

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Law Enforcement Weekly Report



Patrol, Protect, Preserve

October 25, 2019 through October 31, 2019

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.

NORTHWEST REGION

CASES

BAY COUNTY

Officers Rice and Brady were conducting patrols in St. Andrews State Park near the jetties when they saw several individuals actively fishing. When the subjects finished fishing and were returning to their vehicle, the officers conducted a resource inspection. None of the individuals had a saltwater fishing license and several of the fish in their bucket appeared to be undersized. After measurement of the fish, the individuals were issued citations accordingly.

Officer Wicker was conducting resource patrols at the Bailey Bridge in Lynn Haven. He approached an individual fishing and observed a bucket with a large fish in it. During a resource inspection, Officer Wicker found the fish to be a redfish measuring 36 inches. The individual was issued a citation.

Officer Rice and Lieutenant Allen were conducting patrols in St. Andrews State Park near the jetties when they saw three adults and a juvenile return from fishing carrying a bucket. The officers approached the individuals and conducted a resource inspection of their catch. None of the individuals had a saltwater fishing license and possessed 10 mangrove snapper and one gag grouper, which was caught by the juvenile. Eight of the mangrove snapper and the gag grouper were undersized. Each adult was issued a citation and the parent of the juvenile was issued a warning.

Officer T. Basford was on vessel patrol in East Bay near the Dupont Bridge when he saw a small boat with two people on board fishing. Officer Basford conducted a boating safety and resource inspection, and the captain of the vessel was unable to provide the required personal flotation devices or a whistle. Three undersized spotted sea trout were on a stringer hanging over the side of the vessel. The appropriate citations were issued.

ESCAMBIA COUNTY

Officer Long responded to an anonymous call regarding a subject catching and keeping undersized red snapper at NAS Pensacola's fishing pier. Officer Long observed the subject catch a red snapper and found he had additional fish in his cooler. A resource inspection found one undersized red snapper. The subject was issued an appropriate citation.

Officer Long and Officer Specialist Clark were conducting resource and license checks on NAS Pensacola's East Seawall. The officers conducted a fisheries inspection on two fishermen and discovered six undersized mangrove snapper. They educated the individuals on current regulations regarding the species and gave them online resources. The appropriate citation was issued.

GULF COUNTY

While on patrol in the Apalachicola River Wildlife Environmental Area, Officer Gerber observed a vehicle displaying a light into a field where deer are commonly found. He conducted a traffic stop and found the driver in possession of two loaded firearms. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Gerber was on patrol when he observed a vehicle displaying a light into an open field where deer are commonly found. The vehicle stopped in the middle of the road and one individual exited the vehicle and walked into the field. Officer Gerber walked to the road, identified himself, and told the individuals not to move. The vehicle sped off and the individual fled into the woods. The subject was located and placed under arrest for resisting law enforcement without violence. A loaded firearm hidden in the woods was recovered from the scene. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Specialist Lipford was conducting a resource inspection under the Highland View Bridge. A violation was discovered relating to the minimum size limit of spotted sea trout. The appropriate citation was issued, and the fish was returned to the water.

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Officer Specialist Corbin and Officer Hicks were on land patrol when they conducted a resource inspection on an individual. They observed the subject returning to his vehicle from the Shalimar Bridge and located a total of seven Spanish mackerel, four being undersized. The appropriate citation was issued.

SANTA ROSA COUNTY

Officer Ramos was patrolling Yellow River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and observed a vehicle parked with no occupants. He saw narcotics in plain view and provided the vehicle information to dispatch. The vehicle owner had an extensive criminal history. A short time later, two subjects returned to the vehicle. Officer Ramos conducted interviews with the subjects while waiting for Officer Matechik and Officer Land to arrive as backup. Officer Ramos removed a loaded .38 caliber revolver from one of the driver's jacket pockets and confirmed the man was a convicted felon. The two men were also in physical possession of several bags of crystal methamphetamine, nine syringes which field tested positive for methamphetamine, and various other drug paraphernalia. The subjects were cited appropriately, arrested and transported to the Santa Rosa County Jail.

Officer Specialists Mullins and Roberson responded to a call in Santa Rosa County regarding a doe that was shot in a field. They spoke to an individual who admitted to shooting the deer, but said the deer had been hit by a vehicle. Officer Roberson and Officer Hoomes talked with two witnesses on scene that said they saw the deer grazing on the side of the road when they heard a shot and observed the subject dragging the deer out of the woods. Based on the witness's statements and no evidence that the deer had been hit by a vehicle, Officer Roberson filed charges against the subject.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Officer Specialist Rockwell, Officer McVaney and Officer Murphy attended the law enforcement portion of a hunter safety course at Okaloosa County Correctional Institute. Approximately forty-six people were in attendance. The officers gave a PowerPoint presentation that included safety requirements, zone information, bag and size limits, as well as rule changes. Numerous questions were answered, and the new deer harvest reporting process was discussed in detail.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

CASES

CITRUS COUNTY

Officer Hughes was on patrol when he conducted a dockside inspection of a commercial reef fish vessel. During the inspection it was determined that the vessel had landed with its catch prior to its landing time as submitted to NOAA. Officer Hughes

issued a federal citation for the violation. The case will be turned over to NOAA for prosecution.

Officers Crane, Browning and VanNess were working oyster harvesters in Citrus and Levy County when they observed fishermen in three oyster boats actively harvesting oysters. As the officers approached, the oystermen left the area. The officers were able to stop two of the boats while the third left the area. After the stop, Officers Crane and Browning located the third boat and conducted an inspection of their harvest. Four misdemeanors and several boating safety violations were addressed. The violations included 80% undersized oysters, untagged oysters, quality control violations and licensing issues. The untagged oysters and undersized oysters were photographed and returned to the water.

MADISON COUNTY

Lieutenant Humphries' squad was conducting a night hunting enforcement detail when they saw an illegal fire in Twin Rivers State Forest. Officers Ransom and Waychoff found an individual who had a warrant issued for his arrest. The subject was issued warnings for violations of state forest regulations and transported to the Madison County Jail.

ALACHUA COUNTY

Officer Stanley checked a group fishing from the dock of Town Lake in Hawthorne. One of the individuals said he had a fishing license, but it was at his house. Officer Stanley ran his name through dispatch and discovered he was on the DO NOT SELL list. Officer Stanley issued a criminal citation for fishing on a suspended fishing license.

DUVAL COUNTY

Officer Read was on water patrol when he observed a vessel in a derelict condition. The vessel was documented and added to the DV Database. The titled owner advised he paid someone \$500 to remove it from his residence three years ago. After a lengthy investigation, the responsible party was determined to be someone currently incarcerated for other charges in the Nassau County Jail. After being interviewed, a warrant for extradition was issued for his arrest.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

HAMILTON COUNTY

Lieutenant Kiss and Officer Johnston attended the annual Real Men's Christian Event held at the Skeeter Ranch. The officers brought an agency UTV and provided hunting, fishing and boating brochures to attendees. There were approximately 2,500 people in attendance.

ALACHUA COUNTY

Officer Stanley and Lieutenant Justus participated in a public outreach at Stephen Foster Elementary School in Gainesville. Over 130 students got a chance to sit in a patrol airboat while being educated about the many responsibilities of FWC officers.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

MARION COUNTY

Officer Hargabus was dispatched to the Ocklawaha River after a concerned citizen reported what appeared to be illegal alligator hunting. The caller described seeing an unattended setline attached to a cypress tree and provided a detailed description of the vessel observed in the immediate area. Officer Hargabus located a vessel matching the description returning to the Moss Bluff boat ramp. A resource inspection discovered a five-foot alligator in the vessel. After interviewing both subjects onboard, one of the subjects admitted to setting the unattended setline to catch alligators. The appropriate citations were issued.

VOLUSIA COUNTY

Officers Vanas and Fletcher were on patrol in Lake George Wildlife Management Area (WMA) during the week between the quota archery hunt and the quota muzzleloader hunt. They saw two males exit the woods on foot armed with pistols. The men told the officers they saw a group of hogs and stalked them, taking several shots but missing. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Ward was on patrol in Tiger Bay/Rima Ridge Unit Wildlife Management Area (WMA) during the quota muzzleloader hunt. Officer Ward observed a vehicle leaving a closed road and stopped the vehicle to address the violation. The driver had a buck that did not meet the antler requirements and had not completed a deer harvest log prior to attempting to leave the area. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Cornell was on water patrol in the Port Orange area and approached an adult male fishing from his boat. The man began to throw fish overboard until instructed to stop. After completing a fisheries inspection, the man was issued two criminal notices to appear for possession of over the daily bag limit of black drum and sheepshead.

Officer Pelzel was checking fishermen on one of the jetties at Ponce Inlet. She approached two adult men fishing and asked about a bucket hidden within the rocks. One of the men claimed ownership and was issued a criminal notice to appear for possessing under the legal-size limit of grey mangrove snapper.

Officer Goodreau was on water patrol in the Mosquito Lagoon when he stopped a boat with an adult female on board. A fisheries inspection found her in possession of two red drum greater than the legal slot size limit and one snook under the legal slot size limit. She was issued a criminal notice to appear.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

HILLSBOROUGH/PINELLAS COUNTIES

Officers from Lieutenant Rosas squad worked a Targeted Enforcement Action directed at vessels moored outside of designated mooring areas without proper lighting at night. Officers issued forty-four uniform boating citations and four warnings for lighting violations, registration, “at risk” vessels and various other boating safety violations.

PINELLAS COUNTY

While on land patrol, Officer Specialist Bibeau observed an individual diving underneath a bridge. He waited for the subject to return to the shore and conducted a fisheries inspection. The subject was in possession of twenty-one stone crab claws, fifteen of which were undersized. The appropriate citations were issued.

While on land patrol, Officer Specialist Bibeau observed two individuals actively fishing underneath a bridge. He contacted the subjects to conduct a fisheries inspection. The inspection revealed a small, undersized redfish with its head cut off inside a bait bucket. The appropriate citations were issued.

While on water patrol, Officer Specialist Bibeau observed two individuals actively fishing from underneath a bridge. He conducted a fisheries inspection and located two undersized gag grouper. The appropriate citation was issued.

While on water patrol, Officer Specialist Bibeau observed multiple people fishing underneath a bridge. He conducted a fisheries inspection and located a large black trash bag hidden underneath the bridge containing fish. The bag contained four undersized mangrove snapper and one undersized gag grouper. The appropriate citations were issued.

While conducting fisheries inspections under a bridge, Officer Specialist Bibeau observed two individuals walking the shoreline carrying fishing equipment. He contacted the individuals to conduct a fisheries inspection. The inspection located two undersize gag grouper and an out of season redfish inside a duffel bag. The appropriate citations were issued.

While on water patrol, Officer Specialist Bibeau stopped a vessel returning from offshore to conduct a fisheries inspection. The four individuals onboard the vessel said they caught their limit of red snapper and advised the fish were located inside a large cooler. He boarded the vessel and located eight red snapper inside the cooler and a five-gallon bucket covered by a large towel. The bucket contained four more red snapper, three of which were undersized. The appropriate citations were issued.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

Officer Specialist Goggin responded to a report of a capsized vessel in Charlotte Harbor. The vessel's prop was fouled, and the three occupants went together to the back of the sixteen-foot vessel. Water came over the stern and the vessel soon capsized. The three occupants were recovered by sheriff's deputies. The boat was recovered by a commercial salvage company. There were no reported injuries.

Officer Specialist Birchfield responded to a report of a capsized vessel in Placida Harbor. The vessel had a crack in the transom and was slowly taking on water. By the time the occupants realized the problem, water had rushed over the stern and capsized the vessel. Sheriff's deputies recovered the two occupants on board. The boat was later recovered by commercial salvage. There were no reported injuries.

LEE COUNTY

Officer Lejarzar and Lieutenant Ruggiero were on water patrol when they overheard a vessel calling for help over the VHF radio. One of the subjects on the boat was having a medical emergency. The officers obtained the vessel's GPS location. It was approximately forty miles offshore in the Gulf of Mexico and headed east at a very slow speed of about six knots. The officers made their way towards the targeted location and found a commercial fishing vessel with a man laying inside the cabin conscious and breathing but having chest pains. The United States Coast Guard sent a helicopter with a rescue swimmer and rescue basket. Officer Lejarzar helped the Coast Guard rescue swimmer get the distressed man into the rescue basket and remained vigilant as the man was hoisted into the helicopter where he was transported to Tampa for immediate medical treatment.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROLS

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

Officer Specialist Birchfield organized a directed conservation detail targeting illegal activity in Prairie Shell Creek Preserve. Multiple officers worked the detail and issued nine misdemeanor citations and three warnings. Violations included: hunting in a closed area, hunting after hours, illegal entry into the preserve, operating a vehicle within the preserve and removing natural resources. Additional felony charges are pending.

SOUTH REGION A

CASES

BROWARD COUNTY

Officer Grant responded to USCG Ft. Lauderdale to assist with a subject suspected of boating under the influence. Officers Luna, Doyle, Ryan and Lieutenant Brock also responded to assist. Officer Grant conducted seated field sobriety tasks on the subject and placed him under arrest for BUI.

Officers Sellers, Ryan and Doyle responded to a report of a mentally ill person at the Stub Canal boat ramp off US-27. The individual made statements that he wanted to harm himself and was transported to a local hospital for evaluation.

GLADES COUNTY

Officer Madsen observed a vessel actively shining a spot light in an area closed to alligator hunting. He conducted a stop as the vessel approached the boat ramp. The inspection revealed three subjects on board with two harvested alligators, one of them being untagged. Officer Madsen advised the permit holder that he was in violation for failure to tag alligator immediately upon killing, hunting out of area, and failure to sign alligator harvest permit. Officer Madsen educated the hunters and issued the appropriate citations.

HENDRY COUNTY

Lieutenant Steelman observed lights shining from a vehicle driving on a dirt road in a wildlife management area. A stop revealed a driver and three subjects in the bed of the truck. All four subjects were wearing headlights and three firearms were in the bed of the truck. The appropriate citations were issued.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Reserve Officer Spradling and Officer Godward were on water patrol at Phil Foster Boat Ramp. The officers noticed a vessel docking that had fishing poles and an expired registration decal. The subject had the following violations: expired registration, failure to register vessel within 30 days of purchase, expired saltwater fishing license and improper display. The subject was cited and warned accordingly.

Officer Sellers was patrolling the A-1 FEB in Palm Beach County. During a vessel inspection, one of the users checked was confirmed for a felony warrant out of Miami Dade. The subject was arrested and later found to be using two aliases.

Officer Schroer responded to a caller advising a red-tailed hawk was shot in his backyard. The hawk was found at the base of a fence dividing two properties. A chicken coop was observed on an adjacent property. The owner of the chicken coop admitted to shooting the hawk and firing in the direction of his neighbor's house. The owner of the chicken coop was charged with violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and reminded that only non-lethal steps can be taken to protect his livestock from the protected birds. An additional charge is pending for discharging a firearm into the neighbor's property.

Officer Ames received a call about four subjects cast netting on a residential lake. Upon arriving at the location, Officer Ames observed four subjects on a small aluminum boat, with one subject at the bow actively throwing a cast net, keeping the fish, and not releasing any of them back in the water. A fisheries inspection revealed a five-gallon bucket full of fish. The catch included non-game species and four butterfly peacock bass. The appropriate citations were issued.

ST. LUCIE COUNTY

Officer Bingham observed several vessels at anchor near the north bridge. One vessel was adjacent to the main Intracoastal Waterway and the other was further west. Both vessels did not display anchor lights during night hours. One vessel had a registration, which was expired for over a year, and the other was in various states of disrepair. Both vessels had been at the same location for several months. Numerous attempts to locate the owners or responsible party were unsuccessful. Officer Bingham observed the vessels were occupied, addressed the violations, and issued the appropriate citations.

Officer Arnold and Investigator Turner responded by water to a boat crash involving a single vessel. Information received indicated that a single occupant had been ejected from the vessel and rescued by a good Samaritan. No injuries were reported. The occupant was not wearing his emergency cut off switch lanyard. The vessel's outboard motor was still in gear and the vessel was going in circles. A plan was implemented to foul the propeller. Once the vessel was secure, it was returned to the operator. The subject was issued several warnings for safety violations.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

BROWARD COUNTY

Multiple FWC officers, along with local agencies responded to a plane crash in the Everglades off US-27. Officers located the plane with the use of airboats. Two individuals were recovered from the plane and taken to area hospitals. Following the crash, officers assisted NTSB and FAA investigators with airboat transportation out to the crash site.

MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

BROWARD COUNTY

Officer Doyle and Officer Ryan responded to call of an alligator in a resident's swimming pool. The alligator was successfully removed from the pool and transported to a nearby canal where it was released.

SOUTH REGION B

CASES

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Officers T. Stanton and A. Bruder were on land patrol at Newport Fishing Pier when they observed a subject fishing off the side of the pier. A resource inspection revealed one bonefish, which is illegal to harvest and possess. The appropriate citation was issued.

Officer Cartaya was on land-based water patrol at Tropical Park when he observed a subject actively fishing at the park lake. A resource inspection revealed the subject had no fishing license and possessed three rainbow peacock bass, one large mouth bass, and one tilapia. The appropriate citations were issued.

COLLIER COUNTY

Investigator Carroll and Officer Rubenstein investigated a tip regarding an unlicensed stone crab seller. The subject did not currently have, nor had ever held a retail or wholesale saltwater products license. The stone crab packages were seized as evidence and the subject cited accordingly.

Officer Conroy observed a sailboat that had foundered on the oceanside of Keewaydin Island within the Rookery Bay State Buffer Preserve boundary. After determining there was no marine emergency onboard, the officer determined the sailboat to be "at-risk" of becoming a derelict vessel. Officer Conroy found the owner and issued him citations for the at-risk vessel, registration violation, and for disturbing the shoreline of the state buffer preserve adjacent to a Critical Wildlife Area – home to several threatened shorebird species.

MONROE COUNTY

Officers Rhoda and Weichhan were bayside of Tavernier Creek and observed a vessel traveling out of Cow Pens Cut without displaying navigation lights. They initiated a vessel stop and during the safety inspection observed signs of impairment from the operator. Seated field sobriety tests were conducted and the captain was arrested for BUI.

Lieutenant Lyne was checking fishermen in the early morning at the north end of Channel 5 Bridge in the Upper Keys. A resource inspection revealed illegal possession of a tarpon and an undersized black grouper. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officers Cobb and Sapp were conducting water patrol near Boca Grande. The officers observed a vessel underway that was displaying a "Diver Down" flag. The officers initiated a vessel stop and conducted a marine resource inspection. The inspection revealed an undersized black grouper. The appropriate citations were issued.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROL

MONROE COUNTY

Lieutenant Peters was on patrol in an unmarked vessel when he was informed by FWC dispatch that an FWC biologist had observed a freight vessel traveling east up the reef tract off Big Pine Key. He observed the tug vessel "Jay Michael" online by means of the vessel's AIS (Automatic Identification System). The tug's AIS showed it dangerously close to the reef tract – well inside the Area To Be Avoided (ATBA) by vessel's over 50 meters as established by the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Act. Lieutenant Peters located the "Jay Michael" with a barge in tow inside the ATBA and less than 1.5 nautical miles from the reef line. A Federal Notice of Violation and Assessment (NOVA) was issued for violating the ATBA.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

COLLIER COUNTY

Officer Arbogast and Lieutenant Bulger responded to a Marine Emergency Response Team call to search for an intoxicated person missing in the Gulf of Mexico off Marco Island. FWC joined the U.S. Coast Guard, Collier County Sheriff's Office, and Marco Island Police Department's marine units in searching the area for several hours from shore, boat, and helicopter. The impaired subject was eventually located safe at a nearby residence.

MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

FWC received a report of an injured manatee at Hideaway Beach. Officer Oldsen responded to the scene and could see the threatened species was having difficulty and in serious distress. He held the manatee's head above water while waiting for FWC marine mammal biologists to arrive. Officer Oldsen assisted the biologists in securing the manatee for transport to a rehabilitation facility.

FWC received a call about a burrowing owl that had become trapped within a pool screen enclosure in Golden Gate Estates. Officer Yurewitch responded and used a net to secure the bird. The owl appeared uninjured and was released back into the wild.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Officers Washington and Araujo spoke to a group for the Owl Watch at their annual AWE Hootenanny. FWC had a table at the event and answered questions about the importance of burrowing owl regulations and how to legally handle burrowing owl conflicts. The event was designed to celebrate the past breeding season for the burrowing owl, an imperiled species native to Florida.

COLLIER COUNTY

Officer Conroy represented FWC at the Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park Nature Festival. She brought an FWC UTV side-by-side beach patrol vehicle for the children to see and answered questions about this unique element of FWC beach patrol.

MONROE COUNTY

Officer McKay represented FWC at the first annual Trunk or Treat event at John Pennekamp State Park in Key Largo. Officer McKay had a patrol vessel and a juvenile alligator on display. Approximately 300 people attended and were educated on the differences between alligators and crocodiles and how to co-exist with each.