspection and, at the conclusion, found the subject to be in possession of seven undersized mangrove snapper, one undersized lane snapper and an undersized gag grouper. Officer Bibeau wrote the individual a misdemeanor citation and multiple warnings for the fisheries violations.

While on patrol near the Gandy Bridge, Lieutenant Laskowski saw two individuals spearfishing near the bridge. From a concealed position, he saw the two individuals in possession of stringers with snook on them. The two individuals hid the snook in some mangroves before walking back to their car. After watching them hide the snook, a fisheries inspection was initiated. The snook were recovered and the two men were cited for illegally spearing the snook and possession of snook during a closed season.

Lieutenant Laskowski responded to assist the Florida Highway Patrol with an individual who had cast netted a snook at the North Skyway fishing area. After being read Miranda, one of the individuals admitted to catching the snook with a cast net. The individual was cited for possession of a snook during a closed season.

Officers Ludtke, Martinez and Bibeau responded to the report of an undetonated naval canister flare on the beach at Three Rooker Island. The three officers responded by water with a State Fire Marshall and two Pinellas County Sheriff's Office Bomb Technicians. The officers worked through the night to recover the flare which was transported to the MacDill Air Force Base for safe disposal.

While on land patrol near Gandy Beach, Officer Bibeau saw four individuals diving and fishing around a submerged rock pile. He watched the individuals from a concealed location and approached them to conduct a fisheries inspection as they were preparing to leave the area. The individuals were in possession of 40 undersized and out-of-season stone crab claws, an egg-bearing blue crab, four undersized sheepshead and an undersized red drum. The individuals were issued numerous misdemeanor citations and warnings for the fisheries violations.

Officers Gonzales and Martinez were on land patrol near the Mustang Flea Market in Pinellas Park, and noticed a woman selling shellfish from a cooler to the public. When the woman was asked if she had a saltwater retail license which would allow her to sell

saltwater products, she could not produce one for the officers. The woman was cited criminally for not having a saltwater retail license and is required appear in court.

RESCUES

SARASOTA COUNTY

Officers Sierra, Hertel, Rivard, Investigator O'Horo and Lieutenant Gerkin responded to an overdue canoer that was stranded in the Lower Lake of Myakka State Park. The canoer left the boat ramp at the park on Sunday afternoon and paddled downriver to the lower lake. The weather then began to deteriorate as Tropical Storm Emily was forming and coming ashore. It was not until Monday morning that the subject's wife called the park rangers and informed them that the subject was overdue. The officers quickly located the subject, unharmed, and transported him back to his vehicle.

SOUTH REGION A

CASES

BROWARD COUNTY

Captive Wildlife Investigator Corteguera responded to an animal cruelty complaint. Upon arrival, he found one deceased raccoon in a trap. Further investigation revealed the raccoon was captured and left in the trap for at least two days in extreme temperatures without food or water, causing its death. The subject was charged criminally with one count of cruelty to animals and one count for failure to release the raccoon within 24 hours as required by law. Officers Ariza and Delatorre assisted.

MARTIN COUNTY

While conducting vessel patrol, Officer Morrow conducted a resource inspection on a vessel returning from offshore. During the inspection, a mangrove snapper which had been filleted and an undersized dolphin were located, which had been caught by the vessel captain. A check of the two involved fishermen revealed that they had no history of fisheries violations. The captain and another fisherman were issued warnings and educated about their violations.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

The USCG contacted the FWC about a possible impaired boater at the New Port Cove Marina. Officer Spradling and Lieutenant Russo arrived and conducted field sobriety tasks on the vessel captain. After their investigation, the subject was transported to the Palm Beach County Jail where he was charged with BUI.

ST. LUCIE COUNTY

While on water patrol, Officer Payne saw a vessel returning to the boat ramp with several individuals on board and visible diving equipment. An inspection of their catch

revealed 15 whole Florida spiny lobsters. After being measured, three of the lobsters were undersized. A citation was issued for the violation and the lobsters were seized as evidence.

MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officer Spradling responded to a call of an alligator in the ICW near Peanut Island. Officer Spradling located the large alligator, then caught and removed him from the water and into his patrol vessel, with the assistance from U.S. Customs officers that happened to be on patrol in the area. Officer Spradling brought the alligator back to Rybovich Marina where his patrol vehicle was located. With the assistance of Officers Godward and Marrow, they relocated and released the alligator back into a remote freshwater habitat.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROLS

PALM BEACH COUNTY

While conducting vessel patrol for the Spiny Lobster Sport Season, Officers Morrow and Hankinson encountered a vessel offshore. Officer Morrow located an egg-bearing/wrung lobster tail while conducting a resource inspection on the vessel. All the vessel occupants were juveniles and, upon questioning, they advised this was their first Spiny Lobster Sport Season and that they were unaware of regulations surrounding possession of wrung tail and egg-bearing lobster. The juveniles were educated on the importance of ensuring they were following resource laws. The juvenile (age 15) that caught the lobster was issued a warning for both violations. The illegal lobster was then seized and returned to the resource.

ST. LUCIE COUNTY

During the Spiny Lobster Sport Season, multiple officers were on water patrol to ensure legal harvest. Although multiple vessels and harvesters were inspected for compliance over the two-day period, few violations were noted. Boating safety as it relates to diving and snorkeling activities were monitored closely. Several vessels displayed the wrong size dive flags and several divers were found to be beyond their "safety zone" when their vessel either traveled or drifted away from them. Public safety was paramount, and violations were handled accordingly.

SOUTH REGION B

CASES

COLLIER COUNTY

Lieutenant Mahoney and Officer Curbelo were conducting freshwater fisheries enforcement near a canal at White Lake Boulevard. During their patrol, they noticed a fisherman shaking out the contents of a cast net near a culvert pipe. They approached

the fishermen as he went back to his vehicle and discovered he harvested two pan fish and placed them into a bucket. As Officer Curbelo explained the violation in greater detail, Lieutenant Mahoney followed the fisherman's footprints along the shoreline leading back to the culvert pipe and noticed a noise coming from the nearby high grass. An inspection of the area revealed a largemouth bass. The fisherman was cited for taking freshwater game fish by illegal method. Both pan fish and the largemouth bass were returned alive to the water.

Officer Plussa was conducting state park patrol in Delnor Wiggins State Park when he was contacted by a patron about subjects harassing gopher tortoises. Two subjects were located with a gopher tortoise nearby. The subjects admitted that they had been playing with and taking photos with the gopher tortoise. When Officer Plussa explained that the gopher tortoise was a protected species of land tortoise, the subjects stated that they didn't believe there was such a thing. The subjects were cited accordingly.

MONROE COUNTY

During the Spiny Lobster Sport Season, the crew of the Offshore Patrol Vessel *CT Randall* performed a fisheries inspection on a vessel approximately 30 nautical miles north of Key West, two days after the Spiny Lobster Sport Season had closed. During the inspection, Officer Yaxley located 71 wrung spiny lobster on the vessel during the closed season, and the vessel was also 59 over the daily bag limit. Federal charges are pending.

Officer Arbogast was in the upper Florida Keys assisting the enforcement effort with the Spiny Lobster Sport Season. Officer Arbogast was on state water patrol with the USCG. During a routine vessel inspection, 10 illegally harvested Queen Conch were found in the center of the subject's vessel. Each shell contained a live Queen Conch. The subject stated that he wanted to use the shells as decorations around his home. All the Queen Conch were returned to the water safely, and the subject was charged accordingly.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

MONROE COUNTY

Officers Dube, Steinmetz and McKay attended the National Night Out event at the Key Largo Community Park alongside our partner agencies. The officers had various snakes and alligators for the citizens to interact with and answered numerous questions about employment with the agency and boating/resource regulations. The US Congressman Carlos Curbelo was in attendance and even held the large alligator and an Albino Burmese Python. Monroe County Sheriff Rick Ramsey personally thanked our officers for participating and especially liked all the wildlife we brought.