

FWC

Division of Law Enforcement Weekly Report



February 2, 2018 through February 8, 2018

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

ESCAMBIA COUNTY

Officer Pettey received information that a group of subjects were catching what appeared to be several hundred pounds of Bonita on the Pensacola Beach Gulf Pier. State law prohibits an individual from keeping more than 100 pounds of Bonita unless they have a saltwater products license (SPL). Officers McHenry and Land arrived to assist. Together the officers found five subjects in possession of 1,145 pounds of Bonita without having the required SPL. The officers seized 645 pounds of Bonita from the subjects. The individuals were allowed to keep the remaining 500 pounds as part of their daily limit. The seized Bonita were donated to the Wildlife Sanctuary of Northwest Florida. Notice to appear citations were issued for the violations.

FRANKLIN COUNTY

Officers Peterson, Kossey, and Travis were targeting undersized oysters in the Eastpoint area and conducted a resource inspection at the Eastpoint Boat Ramp. During the inspection, they determined the subject was in possession of undersized oysters. After checking a bag of oysters for size tolerance, they determined the bag contained 68% undersized oysters. The subject was cited and the undersized oysters were returned to the water alive.

Officers Travis and Carr received a call about subjects hunting deer with dogs in the Apalachicola Wildlife Environmental Area during closed season. They responded to the

Sand Beach area and contacted three subjects, one of whom admitted to allowing his dogs to pursue deer. The subject was cited for running deer during closed season.

Officers Carr and Nelson were patrolling Highway 65 when they conducted a resource inspection on two subjects fishing at the Cashes Creek bridge. Officer Nelson checked their fishing licenses, which were valid, and then he requested to check the cooler and was given permission. The subjects immediately began to explain that the fish in the cooler were given to them about 10-15 minutes earlier. The resource inspection revealed 13 redfish, only one of which was of legal size. The appropriate citations were issued to the subjects. Officer Nelson returned nine back to the water alive and left the one legal sized fish with the subjects.

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Officer Corbin received information from the U. S. Coast Guard (USCG) Destin regarding a 27-foot sailboat aground and blocking part of the channel into Sara Ann Bayou in Niceville. The last known registered owner stated the vessel was sold in October and provided a bill of sale. The new owner confirmed that he purchased the vessel and provided the title documentation. The new owner was aware the sailboat was aground and blocking part of the channel. A notice to appear citation was issued for failure to transfer vessel title into his name, which is required within 30 days of purchase.

Officers Jarvis and Bartlett received a complaint regarding a subject who killed two antlerless deer on Eglin Wildlife Management area. The officers contacted the subject and observed the antlerless deer. A notice to appear citation was issued for killing two antlerless deer.

SANTA ROSA COUNTY

Officer Hutchinson received a complaint about a subject who shot after legal shooting hours while deer hunting. When he responded to the area, he located a man at the house on the property, who claimed to have shot a coyote. After further investigation, the man admitted to shooting a buck after legal shooting hours with the aid of a spotlight in the field in front of his residence. Officer Hutchinson located the seven-point buck. The man was charged with night hunting. The deer was donated to the Waterfront Rescue Mission and the rifle and spotlight were seized.

Officer Hutchinson was contacted after midnight by a Santa Rosa County Deputy Sheriff who requested his assistance. The deputy informed him that he observed a truck driving slowly down a road while a spotlight was being shined from the cab into several fields where deer are located. He followed the truck and stopped it for a traffic violation. Once he stopped the truck, he discovered a freshly killed 4-point buck lying in the bed of the truck. Two firearms were in the front seat. Officer Hutchinson arrived at the deputy's location and immediately recognized the driver of the truck from a previous night hunting case. All three subjects admitted to shooting the deer on the side of the road

with the use of a spotlight. A search of the truck revealed drug paraphernalia and illegal drugs. One subject was charged with night hunting and the drug and paraphernalia violations. The two other subjects were charged with night hunting and shooting from a paved public roadway. Both firearms, the spotlight, and the deer were seized. The deer was donated to the Waterfront Rescue Mission.

Officer Lewis located a subject in Blackwater Wildlife Management Area that was hunting over a food plot and scattered corn. The suspect had placed no trespassing signs up at the entrance to the area and had apparently been hunting the area for quite a while. He was charged with attempting to take deer over bait in a wildlife management area.

Officer Mullins received information regarding an illegal deer that had been taken in Blackwater Wildlife Management Area. Officer Mullins and Roberson met with and interviewed the subject involved, who admitted to taking the deer, but stated that it was legal. When asked to see the antlers from the deer, the suspect was evasive and the officers felt he was not being truthful. The officers asked to see the remains of the deer and the suspect showed them buried remains from the deer he claimed was legal. Laying a few feet from the remains, the officers noticed a small set of antlers that matched the antlers from the deer in question. After an investigation, it was determined that those small antlers belonged to the deer the subject had taken a few days before. Charges were filed for taking a deer that did not meet the antler restriction rule.

WAKULLA COUNTY

Officer Korade responded to assist with a call for service off Forest Road 313 in the Apalachicola WMA. While in route to the area, along Whiddon Lake Road, he observed several vehicles parked along the roadway. The vehicles were occupied by several individuals wearing blaze orange and holding what appeared to be handheld GPS tracking units. Officer Korade made note of this and continued to the assigned call. After completing the call, he returned to the area where he had seen the subjects. Officer Korade was joined by Officers Hughes and Carr. The officers investigated and determined the individuals were allowing their dogs to pursue game on private lands without owner permission. Citations were issued to the individuals for Hunter Responsibility violations.

WALTON COUNTY

Officer Bartlett received an anonymous complaint of two vehicles driving in an area closed to vehicle traffic in the Eglin Choctaw East Management Unit near Range Road 214. The complainant stated while he was exiting the area he observed where the vehicles had drove around a closed gate and pulled the post up to access the closed area by vehicle. When the officer arrived, he contacted both vehicles exiting the area on the same unnamed/unnumbered road they used to access the area. Both drivers acknowledged they drove their vehicles in the closed area and were issued citations for driving in a closed area.

Investigator Armstrong and Officers Brooks and Bartlett were on water patrol on the Choctawhatchee River when they observed a subject in a vessel returning from hunting. When the officers contacted the subject, they observed blood in his vessel. The subject said the blood was from a deer he had killed the day before but was unable to produce any sex identification of the deer – but stated some of the deer meat was at a friend's house in Freeport. Lieutenant Hollinhead and Officer Letcher contacted a subject at the residence and confirmed a portion of a deer had been brought to him. An inspection of the meat did not support when the subject said the deer was killed due to the age of the meat. After several conflicting stories the subject in the vessel took the officers to a houseboat where a deer had been cleaned but there were also multiple deer carcasses that appeared to have been killed in the last several weeks. The antlers on two of the carcasses were less than ten inches. The subject was questioned again and provided a statement that he and his brother had killed one of the deer while night hunting on the river the night before the officers had stopped him. A firearm on the houseboat was identified as the one used to take the deer and was seized and placed into evidence storage. The subject was charged with taking a deer at night with a gun and light and taking a deer with antlers less than ten inches.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

WALTON COUNTY

Local FWC officers helped with the annual mobility impaired Wounded Warrior hunt on Eglin Wildlife Management Area. There were a total of 58 mobility impaired hunters and Wounded Warrior veterans that attended the hunt. The officers tracked/recovered deer for the hunters and responded to calls for service in other areas of Eglin. There were 270 applicants who submitted their requests to participate and 49 hunters were randomly selected. There were 39 deer taken, along with 9 hogs. Also, there were 20 Panhandle Archery volunteers that helped clean deer and provided food for the event.

SANTA ROSA COUNTY

Santa Rosa County officers teamed up with other FWC staff and numerous volunteers to work the Blackwater Hutton Unit Mobility Impaired Hunts. The hunts went off without any issues with several hunters harvesting deer. FWC staff and volunteers provided meals for the hunters and sponsors provided door prizes and giveaways for the hunters. Many hours of preparation from both FWC staff and volunteers go toward this hunt to make it what it is. Many in the community came together and made the hunt a great success.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

CASES

DUVAL COUNTY

The Resource Protection Squad was assigned a call concerning someone setting raptor traps in a county preserve in western Duval County. A trap baited with a live pigeon and mice was located and a Cooper's Hawk that became trapped was released.

Surveillance was set up on the trap and an hour after sunset two individuals were observed leaving a trail and walking down to the creek where the trap was set. One of the subjects admitted to setting the trap. He had no falconry permit and had set the trap in a preserve area where it is illegal to take any animal anytime. Appropriate citations and warnings were issued.

TAYLOR COUNTY

Officer Robson was on patrol at Yates Creek boat ramp checking fishermen as they landed their vessels. During a resource inspection of a commercial air boat, subjects were found to be in possession of a seine net not properly marked at each end wrapped in a tarp in the floor of the boat. The owner received a citation for not properly marking each end of the seine net.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

BREVARD COUNTY

Officer Eller was targeting illegal night fishing in Port Canaveral when he observed a group of men quickly exiting a marina with several coolers. At first contact, the men stated that they were going fishing and that they were preparing their gear. Officer Eller heard what sounded like fish flopping in the cooler and other evidence that indicated this may be untrue. The men gave permission for a search which revealed two coolers full of fish, including six undersized sheepshead and one undersized seatrout. The fish were seized and the subjects were cited appropriately.

LAKE COUNTY

Officer Shaw was on patrol on the south-side of Lake Gertrude when he observed a subject fishing in a boat. A resource inspection revealed the man was in possession of two black bass which were well over the maximum 16-inch size limit. He was appropriately cited for the violation and was also issued several warnings for boating safety violations.

MARION COUNTY

Officer Dias received information from the land manager of Ventura Ranch about someone trespassing. Officers Hargabus, Rice, and Simpson responded to assist. A

Toyota pickup truck was located on the boundary of the ranch with foot sign going into the property. The foot sign was tracked for approximately four miles into the ranch. After three hours, Officer Hargabus contacted the subject when he returned to his vehicle. The adult male subject admitted to trespassing on the property, but would not say what he was doing there. He was issued a notice to appear for trespass on property other than a structure or conveyance.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

ST. JOHNS COUNTY

Officer Graves and Lieutenant Zukowsky gave a presentation on general and local saltwater fishing rules and regulations to approximately 80 members of the Flagler Sportfishing Club in Palm Coast. The evening event was held at the Flagler County Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) club where the officers also provided members information on commercial and federal saltwater fishing regulations, boating safety rules and hunting laws.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

HARDEE COUNTY

Officer Kobs received a complaint from a hunter who witnessed a person shoot a deer from a truck in a nearby field. Two individuals by a truck matched the description given by the hunter. The subjects admitted to shooting a doe, cutting out the backstrap and two leg hams, and placing them in a cooler provided by the second subject. A .22 Magnum rifle was seized from the shooter. The individual was charged with hunting by illegal method and hunting out of season. Additional charges will be direct filed for being a convicted felon in possession of a firearm and hunting with his license being permanently revoked.

LEE COUNTY

Officer Price observed subjects in a wildlife management area late one night and called Officer Perry for assistance. The officers tracked the subjects as they deployed dogs and hunted the area. One of the vehicles began driving in a closed area. At approximately 4:45am, the officers stopped the men as they were leaving the area. During the inspection the men said they were just hunting raccoons, but when asked for their hunting licenses and management area permits, neither of the men had the licenses. The dogs were not tagged with any identifying information. A misdemeanor citation was issued for failing to have the dogs properly tagged, and infractions were issued for not possessing a valid hunting license and management area permit. A warning was issued for operating a vehicle in a closed area.

MANATEE COUNTY

Officer Dalton and Lieutenant Hinds were on water patrol around Terra Ceia Bay. While on patrol they stopped to perform a fisheries and boating safety inspection on a vessel casting netting in the bay. During the inspection the two officers noticed that the subject on the vessel had cast netted three undersized red drum and one undersized sheepshead. The subject was issued one citation for possession of over the bag limit of red drum and two written warnings for undersized red drum and undersized sheepshead.

While Officer Gonzales was on water patrol around Long Boat Pass, he stopped a vessel to perform a boating safety and fisheries inspection. During the inspection, Officer Gonzales found that the captain of the vessel had caught and kept undersized tripletail fish. The subject was issued a citation for possession of undersized tripletail.

While Officer Hinds was on land patrol around Bishop Harbor boat ramp, he stopped a vessel returning to the boat ramp to perform a boating safety and fisheries inspection. The inspection revealed that the subject had caught and kept several very small spotted seatrout. The subject was issued one citation for possession of undersized spotted seatrout.

PINELLAS COUNTY

While on patrol, Lieutenant Laskowski observed an individual wade fishing, catching and keeping several spotted seatrout. When the man waded back to shore, a resource inspection revealed the subject was in possession of nine spotted seatrout. Three of the nine fish were undersized. The individual was cited for possession of undersized and over the bag limit of trout.

While on water patrol approximately eight miles offshore of Indian Rocks Beach, Officer Bibler stopped a vessel that had been fishing. A resource inspection revealed the subject was in possession of undersized and out of season gray triggerfish, as well as five undersized hogfish. The subject was cited for the violations.

While on water patrol approximately seven miles offshore of John's Pass, Officers Bibler and Martinez stopped a vessel that had been fishing to conduct a resource inspection. During the inspection the officers found one subject to be in possession of several undersized and out of season gray triggerfish. The subject was cited for the violations.

POLK COUNTY

Officers Infante, Carter, and Reserve Officer Johnson were on water patrol on the Chain of Lakes for the Smoke on the Water event. While Officer Infante was assisting Officer Carter during a BUI arrest, a vessel motored past their vessels on plane. Officer Infante immediately activated blue lights and went after the vessel. During the encounter,

Officer Infante noticed the captain of the vessel had bloodshot eyes and very slurred speech. The captain refused to perform the seated field sobriety tests (SFSTs) upon request. The individual was placed under arrest for boating while normal faculties are impaired. The individual refused to provide a breath test as well, and was booked into the Polk County jail.

RESCUES

PASCO COUNTY

Officer Angelis responded to a motorcycle accident that occurred on SR 52 in the San Antonio area. He stopped to check on injured persons and render aid while waiting for the investigating agency. While he was there, the motorcycle operator fled the area. Officer Angelis determined the motorcycle was stolen and requested additional assistance. Numerous personnel from FWC including K-9 and Aviation responded. Members from the Pasco County Sheriff's Office and Florida Highway Patrol arrived to investigate the incident. Officer Balfour was searching a nearby field when he saw the subject off in the distance. The subject was in a tree hiding from law enforcement. The subject was taken into custody without incident.

SOUTH REGION A

CASES

GLADES COUNTY

Officer Brodbeck was on land-based water patrol at night at Harney Pond boat ramp conducting resource and boating safety inspections. A pontoon boat approached with fishing equipment in plain view consistent with fishing for black crappie. The pontoon boat beached next to the boat ramp with no other vessels nearby. The officer asked the two subjects aboard the pontoon boat if they had caught any fish and they stated that they had black crappie on board. Officer Brodbeck asked the operator if he could inspect the fish and the operator consented. One occupant retrieved the truck and trailer, while the operator backed away from the beach to load the vessel. Once the vessel was on the trailer, the officer observed a black crappie floating in the water where the vessel had been. Officer Brodbeck waded out into the water and retrieved the fish which was a black crappie measuring 11.5 inches. The fish was still alive, but cold to the touch. An inspection of the vessel revealed 50 black crappie, a 2-person limit. Several of the fish were still alive but on ice in a cooler. The operator of the vessel was cited for over the bag limit of black crappie.

Officer Brodbeck was on vessel patrol on Lake Okeechobee conducting boating safety and resource inspections near Indian Prairie Canal. After responding to a search for a stranded boater in a nearby marsh, the officer returned to the canal where he had observed numerous vessels fishing for black crappie. Two vessels were found with

undersize black crappie aboard, despite both having measuring devices aboard and knowledge of the 10-inch limit for Lake Okeechobee. The appropriate citations were issued.

OKEECHOBEE COUNTY

Investigator Patterson and Officer Fretwell were on night patrol when they observed lights working in a grove. The lights were shining in a manner capable of disclosing the presence of wildlife. Investigator Patterson and Officer Fretwell located nine subjects in the grove where the lights were being displayed. Each subject was in possession of a firearm and ammunition. The subjects were also in possession of freshly killed rabbits, armadillos and opossums. One of the subjects was a convicted felon. Another subject was under a domestic violence injunction, which prohibited possession of a firearm. Three subjects were issued Notices to Appear for misdemeanor charges. One subject was booked into the Okeechobee County Jail on a felony charge.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officer Hankinson investigated a social media complaint concerning the reckless operation of a vessel in Jupiter. The complaint consisted of a vessel being operated at a high rate of speed in hazardous conditions within a few feet of surfers, approximately twenty to sixty yards offshore. Through investigation and sworn statements, Officer Hankinson identified the operator, witnesses and location. Upon review of the investigation, the Palm Beach County State Attorney's Office is direct-filing a reckless operation misdemeanor charge on the operator.

Officer Spradling was advised by Officer Merizio and Investigator Sierra that a tip was received by email about a subject in a vessel catching and keeping over the bag limit of Golden Tilefish. Officer Godward and Officer Stone, who were on a patrol vessel, observed the vessel entering the intracoastal water way through the Boynton Beach inlet, occupied by one subject operating the vessel. Officers Godward and Stone followed the vessel into the Boynton Beach Boat ramp where Officer Spradling was standing by. Officer Stone asked for consent to search the cooler and the subject advised it was fine for him to do so. The subject was in possession of six Golden Tilefish on state waters, which is five over the legal bag limit. The subject was issued a misdemeanor notice to appear citation for over the bag limit of Golden Tilefish. Six Golden Tilefish were seized as evidence.

RESCUES

GLADES COUNTY

Officer Worrell responded to a request for assistance from the Glades County Sheriff's Office. They had received a 911 call that an individual had been ejected from a swamp buggy and run over. The Sheriff's Office could not access the area due to the wet

muddy conditions. Officer Worrell arrived on scene, located the individual and called for a medical helicopter. The injured person was transported to the hospital via helicopter.

MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

HENDRY COUNTY

Officer Worrell responded to a panther complaint near Highway 835 and Dooley Grade. The deceased panther was located on the west shoulder of the road with fatal injuries from a vehicle collision. The officer photographed the scene, took GPS coordinates and transported the panther to a FWC biologist for further evaluation.

SOUTH REGION B

CASES

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

While on land patrol in Miami-Dade, an investigator and an officer followed up on a lead to a residence that had several cages in plain view. They contacted the owner of the residence and discovered another cage inside the yard containing a juvenile bobcat. They confirmed the owner did not possess a Class II wildlife permit for the animal. The owner was charged with several misdemeanor violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and possession of the bobcat without a permit. The officer seized a total of ten birds, both painted bunting and indigo, eleven trapping cages, as well as the bobcat that will be released upon discharge from a veterinarian.

FWC, working with the USFWS at MIA, inspected a shipment of marine fish. In the shipment, a saltwater business imported four lionfish of the genus *Pterois*. The fish were turned over to the FWC and the business was cited.

MONROE COUNTY

Investigator Chris Mattson was on water patrol and observed a subject pulling recreational stone crab traps on the bayside of the 84 mile marker. Six of the stone crab claws were undersized. The man was cited for the violation of possession undersized stone crab claws.

Investigator Mattson was driving northbound on US 1 and observed a vehicle passing in the no passing zone at a high rate of speed. During a traffic stop, the driver showed signs of impairment. Monroe County Sheriff's Office arrived and told Investigator Mattson that they were running radar and had clocked the vehicle at more than 100 MPH. The vehicle was passing on the Snake Creek bridge, almost causing several accidents. The operator was arrested for DUI after field sobriety tasks showed many signs of impairment. He was taken to the DUI room where he provided a breath sample

of .156 and .158. He was charged with DUI and reckless driving and booked into the Plantation Key Jail.

COLLIER COUNTY

Officers Araujo and Yurewitch were on late night UTV patrol on Collier beaches when they encountered a subject cast netting. Officer Araujo observed movement in a nearby plastic bag, which turned out to be three undersized pompano. The subject was issued the appropriate law enforcement action.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

MONROE COUNTY

Officer Dube assisted the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary with the "Boat Smart" boating course at the History of Diving Museum in Islamorada. As an instructor Officer Dube taught several sections of the course along with Coast Guard personnel to the students. There were approximately 25 students of all ages that attended the weekend class.

COLLIER COUNTY

Officers Curbelo and Polly represented FWC at the Collier 2018 First Responder's Career Fair in Naples. The officers interacted with more than 150 youths from area schools. They educated them on FWC's primary missions as well as some of the specialized equipment we use in our day to day operations.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROLS

COLLIER COUNTY

Officers Yurewitch, Plussa, Knutson, Araujo, and Lieutenant Mahoney participated in an overnight operation in Delnor Wiggins Pass State Park targeting boating and fishing violations within the park. Numerous subjects were educated regarding park rules and numerous violations were addressed.

RESCUES

MONROE COUNTY

A couple on vacation rented a deck boat from a local marina earlier in the day to go boating and swimming after becoming recently engaged. They decided to stop the vessel and swim around it as it drifted. Due to the winds the vessel drifted away faster than they could swim. The rental company, which utilizes a GPS tracking device on all their vessels was able to see that the vessel engine was off and the vessel adrift for at least an hour and a half. When the vessel was not at the dock at 5 pm the company

called and reported the rental as overdue activating FWC and the USCG with an air asset flown in from Miami to search at sun down. The female was eventually found an hour later by an FWC crew when they heard her shouts for help, some 2.2 miles away from the rented vessel. The USCG air asset located the male 2.6 miles from the rented vessel location and another FWC crew responded finding the male extremely fatigued but still wearing his PFD. Both subjects were transported to shore to be evaluated by EMS but refused transport.

FWC and the Monroe County Sheriff's Office water units responded to a call of a single vessel accident. The vessel crashed on to the bank of the canal in Tarpon Creek near the Sugarloaf KOA. The vessel operator was the only one board the vessel when it crashed. FWC and MCSO transported him on a backboard to shore for awaiting EMS. The FWC is investigating the accident.

COLLIER COUNTY

During an overnight detail in Delnor Wiggins Pass State Park, Officers Yurewitch, Plussa, Knutson, Araujo, and Lieutenant Mahoney assisted a boater who had become grounded on a sandbar during low tide. With conditions worsening, the officers assisted the boater in removing his vessel from the sandbar.