

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Division of Law Enforcement Weekly Report



Patrol, Protect, Preserve

March 8, 2019 through March 21, 2019

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

NORTHWEST REGION

CASES

BAY COUNTY

Officer Basford received a complaint of a dog left unattended in a vehicle at St. Andrews State Park. She located the vehicle at the jetties parking lot. Witnesses advised that the dog had been in the vehicle several hours and the windows were only cracked open about an inch. A witness also advised that he saw the driver leave the vehicle earlier with fishing poles. A check of the tag number through dispatch indicated the owner has a suspended driver's license and was notified of the suspension in September 2018. A park ranger watched the vehicle while the officer went to the jetties to see if she could locate the owner. While at the jetties, the park ranger called the officer and advised the vehicle owner was back at the vehicle and about to leave. Officer Basford conducted a traffic stop on the vehicle and contacted the operator, who was also the owner of the vehicle. She advised the operator that his driver's license was suspended and that he could not operate the vehicle. The passenger said that her driver's license was in the bed of the truck. When the passenger opened the tailgate of the truck to retrieve her license, Officer Basford saw two red drum in the bed of the truck. The operator told the officer that he had caught both fish. The operator was cited for over the bag limit of red drum. He was also cited for driving while license suspended or revoked (with knowledge). He was issued written warnings for expired fishing license and leaving a pet unattended for more than 30 minutes.

FRANKLIN COUNTY

Officer Sauls and Travis were patrolling the Apalachicola River Wildlife and Environmental Area when they discovered an abandoned truck. They saw fresh blood on the truck and drag marks leading into the woods where they found a doe deer. After an investigation, they determined the deer had been illegally shot the previous night. They tracked down the suspects and charged them with night hunting and willful and wanton waste.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

CASES

DIXIE COUNTY

Officer Sheffield was conducting resource inspections at a local boat ramp when he saw a subject loading a vessel. Officer Sheffield approached the subject and noticed he was nervous. As the officer began his inspection, the subject told the officer he had over the bag limit of spotted sea trout in the cooler. The subject was found to be in possession of six fish over the daily bag limit and was cited accordingly.

Officer Butler was on water patrol along coastline, focusing on commercial oyster harvest in prohibited areas. Officer Butler saw a dark colored boat enter a creek closed to the harvest of oysters. Officer Butler positioned his patrol vessel to maintain surveillance and saw the subject begin to harvest oysters. Officer Butler made contact and the subject was issued a notice to appear for harvesting oysters from a prohibited area.

GILCHRIST COUNTY

Officer Allen and K9 Officer Wiggins received information about an alligator that was taken illegally. The officers contacted one of the suspects and seized fresh alligator meat. The officers contacted the other suspect who admitted to killing the alligator. Charges will be direct filed with the Gilchrist County State Attorney's Office for the violation.

Officer Allen and K9 Officer Wiggins discovered a turkey blind and freshly placed bait prior to the youth turkey season. The officers returned to the blind on the morning of the opening of youth turkey season, and heard a subject actively using a mouth yelper. The officers approached the blind and discovered an adult subject inside with no youth subject present. Charges for attempting to take turkey over bait and attempting to take turkey during closed season will be direct filed with the state attorney's office in Gilchrist County.

COLUMBIA COUNTY

On the opening day of spring turkey season, Officer McDonald and Lieutenant Kiss worked together to investigate an active turkey bait site. Lieutenant Kiss dropped off Officer McDonald at the site well before dawn. Officer McDonald set up in a concealed position and saw two subjects enter the hunting blind, place turkey decoys in the baited food plot and started calling for turkeys. After a brief period, Officer McDonald contacted the subjects. One subject was cited for attempting to take turkey within 100 yards of bait.

Captain Huff was working the opening of turkey season on an active bait site he had found previously. Shortly after daylight, he saw a subject walk to the baited site, place turkey decoys out, and begin to call for turkeys, using a box turkey call. After observing the subject for 20 minutes, Captain Huff contacted the subject to address the violation. The subject was cited for attempting to take turkey within 100 yards of a baited area.

LAFAYETTE COUNTY

Officers Fowler and Boone worked the weekend of opening turkey season. While on foot patrol, a blind was found less than 100 yards from scattered wheat feed. Both officers saw a hen decoy and three subjects in the blind from which they heard turkey calls. Further investigation revealed that only two of the three were hunting and the third subject was filming the hunt. The two subjects hunting were issued citations for attempting to take turkey within 100 yards of feed.

TAYLOR COUNTY

Officer Colasanti and Lieutenant Loyed were working an area that appeared to be baited for turkeys when they heard a shotgun fire approximately 400 yards away. They separated and began a search of the area. Officer Colasanti located a subject with a dead gobbler and a shotgun. As Lieutenant Loyed and Officer Colasanti were getting ready to meet with the subject, the lieutenant located a game feeder with bird seed, along with signs of a turkey being killed in the same area. After questioning the subject, it was determined that he had shot and killed the turkey approximately 45 yards from the feeder and bird seed. He was cited for taking turkey over a baited area.

Officer Albritton and Reserve Officer Wilcox were working turkey hunting in Taylor County when the officers located a subject sitting inside a shooting house, using a call to hunt turkeys. The man was within 100 yards of a feeder filled with corn. The appropriate citation was issued for hunting turkey over bait.

While on land patrol, Officer Dasher located a hunting blind with turkey decoys and whole corn. The next morning, a subject walked to the bait site and entered the hunting blind. After sunrise, the subject started working a turkey call several times. The subject admitted to hunting turkeys while being aware that the bait was there. Officer Dasher cited the subject with attempting to take turkeys over bait.

UNION COUNTY

On the morning of the opening of youth turkey season, Officer Burnsed was monitoring an active feeding station with a blind nearby, when an adult and youth subject began setting up at another location over 100 yards from the feeding station. Assuming the subjects were legal, Officer Burnsed remained hidden so he would not interfere with their hunt. The subjects were unsuccessful and left the area after a couple of hours. After the subjects left the area, Officer Burnsed checked their blind location and located a large amount of milo seed placed within 10 yards of the blind. The subjects were located and returned to the hunting location. The adult understood that he was in violation and was cited accordingly.

DUVAL COUNTY

Jacksonville Resource Protection Unit Officers Schirbock and Shearer made multiple cases while on JEA patrol in Mayport. On one vessel, Officer Schirbock found two occupants to be in possession of 19 black sea bass, putting them five over the legal limit. Other cases were made on undersized gray trigger fish and undersized and cut up black sea bass. One federal case was made when two occupants on a vessel were found to be in possession of four red snapper which are closed to harvest in federal waters. All violators were cited appropriately.

LEVY COUNTY

Officer VanNess was on land patrol around the Allen Park Drive boat ramp in Yankeetown, when he saw a commercial oyster vessel returning and preparing to load their vessel. In the vessel, he saw several bags of tagged oysters. There were two commercially licensed subjects on board and their catch was separated to their individual issued tags. Officer VanNess began a quality control and compliance inspection—taking one bag from each subject. He found 29 percent undersized oysters in one bag and 37 percent in the other. The legal tolerance for undersized oysters is 5 percent. Each subject was cited accordingly.

CITRUS COUNTY

Officers Creel and Ulrich were on state forest patrol in the Withlacoochee State Forest/Citrus WMA when Officer Ulrich located a vehicle with an empty utility trailer and what appeared to be UTV tracks leading away from the trailer into the woods. Officer Creel arrived to assist with locating the UTV. The UTV appeared to have operated over obstacles immediately surrounding a gate that the Division of Forestry had in place to keep out UTVs and ATVs. There also appeared to be a freshly made trail with destroyed shrubs, brush and trees. Officer Creel located and questioned the operator of the UTV. The subject was issued a misdemeanor citation for destruction of public lands by a motor vehicle.

Officer Ulrich was on state park patrol in the Crystal River Buffer Preserve when he was flagged down by a state park employee who told him that there were two individuals

parked at the “mullet hole” after hours. He went to the mullet hole and found two individuals preparing to leave. One of the individuals was holding an orange bucket with several fish in it. Officer Ulrich performed a resource inspection and saw four undersized mangrove snappers and one undersized black drum. The individual also did not have a saltwater fishing license. The individual was cited accordingly.

Officer Banks was dispatched to a dumping complaint in a WMA. Upon arrival, he saw an above-ground pool, toys and miscellaneous household items strewn about. Officer Reid came to assist, and both officers began digging through the garbage to try and find an article with which to identify the subject. Officer Reid located a portion of a box from a local automotive store. He took it to the store and had it scanned and received information of the purchaser. Officer Banks went to the address provided, identified the subject and was able to obtain a sworn written statement. The dumped items weighed a total of 150 pounds. A dumping charge was filed with the Citrus County State Attorney's Office.

Officers Peterson and Suttles were dispatched to a complaint under the King's Bay Bridge in Crystal River. The complaint was regarding two individuals keeping undersized mangrove snapper. Officers Peterson and Suttles located the two individuals who were collectively in possession of 36 mangrove snappers, 15 of which were undersized. The subjects were cited for over the bag limit of mangrove snapper and issued a written warning for the undersized violations.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

MARION COUNTY

Officer Rice was on foot patrol in Altoona, when he located an open field with signs of heavy turkey traffic. Further inspection of the area revealed bird seed scattered about the open field. Opening morning of spring gobbler season Officer Rice conducted surveillance of the area and saw two subjects setting up their hunt site directly over the baited area. At safe light Officer Rice contacted the subjects for attempting to take turkeys within 100 yards of a baited area. The subjects admitted to placing the bird seed and having knowledge that they were too close to the baited area. Officer Rice issued a notice to appear for the violation.

OSCEOLA & SOUTHEAST ORANGE COUNTY

Officer Mendelson, K-9 Officer Hadwin, with the assistance of Officers Hocker, Stelzer, Summers, Humphrey, Eller, Matthews, Platt, McLendon, Hallsten, Balgo, Wigley, Marroquin, Delano, Balgo, Reserve Officer Miller, and aviation conducted an operational plan that encompassed Osceola and East Orange Counties. The operation spanned through the youth turkey season and the early stages of spring gobbler season.

Investigators Wayne, Straub and Officer Dias provided a one-day infield training on some tricks of the trade for catching illegal turkey subjects. Officers relied upon Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Research Assistant Tustison, who designed a Geographic Information System (GIS) tool to assist the officers in organizing and prioritizing their enforcement efforts. Officers followed historical data and local stakeholder contacts to narrow down their search for illegal bait sites and illegal harvest areas. The operation resulted in eleven separate groups being seen taking or attempting to take Osceola Turkeys over bait. Most bait sites resulted in multiple charges due to several subjects being in each blind. Violations resulted in notices to appear to the subjects. FWC continues to take strong enforcement steps to proactively protect the Osceola Turkey and to ensure this species population remains healthy for future outdoor experiences by Florida residents and visitors.

OSCEOLA COUNTY

Officers Balgo and Hallsten were patrolling near Bull Creek Wildlife Management Area when they saw a subject actively fishing. They conducted a fisheries inspection and the subject had five panfish in his bucket. A resource inspection including the truck bed revealed seventeen black bass. The subject was cited for being over his daily bag limit of five black bass.

ORANGE COUNTY

Officer Presser and Lieutenant Tye stopped a vessel displaying improper navigation lights on Lake Maitland and conducted a vessel safety inspection. During the inspection the operator exhibited signs of impairment. After a boating under the influence (BUI) investigation, the operator was arrested and booked into the Orange County Jail. The operator provided a breath sample over the legal limit of 0.08.

Officers Presser and Fahnestock responded to a domestic disturbance call at Wekiwa Springs State Park. Upon arrival at the park Officers Presser and Fahnestock located a suspect matching the description given by the caller. The suspect was detained for questioning and provided a false name. After being informed that the name he provided did not come back with any records found, the suspect turned and ran. After a brief foot chase Officer Presser was able to apprehend the suspect and arrest him. The suspect was booked into the Orange County Jail and cited for providing a false name to a law enforcement officer, resisting arrest without violence, and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Officer Presser was on land-based water patrol at Lake Underhill where he saw an individual actively fishing from the bridge over the lake. As Officer Presser was walking out to the bridge to conduct a resource inspection, the individual quickly set down his fishing rod and began to reach into a five-gallon bucket directly beside him. Officer Presser instructed the individual to not touch the fish. A resource inspection revealed the individual was in possession of three black bass. The possession of black bass is

prohibited on Lake Underhill and the suspect was issued a notice to appear in court for the fish management area violation.

Opening morning of the spring youth turkey season, Officers Matthews and Platt were watching a hunting blind that was baited with cracked corn. Officer Matthews heard someone walking around the blind and when it became light he saw a turkey decoy set-up fifteen yards in front of the blind. Officer Platt saw individuals in the blind. After hours of watching the subjects, the individuals exited the blind, walked to a fence line and then returned to the blind. The two officers identified themselves and Officer Platt conducted interviews with the subjects. It was found that the subjects were attempting to take Osceola Turkeys within 100 yards of a bait site. A citation was issued.

LAKE COUNTY

On opening morning of the youth turkey hunt, Officers Phillips and Teal located a utility terrain vehicle (UTV) on private property. After following fresh foot sign for approximately a half mile, the officers heard someone use a turkey yelper. The officers saw two adults and a youth subject walking away from their direction into the woods. After following and listening for approximately 20 minutes, they saw the three subjects ten yards from a tripod feeder filled with corn, actively calling for turkey. They contacted the three subjects and upon further investigation, located more corn in one of the subject's hunting vest. The subjects were cited appropriately for the violation.

BREVARD COUNTY

Officer Maslo saw two men fishing from a local causeway. Officer Maslo approached the two men and conducted a resource inspection. The inspection revealed one of the men was in possession of thirty-two undersized mangrove snapper, two undersized spotted seatrout, two undersized bluefish, and one undersized sheepshead. The other subject did not possess a valid fishing license. A citation and notice to appear was issued for the offenses.

While on patrol near Front Street Boat Ramp, Officer Delano saw two individuals fishing on a nearby dock. Officer Delano conducted a resource inspection and saw a cooler close by. He had the individuals empty the cooler and discovered an undersized redfish, measuring 13.75 inches. Officer Delano identified the individual who caught the redfish and neither of the individuals possessed a saltwater fishing license. The individuals were cited accordingly.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

Officers Matthews and Delano led two outreach programs for the Indian River County Public Library Children Services Department. Officers Matthews and Delano provided

instruction in outdoor safety and wildlife interactions to two separate groups of home-schooled children and their parents. They presented to more than 60 individuals and brought a live juvenile American Alligator for the children to interact with.

BREVARD COUNTY

Officers Rasey, Maslo, and Humphrey participated in a youth outreach. The officers brought a Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission taxidermist trailer with animal mounts for display and provided overview of the animals and their unique habitats. Over 300 youth were in attendance for this event and numerous questions were asked and answered concerning wildlife in Florida.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

Officer Salem and Officer Perry were on foot patrol working an area they knew was baited and was possibly being hunted for turkeys. Early in the morning, the officers saw a man enter the area and begin hunting turkeys within approximately twenty-five yards of bait that had been thrown out on the ground and less than one hundred yards from a feeder that was also present. While hunting, the man made several attempts at calling in a turkey. After a while, the officers approached the man and identified themselves to begin a resource inspection. When asked for his hunting license and turkey stamp, the officers found he did not have either. He was issued a notice to appear for hunting turkeys over bait and an infraction for not possessing a valid turkey stamp. During the stop, the officers determined the man had come to the property as a guest of another subject. Officer Perry located the other man and inspected a second location where the second subject was hunting. The second man was hunting turkeys over bait and was issued a notice to appear for hunting turkeys over bait. The man also admitted he was a convicted felon. Since he was in possession of a shotgun and a rifle, he was later arrested for possessing a firearm and delivered to the Charlotte County Jail. The firearms were seized and delivered to the local sheriff's department.

Lieutenant Ruggiero was working a baited area during turkey season when he saw a side-by-side drive down a dirt road. A man got out of the side-by-side, put out a decoy and got into a nearby blind. Shortly afterwards, the man started making turkey calls. After a while of listening to the man making turkey calls, Lieutenant Ruggiero approached the blind and announced himself. During the inspection, the man admitted he had thrown out some corn and birdseed on the ground back in January. An inspection of the area found a large amount of birdseed on the ground less than one hundred yards from the bait. The subject was issued a notice to appear for hunting turkeys less than one hundred yards from bait.

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

While conducting resource inspections at the Gandy boat ramp, Officer Freda saw a vessel return to the ramp. Upon inspecting the vessel's contents, he discovered the operator to be in possession of eight mangrove snapper. The snappers' heads and tails had been removed. The individual was cited for possession of over the legal bag limit of five mangrove snapper per day and for failure to land reef fish in whole condition.

LEE COUNTY

Officer Winton was on patrol in Cape Coral when he saw a vehicle driving erratically and failing to maintain a single lane. A vehicle stop was conducted, at which time Officer Winton noticed that the driver exhibited signs of impairment. The driver performed poorly on field sobriety tasks and was arrested for driving under the influence. The driver was transported to the Lee County Jail where she refused to provide a breath sample.

Officer Winton was on vessel patrol in Matanzas Pass when he saw a vessel being operated without the required registration numbers or decal. A vessel stop was conducted, and it was determined that the vessel was a rental, and that there were two children onboard but only one child-sized life jacket. Officer Winton followed the vessel back to the rental company and issued the rental operator a notice to appear for renting a vessel without the required safety gear, as well as several boating citations and warnings for related registration violations.

Officer Winton was on vessel patrol in San Carlos Bay when he stopped a fishing vessel to conduct a fisheries inspection. It was determined that the captain was operating a fishing charter without the required Florida charter captain's license. Additionally, the captain possessed an expired United States Coast Guard (USCG) captain's license and was unable to provide a valid drug consortium card. The captain was issued a citation for failure to possess the required charter captain's license and the case was forwarded to the USCG for federal charges.

Officer Winton assisted Lee County Sheriff's Deputy Dailey with a vessel stop near Tarpon Point. During the stop, the officers noticed that the operator exhibited signs of impairment. After performing poorly on the field sobriety tasks, the operator was placed under arrest for boating under the influence and transported to the Lee County Jail. The operator was also cited for violation of a manatee protection zone.

Officer Winton and Lieutenant Spoede were on vessel patrol near Shell Island when they saw a vessel violating a posted slow speed zone and being operated without the required registration numbers. A vessel stop was conducted, and the operator exhibited signs of impairment. After performing poorly on the field sobriety tasks, the operator was placed under arrest for boating under the influence and transported to the Lee County Jail, where he refused to provide a breath sample. The operator was also issued several citations and warnings for related violations.

Officer Price was on water patrol in Estero Bay when he stopped a PWC for violating a slow-speed manatee zone. During the stop, Officer Price saw signs of possible impairment. Officer Price hip-towed the PWC to a safe location so he could perform sobriety exercises. While Officer Price was attempting to secure the PWC to a dock, the man tried to get up several times and Officer Price had to repeatedly tell him to sit down. The man was later arrested for boating under the influence and delivered to the Lee County Jail where he agreed to provide a breath sample. Officer Winton arrived to operate the breathalyzer machine and determined the man's breath alcohol level was at a .20. He was cited for boating under the influence and issued a warning for the manatee zone violation.

Officer Stanley stopped a commercial charter vessel returning to the dock at Punta Rassa boat ramp. A fisheries inspection revealed a 23.5-inch fork length king mackerel and three king mackerel with the heads and caudal fins removed. A notice to appear citation was issued for undersized king mackerel and for failure to land the species in whole condition.

Officer Garcia and Officer Hardgrove were on patrol at Punta Rassa boat ramp conducting fisheries inspections. Officer Garcia watched a vessel approach the dock while one subject onboard the vessel was actively filleting fish with several cut-up fish already visible. Officer Garcia asked the group if it was a charter trip or recreational trip. The captain replied it was a recreational trip. Upon further investigation, it was discovered to be a charter trip. This was the captain's second time being stopped with not having his charter captain's license. A notice to appear was issued for the filleted fish and a citation for the violation of the operator not having a charter captain license.

MANATEE COUNTY

Officer Gonzales and Officer Dalton were on water patrol around Anna Maria Island. While on patrol, they stopped a vessel to perform a fisheries and boating safety inspection. During the inspection it was found that the subject on board had caught and kept several undersized red grouper. One of the subjects was cited for possession of undersized red grouper and will have to appear in court for his violation.

PASCO COUNTY

While on land patrol in the Wesley Chapel area Officer Specialist Pulaski and Lieutenant Parisoe located a vehicle parked in a wooded area. Due to the location, the officers suspected the occupant(s) may be engaged in hunting turkey and could possibly be hunting on nearby public lands which were closed. Officer Specialist Pulaski decided to conduct surveillance on the vehicle while Lieutenant Parisoe searched for any subjects. After a brief walk, Lieutenant Parisoe noticed a newly made trail through the woods. Upon following the trail, Lieutenant Parisoe located a hunt blind near an active feeder. The officers conducted a resource inspection on the person they located hunting the area and issued a citation for him attempting to take turkey over bait.

While on water patrol south of Hudson Beach, Investigator Tsongranis and Officer Specialist Pulaski saw an individual fall off his personal watercraft (PWC) while he was trying to retrieve a beach ball from the mangroves. The officers pulled alongside to check on the welfare of the individual. Upon re-mounting the PWC, the officers could see blood running down the subject's legs. While conducting a boating safety inspection, Officer Specialist Pulaski noticed indicators of impairment and requested the subject to perform seated field sobriety tasks. The subject refused to perform the tasks and was subsequently arrested for boating under the influence. Approximately two hours later, the individual provided a sample of his breath. The sample registered a breath alcohol content of .145 and .146.

PINELLAS COUNTY

Officer Caldwell saw a white van parked in an area known for cast netting and fishing activity. After waiting for the subjects to return to their vehicle, Officer Caldwell saw lights coming from the mangroves and moving towards the van. The subjects were loading a cast net and buckets into the back of the van. Officer Caldwell relayed the information to Officer Pettifer who initiated a traffic stop to conduct a resource inspection. During the inspection, the three subjects were found to be in possession of four undersized snook and six undersized sheepshead. A cast net was also located in the back of the van. One of the subjects admitted to harvesting the fish with the net. The three subjects were cited for possession of snook during a closed season, illegal method of taking of snook by cast net and possession of undersized sheepshead.

While on land patrol, Officer Pettifer saw an individual fishing near the base of the Gandy bridge. While conducting a resource inspection, he discovered a snook hidden among the rocks near the subject. The individual admitted to catching the snook. He was cited for possession of a snook during a closed season.

While on land patrol near the Courtney Campbell Causeway, Officer Pettifer saw an individual cleaning fish. During a resource inspection, he discovered the individual to be in possession of a red drum. Red drum is catch and release only in Pinellas County waters due to the impacts of red tide earlier this year. The individual was cited for possession of a red drum during a closed season.

POLK COUNTY

Officer Earls was conducting water patrol near Agricola Mine Road when he encountered several individuals fishing from jon boats. Officer Earls contacted many of the subjects to conduct safety inspections as well as fisheries inspections. During one of the fisheries inspections, Officer Earls found one of the subjects to be in possession of two largemouth bass over sixteen inches. The subject was issued a notice to appear for the violation.

Officer Resendez responded to a dispatched call to Tenoroc Fish Management Area about a subject using a cast net to take fish from Picnic Lake. Upon his arrival, Officer Resendez located the subject near the lake and conducted a fisheries inspection. The subject was in possession of five tilapia which had been taken by a cast net. The subject was issued a notice to appear for violation of a fish management area regulation pertaining to the use of cast nets.

SARASOTA COUNTY

Officer Grenz and Officer Ridgway were on land patrol around Marina Jacks. They performed a fisheries inspection on a charter fishing vessel returning to the marina. During the inspection it was found that the captain had let his customers keep over their recreational bag limit of red grouper. Since this was a vessel for hire, the captain of the vessel was cited criminally for being over the bag limit of red grouper and not the customers. The captain will have to appear in court for his violation.

Officer Grenz and Officer Ridgway were on land patrol around North Venice Jetties. They received a complaint from dispatch that someone at the jetties was keeping undersized sheepshead. The two officers were able to locate the subject and perform a fisheries inspection. They found that the subject was in possession of several undersized sheepshead. The subject was given a criminal citation for possession of undersized sheepshead and he will have to appear in court for his violations.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

DESOTO COUNTY

FWC Officers and Investigators responded to a single vessel airboat accident along the Peace River. The vessel operator was traveling at a speed where he lost control in a turn while rounding a bend in the river and collided with several large tree limbs. All occupants were ejected following the collision. Two subjects were transported to the Nocatee boat ramp where the officers and the injured people were met by EMS who took over life-saving measures. Two subjects were taken to a local hospital for their injuries. This is an ongoing boating accident investigation.

LEE COUNTY

FWC Officers and Investigators responded to a single vessel boating accident that occurred along Hendry Creek in Fort Myers. The vessel ran aground and collided with several mangrove trees. The operator was ejected following the collision. The operator was recovered and was administered CPR. The operator was transported to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead because of his injuries. This is an ongoing boating accident investigation.

FWC Officers and Investigators responded to a single vessel boating accident that occurred on a sandbar off Fort Myers Beach. The vessel's engines were in gear and

tilted while the occupants were trying to dislodge the vessel from the sand bar. One of them fell into the propellers causing fatal trauma. This is an ongoing boating accident investigation.

MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

Lieutenant Frantz assisted FWC biologists and partners with a dolphin disentangling. The dolphin was a juvenile and the mother was staying with it continually. The dolphin was monitored and tracked prior to the capture. The juvenile dolphin was released without incident.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROLS

PASCO COUNTY

Officer Smith, Officer Balfour, Officer Hughes and Reserve Officer VanOst set up a directed conservation patrol to work the opening of turkey season. They spent several days scouting cattle ranches, public property, and known hunting leases before the opening day of spring turkey season. The officers located a blind with a feeder approximately fifty yards away as well as corn all around the area of the blind. On opening day, the officers slipped into the woods under the cover of darkness a few hours before dawn. They took up positions, so they could tell what was going on in the area around the blind. As soon as the sun came up, a person was attempting to take turkey by actively calling them. The officers waited and then checked the subject. The subject was cited for hunting turkey over bait.

PINELLAS COUNTY

Over a seven-day period, Officer Bibler, Officer Specialist Bibeau and Lieutenant Van Trees conducted directed conservation patrols in the form of various offshore fisheries stops and inspections in the Gulf of Mexico. Officer Bibler spotted a vessel returning to shore with two subjects on board. The captain had an amberjack on board and was cited for harvesting out of season and undersize amberjack.

Officer Bibler, Officer Specialist Bibeau and Lieutenant Van Trees conducted offshore fisheries patrols in the Gulf of Mexico. Officer Bibler spotted a vessel returning to shore with multiple subjects on board and conducted a vessel stop. Officer Bibler asked the captain if they had any luck fishing and the captain said they did and showed Officer Bibler his fish. As Officer Bibler looked through their catch, he noticed a fish way back in the hatch. Officer Bibler asked the captain about the undeclared fish and the captain said it was a scamp. Officer Bibler identified the fish as an undersized black grouper. Officer Bibler interviewed the subjects on board and cited the appropriate subject for harvesting the undersized black grouper.

Officer Bibler and Officer Specialist Bibeau conducted offshore fisheries patrol in the Gulf of Mexico. Officer Bibler spotted a small vessel anchored with numerous subjects fishing from the boat. Officer Bibler inspected the vessel to check their catch. It was determined that the subjects were on a paid charter. Officer Bibler checked their catch and found bag limits of king mackerel, one undersized triggerfish and one undersized trout. Officer Bibler questioned the captain of the vessel and determined that the captain did not possess the required federal permits to conduct a fishing trip in federal waters. The captain was issued federal citations for not possessing the required federal permits and a citation for possession of undersized triggerfish.

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

Officer Salem, Officer Furbay, Officer Perry, Officer Hazelwood and Officer Lejarzar set up a directed conservation patrol which coordinated efforts to focus on turkey hunting. The officers were able to identify locations where they believed subjects would be illegally hunting turkeys. Officer Perry went to one of the locations and saw someone begin to start hunting turkeys. After a while, he approached the man and conducted a resource and license inspection. During the inspection, Officer Perry identified some bait that was on the ground. The subject was less than 100 yards from the bait and, after interviewing the subject, Officer Perry issued the subject a misdemeanor notice to appear for hunting turkeys over bait. Officer Hazelwood conducted an inspection on an individual who was hunting near a feeder. After the inspection, Officer Hazelwood found the subject was 115 yards away from the bait. The man admitted to being caught twice prior for hunting turkeys over bait and he would not violate the law again. No violations were found during the inspection. Officer Lejarzar's inspection revealed the subject he spotted was more than 100 yards from the bait, but the subject did not have a valid hunting license or a turkey stamp. He was issued the appropriate citation.

SOUTH REGION A

CASES

BROWARD COUNTY

Officer Lopez was on patrol near the 17th St. Causeway bridge in Ft. Lauderdale. He conducted a saltwater fisheries inspection on an individual that was fishing under the bridge. With the identification of the individual, a computer check showed that his fishing license privileges were revoked in the State of Florida. Further information also included that the individual had active extraditable warrants out of the State of Ohio. The individual was placed under arrest for the misdemeanor charge of fishing with privileges revoked and the warrant out of Ohio which relayed the entering agency would be coming to Florida to transport him back to Ohio.

Officer Fuller was dispatched to an incident at Mizell Johnson State Park. The park was closed and a subject at the entrance gate was arguing with the park ranger to let him in.

When the park ranger opened the gate for a park employee, the subject drove through, trespassing into the park. Officer Fuller responded and stopped the subject. The subject refused to provide his driver license, registration, or proof of insurance. The subject was placed under arrest for trespassing and issued citations for evasion of park fees, driver's license not carried or exhibited on demand, no registration, or proof of insurance. The subject was transported and booked into Broward County Jail.

Officer Nall was conducting marine fishery inspections on the Dania Fishing Pier when he noticed a subject in possession of a tackle box that was full of water. Officer Nall noticed the tackle box leaking water and when he tried to slide it to the side to inspect a cooler, the tackle box sloshed water. Upon inspection of the tackle box, an undersized mutton snapper was found in water in the bottom compartment of the tackle box. A misdemeanor citation was issued to the subject for possession of undersize snapper.

Officer Ryan saw an individual fishing on the side of a canal and conducted a freshwater fisheries inspection. The individual was criminally cited for possession of oversize peacock bass and possession of over the bag limit of peacock bass. Six dead peacock bass were seized as evidence.

Captive Wildlife Investigator Corteguera completed an investigation into a report of an escaped kinkajou. The kinkajou was found dead by a neighbor and was apparently electrocuted by power lines. A criminal citation was issued to the owner for the escape. Officer Sellers assisted with the incident.

HENDRY COUNTY

Officer Keen was patrolling a private ranch south of Labelle when he noticed a buggy dropping subjects off for opening day of spring turkey season. A little after noon, Officer Keen heard a gunshot and begin investigating the area of the shot. While investigating, Officer Keen came across a subject turkey hunting. After a search of the surrounding area, no turkey was found, only a game feeder with feed present on the ground. The game feeder was approximately 54 yards from where the subject was hunting. The subject was issued a notice to appear (citation) for attempting to take a turkey within 100 yds of a feeder.

MARTIN COUNTY

Officers Pecko and Morrow were on vessel patrol in a manatee zone after dark. A vessel approached them on plane violating the slow speed manatee zone. The officers conducted a vessel stop to address the violation. While conducting the vessel safety inspection, the operator of the vessel showed signs of being impaired. Officer Morrow conducted standardized field sobriety tasks on the operator. He was placed under arrest for boating under the influence. The subject was also cited for violation of manatee zone and no Type IV throwable device.

Officer Hudson was conducting water patrol when he saw several individuals fishing from the Stuart Causeway. The officer contacted a subject and conducted a fisheries inspection. The subject stated that he only had sand perch but upon inspection of his fish he had 3 puffer fish. Puffer fish are illegal to possess in Volusia, Brevard, St. Lucie, Indian River, and Martin counties. The subject went to his car to get his driver license and the officer smelled a strong odor of marijuana emitting from his car. The subject had a bag of marijuana under 20 grams in his vehicle, and an additional puffer fish after again stating all he had was sand perch in his car. The subject also did not have a valid saltwater shoreline fishing license. The subject was cited accordingly.

OKEECHOBEE COUNTY

Officers Padgett, Dial and Zenoniani responded to a report from the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office of two subjects being lost near Kissimmee Prairie State Park. A sheriff's deputy who initially responded detained two subjects camped on the Kissimmee River Public Use Area. The subjects stated they got lost on the way to Lake Placid and cut the chain on two gates. They said their truck ran out of gas and they had been walking in the middle of the night when they called for help. Lieutenant Strenth and Officers Allen and Crosby arrived. After questioning the two subjects and following the vehicle tracks it was found that the two men had cut the chain to a gate to get into the Kissimmee River PUA, then cut the chain on another gate to get into the adjacent private property. They entered the property then cut the fence of the property boundary with the PUA. The truck was found in the private property. One of the subjects had numerous credit cards in another peoples' name and an endorsed cashier's check. There were numerous other items in the vehicle believed to have obtained from a theft. Both men were booked into the Okeechobee County Jail for two counts of felony breaking and injuring a gate or fence with livestock inside. They were also cited for illegally camping and having a fire without a fire ring in the Kissimmee River PUA.

Officers Partelow and Davis received a call from dispatch about a reported alligator bite. Officer Partelow contacted the victim to investigate the incident. The subject tried to remove a five-foot alligator from the middle of SR-70 and place it over a nearby cattle fence. In doing so, the alligator bit the victim in the left thumb causing a small laceration. The victim of the bite was instructed not to try and remove alligators in the future.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officer Brodbeck was on patrol late at night in Lantana when a vehicle was seen operating in a careless and erratic manner. The vehicle cut across four lanes of traffic and continued into the shoulder, returned to the travel lanes, then entered the shoulder once again, all at a high rate of speed. A vehicle stop was initiated to address the violations and check on the well-being of the driver. The vehicle came to a stop in the travel lanes. After directing the driver off the roadway and contacting the vehicle operator, Officer Brodbeck saw numerous signs of impairment. The officer had to end field sobriety tasks due to safety concerns for the subject injuring themselves. After being placed under arrest for suspicion of DUI, the subject became belligerent and

hostile. The subject was transported to the Palm Beach County Jail, where breath samples of 0.130 and 0.130 g/210 L of breath were obtained. The subject was charged accordingly.

Officer Loach was on patrol at Slim's Fish Camp, Belle Glade, when he saw two subjects at the fish cleaning station. He noticed that the subjects appeared to be cleaning animals, not fish. Officer Loach contacted the subjects to conduct a resource inspection and saw a large number of rabbits the subjects were cleaning. Officer Loach counted 51 rabbits on the fish cleaning station. The possession limit of rabbit is 24. Officer Loach then searched the subjects' truck and discovered an additional 111 rabbits hidden in coolers. Both subjects admitted hunting without a license and being in possession of 162 rabbits. The subjects received a misdemeanor citation for being over the allowed possession limit of rabbit, and infraction citations for hunting without a license.

Officer Schroer, Officer Norbrothen and Lieutenant Hankinson were conducting surveillance on a man fishing in the Loxahatchee River. Officer Norbrothen saw the subject catch a snook, hide it in mangroves and return to fishing. Once the subject gathered his fishing gear to leave, Officer Schroer saw the man take the snook from the mangroves and hide it under a palm frond. As the subject began walking to his car, the three officers approached him. A 35-inch snook was found under the palm frond. The subject was cited for possession of snook greater than 32" and cited for not having a valid snook stamp while in possession of a snook.

Officer Brodbeck was on patrol conducting surveillance in Boynton Beach on several individuals that were harvesting freshwater fish with a cast net. After observing for approximately 30 minutes, the subjects began to leave the area. Officer Brodbeck stopped the vehicle to conduct a resource inspection. Upon inspecting their catch, several freshwater gamefish were found, including largemouth bass, peacock bass, and panfish. One subject took responsibility for the violations and was cited accordingly.

Officer Brodbeck was on patrol in Boynton Beach when two vehicles were seen in an area that is posted no trespassing. The two subjects were harvesting freshwater fish with a cast net. Upon seeing the officer approaching, one subject dumped fish from a cooler back into the water. Once Officer Brodbeck made contact and read the subject his Miranda rights, the subject admitted the fish were dumped into the water upon seeing the officer. One subject was issued a misdemeanor citation for failure to allow inspection. Both subjects were issued trespass warnings.

Officers Pecko and Morrow were called to a tip involving a subject on a vessel, cast netting snook. The officers located the vessel under a bridge with no lights on. After making contact, they discovered that the subject was a commercial harvester. An undersized snook was located on the vessel. The subject admitted he caught it using the cast net. He was cited for possession of undersized snook, illegal method of take, and possession of snook as a commercial harvester. He was also cited for not having navigational lights on.

Officer Brodbeck was on patrol late at night in Lantana when he saw two subjects launching their boats. After checking other nearby boaters, the officer approached to ensure they had the proper safety equipment due to the windy conditions. After finding that neither boater had a PFD on board their vessel, Officer Brodbeck detected numerous signs of impairment in one operator, to include a strong odor of an alcoholic beverage, slurred speech, and glassy, bloodshot eyes. After completing seated field sobriety tasks, the operator was placed under arrest for suspicion of BUI and transported to the Palm Beach County Jail. At the jail, the operator provided breath samples of 0.185 and 0.182 g/210 L of breath. The operator received citations for BUI over 0.15 and no PFD on board.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

HENDRY COUNTY

Lieutenant Steelman presented the laws & ethics portion of the hunter education class to approximately 20 class participants at the Hendry County gun range.

BROWARD COUNTY

Officer Matthews spoke to approximately 75 students at a school in Tamarac. He discussed the mission of the FWC and answered a variety of questions dealing with wildlife, fishing, hunting and boating. The students and staff were very appreciative.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officer Nasworth was dispatched to the area of Pahokee and Lake Okeechobee due to a reported airplane crash. Officer Nasworth assisted the Palm Beach County Fire Department with transporting divers. Unfortunately, there were no survivors.

SOUTH REGION B

CASES

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Officer Cartaya was on land-based water patrol on the Rickenbacker Fishing Pier. He conducted a saltwater fishing inspection which revealed 5 undersized mangrove snapper claimed by a recreational subject. Appropriate enforcement action was taken.

Officer Hedgepeth checked a commercial vessel and found three undersize lobster and one undersize stone crab claw. Appropriate enforcement action was taken for the violations.

MONROE COUNTY

Officers Larios, Tafoya, and Sizemore responded to a boating accident in the Islamorada area. There was a report of a vessel with no one on board crashing into the seawall of a residential canal on the oceanside of Lower Matecumbe Key. A witness gave a description of an aluminum vessel towing a smaller, heavily damaged aluminum vessel heading toward the Channel 2 Bridge. Officers Tafoya and Sizemore were able to make contact from Anne's beach with the subjects, but they refused to come to shore. Officer Larios later arrived and kept eyes on the damaged vessel while Officers Tafoya and Sizemore went to a nearby patrol vessel. About 15 minutes later, the subject came to shore with the damaged vessel and Officers Tafoya and Sizemore came back to the scene. The subject explained to Officer Larios that he crashed into a channel marker and was ejected from the vessel. The vessel was still clutched ahead at wide open throttle after the initial impact and went into the residential canal where it ultimately crashed again. Officer Larios saw that the subject had very slurred speech and a heavy odor of an alcoholic beverage emitting from his breath. After conducting SFSTs, the subject was placed under arrest for operating a vessel while his normal faculties were impaired as well as resisting an officer without violence. The subject was booked into the Plantation Key Jail after being medically cleared at the hospital for minor injuries sustained in the boating accident.

COLLIER COUNTY

Officers Wagner, Knutson, and Yurewitch arrested a man on several violations including; felony gill net violations, misdemeanor resource violations regarding size and bag limits, and a misdemeanor failure to pay uniform boating citation. Officers Wagner and Knutson were following up on a complaint of a suspected individual gill netting mullet and game fish species. Upon locating the subject, he immediately bailed out of his skiff and swam into the mangroves. While searching the abandoned skiff the officers located a large monofilament gill net and many freshly caught fish including black drum, undersized red drum, mangrove snapper, undersized snook, and several mullet. During a follow up interview at the suspects residence the next day, pieces of the boat used in the crime were located. While at the residence the man attempted to hide some of the evidence when the officers were not looking. The interview revealed many discrepancies regarding the incident. Coordinated efforts with the State Attorney's Office resulted in a probable cause arrest warrant issued and the suspect was arrested and transported to the Collier County Jail.

Officer Kleis and Officer Conroy were conducting water patrol on the Marco River. They saw a vessel operating without navigational lights. The officers conducted a vessel stop to address the violation. Multiple nets were located with mullet entangled inside the nets. When asked if there were any other fish on board, the occupants answered no.

Officer Kleis conducted a resource inspection and discovered four undersized permit hidden under ice and drinks. During the officer's investigation, it was determined that the vessel operator had caught the permit with his cast net. The violator was cited for undersized, over the daily bag limit permit and no navigational lights.

While patrolling the area of Keewaydin Island, Officers Arbogast and Stearns saw a vessel with occupants fishing near the mangroves. They conducted a resource and safety equipment inspection which revealed six undersized sheepshead. An occupant of the vessel claimed responsibility for the undersized sheepshead. The fish were seized as evidence and the subject was issued a notice to appear in court.

Officer Yurewitch was conducting water patrol near Keewaydin Island and saw a personal watercraft with improperly displayed registration numbers and decal. The officer noticed multiple fishing rods on board with fresh bait on the hooks. Officer Yurewitch stopped the vessel. When asked if there were any fish on board the operator told the officer he had ladyfish. An inspection of the cooler revealed 6 undersize spotted seatrout. The suspect was over the daily bag limit and had an expired saltwater fishing license. The fish were seized as evidence and the subject was cited accordingly.

Officer Yurewitch conducted a resource and fishing license check of three individuals fishing from the Chokoloskee causeway bridge. The officer located a sheepshead approximately 4 inches in length and a black drum approximately 13 inches in length stored in a small space under the bridge rafters. The fish were returned to the water alive and an investigation was conducted to determine who caught the fish. All three individuals fishing licenses were expired. Appropriate citations and warnings were issued.

Officers Knutson, Oldsen, and Kleis were on water patrol in Naples Bay and saw a person struggling to get back on board a (PWC) personal watercraft. The subject had fallen off the PWC after hitting the wake of a passing vessel. Due to the high amount of vessel traffic in the area, the officers stopped to assist the person get back on board. While helping, the officers noticed multiple signs of impairment from the operator. The subject had slurred speech, bloodshot eyes, and admitted to drinking. The officers administered the seated field sobriety exercises on the operator and determined the subject was impaired. The operator was placed under arrest for boating under the influence (BUI) and transported to the Collier County Jail. The subject refused to provide a breath sample.

Officers Trueblood, Sutter and Conrad were on federal fisheries patrol. While conducting fisheries inspections targeting South Atlantic snapper, grouper and reef fish, the officers located a vessel near the Islamorada Hump that had just departed its fishing location. The vessel was stopped, and Officers Sutter and Conrad performed a resource inspection. During the inspection the operator stated they had caught and kept blueline tilefish. The officers located the blueline tilefish aboard the vessel. The officers informed the operator and occupants onboard that the blueline tilefish fishery was closed, and they were in violation of federal regulations. The officers addressed the

violations with a citation that will be turned over to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

FWC Miami officers met their ‘littles’ of the Bigs in Blue school-to work program. Seventeen officers participate in this program and are involved in the one-to-one mentoring with these high school youth. Through this partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters, FWC gives back to the community by hosting youth from Miami Jackson High at their workplace. The officers discussed the ‘routine’ traffic stop procedure and how to conduct themselves to reduce unnecessary conflict and increase safety for everyone involved.

MONROE COUNTY

Officers Cobb and Sapp participated in a full-scale multi-agency training exercise, of an “Active Shooter” hosted by Area Maritime Security Training and Exercise Program (AMSTEP). Agencies involved included FBI, USCG, Florida EOC, FWC, Key West Fire Rescue, Key West Police Department, Key West Port Director, KW Ferry Terminal, MCSO, Monroe County Fire Rescue, and Lower Keys Medical Center.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROLS

MONROE COUNTY

Officer Chesney and Lieutenant Payne went on water patrol for a TEA for MSD/pump-out, FL/registration, and at-risk vessel violations around Sugarloaf Basin. During the TEA, many vessels were identified that were in violation. After approaching and announcing their presence, officers searched for any number of violations for each vessel. The TEA lasted about 3 hours and produced 27 uniform boating citations and one warning.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

COLLIER COUNTY

Officers Trueblood, Sutter and Conrad were notified by a charter vessel, via VHF radio, that there was a medical concern for one of their passengers. The officers located the vessel, rendered aid to the passenger in distress, and the charter vessel returned safely to the dock with its passengers and crew.