

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Division of Law Enforcement Weekly Report



Patrol, Protect, Preserve

December 27, 2019 through January 9, 2020

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

GADSDEN COUNTY

While on patrol at High Bluff Landing on Lake Talquin, Officer B. Johnson observed two individuals fishing from the fishing pier. Officer Johnson watched them for about an hour and saw them catch and keep several fish. Officer Johnson approached the individuals to conduct a resource inspection and found one of the individuals in possession of nine striped bass; the longest one was 12 inches and the legal minimum length is 18 inches. The individual also had six striped bass, which is over the legal possession limit of three. The other person was in possession of one striped bass that was 11 inches. The appropriate citations were issued.

GULF COUNTY

Officer Gerber was conducting nighttime land patrols when he observed a subject shining a light from a vehicle on the roadway. An inspection revealed the driver was in possession of a firearm in addition to a hand-held light. A citation was issued for attempting to take deer at night with a gun and light.

HOLMES COUNTY

Officer Parrish was dispatched to a call about a deer hunter's dog being shot in the Gritney area. Officer Parrish and the Holmes County Sheriff Office both responded to the scene. Officer Parrish determined the hunter let his deer dogs run on a piece of

property he was not permitted to hunt. The subject was cited for a misdemeanor hunter responsibility deer dog violation. The Holmes County Sheriff's Office is investigating the hunter who shot the collared dog.

LEON COUNTY

While on land patrol in the Apalachicola National Forest, Officer B. Johnson came across a group of individuals riding ATVs and UTVs on a designated trail. An inspection discovered several of the vehicles were not properly titled. Lieutenant Wass de Czege arrived on scene to assist. Both officers wrote six citations for the untitled vehicles and gave several warnings.

WAKULLA COUNTY

Officer Specialist B. Morales was on patrol when he received a complaint in reference to a suspicious person at Wakulla Springs State Park. He responded to the area and discovered that a volunteer worker was being harassed by a subject that entered "Volunteer Village", which is the housing area for the volunteer staff and off limits to the general public. He searched the park and was unable to locate the subject on the property. Officer Specialist Morales spoke with the volunteer worker, who was visibly shaken by the actions of the subject. The Park Manager wanted a trespass warning issued to the subject based on the events that had occurred at the park; the subject illegally entered the volunteer housing area and allegedly caused damage to the volunteer workers vehicle. Officer Specialist Morales was assisted by Lieutenant Wass De Czege and Officer Carr who met him at the subject's address. The investigation concluded with the subject being issued a trespass warning from Wakulla Springs State Park. The Wakulla County Sheriff's Office is investigating a felony criminal mischief charge reference to the damage of the volunteer's vehicle

WASHINGTON COUNTY

Officer Parrish was on patrol at Lucas Lake when he observed a group of duck hunters coming back to the ramp. The vessel had improper navigational lights and empty beer bottles on the deck. The operator displayed signs of impairment, and field sobriety tasks were administered. The operator was arrested for Boating Under the Influence (BUI). Officer Parrish additionally cited the operator an infraction for navigation lights and a warning for the vessel registration. Another hunter was warned for an expired hunting license violation.

Officer Homan was working water patrol on the Choctawhatchee River at Jenkins Landing and observed freshly set bush hooks using bream for bait. Bream is a prohibited gamefish to be used as bait on bush hooks. Officer Homan located a vessel and occupants tending to the set hooks on the river. They were not marking the bush hook sets as required with identification. The appropriate citations were issued.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

WASHINGTON COUNTY

Officers Homan, Brooks, Forehand, Leonard, Rice and Burkhead worked collectively on a search and rescue involving an injured man who was unable to walk out to an accessible location. He was in the Econfina Wildlife Management Area (WMA) hiking the Florida Trail system and was approximately six miles south of Scott Road. The Officers successfully located the injured subject and assisted him out of the woods. Local EMS was on scene to provide necessary medical attention.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

CASES

BAKER COUNTY

Officer Fanelli located an active bait site in Osceola WMA with fresh whole corn placed near a ladder stand. Officer Fanelli monitored the site for five days and observed when the hunter added fresh corn. The hunter was contacted and admitted to placing the bait and knew it was a violation. Appropriate enforcement action was taken.

Officer Bryan was conducting resource checks the last open deer weekend in the Osceola Wildlife Management Area and observed a hunter casting dogs from a forest road. While checking the hunter, he found numerous license violations as well as hunting with dogs without proper collars. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Burnsed received information about an antlerless deer that was killed and hidden in Osceola WMA and contacted Lieutenant Douglas for assistance. The deer was located, and the area was watched for the return of the subjects. Officers Yates, Fanelli, and Waychoff helped monitor the area and after dark observed two vehicles. One vehicle maintained a lookout, while the other vehicles occupants went into the woods and recovered the deer. Once the deer was recovered, both vehicles left the location. A traffic stop was conducted, and the illegal deer was found inside the dog box. The four subjects were cited accordingly.

UNION COUNTY

Officer Gill was off duty when he observed hunters shooting dove on an open field. He monitored the area for several weeks and during the last phase of dove season, the hunters were found actively shooting on the property. Lieutenant Douglas and Officer Burnsed responded to assist as the field was heavily baited with whole corn. Thirteen hunters were charged accordingly.

LEVY COUNTY

Officer Fox was on patrol near Cedar Key Marina when he observed a commercial oyster vessel with one occupant aboard. Officer Fox conducted a resource inspection and found 22% of the oysters on board were undersize. The harvester was cited accordingly.

Officer Fox was patrolling near the Dock Street Marina in Cedar Key when he saw an off-shore vessel coming in from a day of fishing. Officer Fox approached the owner of the vessel to conduct a resource inspection and discovered three large bags in a cooler with fillets from eight gag grouper. Officer Fox explained to the owner that he was in violation of the bag limit for gag grouper and that he had failed to land the fish in whole condition as required. Officer Fox issued the appropriate citations.

Lieutenant Johnston, Officers Bell and Robson were on water patrol in the area of Shell Mound when they observed commercial oyster fishermen harvesting in an area that was temporarily closed due to rainfall. Because of the low tide, the officers were unable to reach the fishermen by patrol boat. Lieutenant Johnston and Officer Robson were able to get on a nearby island and observe the harvesters actively culling the oysters in the closed area. They waded out to the men to make contact and found one of the harvesters did not have a saltwater products license and the oysters were tagged as if they were harvested from a different harvest zone that is open. The subjects were cited accordingly. Ten bags of oysters were seized and returned to the water.

LAFAYETTE COUNTY

Officer Davenport received information of possible illegal trespass and criminal mischief by several subjects in the Mallory Swamp Wildlife Management Area. Responding to the area he discovered fresh vehicle sign along with a gate that had been destroyed leading into posted private property. Further investigation led to several individuals who were interviewed. One subject confessed to trespass and running over the gate with his vehicle. The charges of trespass and criminal mischief are being filed against the subject with the state attorney's office.

DUVAL COUNTY

Officer LeMaster was conducting fisheries inspections on Heckscher Drive when he encountered a subject fishing that had several sheepshead. The subject had an expired saltwater fishing license and an active warrant out of Monroe County for violation of probation reference to multiple resource violations. The warrant was confirmed, and the subject was placed under arrest in compliance with the warrant. The subject was issued a written warning for the fishing license violation.

CITRUS COUNTY

Officer Crane was on land patrol when he observed the occupants of a vehicle using a spotlight. He initiated a traffic stop and found the occupants in possession of a crossbow. The subjects admitted to actively hunting and looking for deer at night. The

driver of the vehicle had a suspended driver's license and had violated his felony probation by possessing a controlled substance. The driver was transported to the Citrus County Jail and the passenger was given a notice to appear for night hunting.

Officer Reid was on water patrol on the Chassahowitzka River. He observed two small vessels gigging along the shore line close to the boat ramp. A fisheries inspection revealed that one of the vessel occupants was in possession of a red drum that had been taken by a gig and one undersized sheepshead. One of the occupants claimed responsibility for the gigged red drum while another occupant claimed he had harvested the undersized sheepshead. Both subjects were issued a citation for the violations.

CLAY COUNTY

Officers E. Barber, J. Barber, and Lieutenant Haney received information about possible illegal bait in the Camp Blanding WMA. They located an empty feeder and later observed a subject fill the feeder with corn and begin hunting. The subject was cited for placing and hunting over bait in a wildlife management area, no hunting license or management area stamp, and warned for not checking in/out of the check station.

Officers E. Barber and J. Barber were on water patrol conducting duck hunting enforcement when they observed two men in a boat shooting after legal hunting hours. The officers contacted the subjects and found both had unplugged shotguns capable of holding more than three shells and neither had hunting licenses or federal duck stamps. Additionally, the boat was unregistered and did not have the proper safety gear. Appropriate citations were issued.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

BREVARD COUNTY

Officer Balgo observed three individuals washing down a vessel near Freddie Patrick Boat Ramp. As he approached, one individual filleting a snook. A resource inspection found an oversized 34-inch snook in a cooler on the vessel. Citations were issued accordingly.

Officer Balgo observed a commercial king mackerel boat in Port Canaveral. A resource inspection found 85 king mackerel, 10 over the commercial limit. A federal citation was issued.

Officer Balgo observed two individuals wading along the shoreline throwing cast nets. He located a bucket hidden in the bushes, which contained several undersized sheepshead, stone crabs in whole condition, and undersized stone crab claws. Citations were issued accordingly.

Officers Mock and Marroquin were on water patrol when they observed a vessel being operated in an unusual manner. The officers stopped the vessel to conduct a vessel safety inspection and the operator showed signs of impairment. Standardized field sobriety tasks were conducted, and the operator was arrested for boating under the influence. The operator was transported and booked into the Brevard County Jail.

MARION COUNTY

Officer Hayes was patrolling private property following up complaints from local landowners regarding individuals shooting deer at night. He observed a vehicle begin to illuminate a cow pasture using a flashlight in a manner capable of disclosing the presence of deer. Officer Hayes conducted a traffic stop and discovered two high-powered rifles inside the vehicle. The operator and passenger were cited accordingly.

VOLUSIA COUNTY

Officer Bertolami was conducting resource inspections and observed two men actively fishing. An inspection revealed one man in possession of over the bag limit of black drum. A later inspection at a boat ramp revealed undersized sheepshead and mangrove snapper. Appropriate citations were issued.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

Officer Berg observed three subjects fishing on a small vessel beside the CSX railroad bridge on the Alafia River. An inspection revealed the subjects had harvested several undersized redfish and sheepshead. One subject was cited for the violations and the fish were returned to the water.

PINELLAS COUNTY

While on patrol at the north Skyway Fishing Pier, Officer Specialist Enos and Officer Conrad conducted inspections of fishermen in the area. During the inspections, the officers discovered a bag containing an undersized sheepshead and undersized gag grouper concealed in some rocks. Two men admitted to catching the undersized fish. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Specialist Bibeau observed a vessel returning from offshore and initiated a vessel stop for a fisheries inspection. He located three undersized and out of season triggerfish, two out of season lane snapper, two undersized hogfish and one undersized red grouper. The appropriate citations and warnings were issued.

Officer Specialist Bibeau observed three individuals fishing underneath a bridge. He watched them catch multiple fish and place them in a small container hidden nearby. Officer Specialist Bibeau conducted an inspection and located thirteen undersized mangrove snapper, one undersized lane snapper and one undersized black seabass. The individuals were cited accordingly.

Officers Godfrey, Phillippi and Lieutenant Wells were on water patrol in Tampa Bay. They watched a commercial net boat actively fishing four seine nets. The officers quickly made their way over to the fishermen just in time to watch one of them disconnect two seine nets. Both fishermen were cited accordingly and the two seine nets along with the device to secure them together were seized as evidence.

LEE COUNTY

Reserve Officer Thompson and Lieutenant Ruggiero saw two men pulling in a seine net on a sand bar and conducted an inspection. They discovered seventy-eight mullet, some sand bream and a spotted seatrout. An inspection of the nets revealed three different shots of net which were tied together as one net, measuring more than 500 square feet. The appropriate citations were issued.

SOUTH REGION A

CASES

BROWARD COUNTY

While patrolling offshore, Officer Nall conducted a resource inspection on divers exiting the water to their vessel. The inspection revealed five violations including undersized spiny lobster, undersized red grouper, four undersized and out-of-season hogfish, and over-the-bag limit of hogfish. The appropriate citations were issued, the lobster were returned to the water alive and the fish were seized as evidence.

Officers Lopez and Larosa stopped a vessel operating at night without navigation lights. The operator had an active warrant out of Miami-Dade County and was placed under arrest and transported to the Broward County Jail.

Officers Seldomridge and Fuller were on water patrol and stopped a vessel to conduct a saltwater fisheries inspection. They located one undersized red grouper and seven undersized gray triggerfish in the live well of the vessel. The appropriate citations were issued and the fish were returned to the water alive.

Officer Dudas and Lieutenant Brock observed a large cabin vessel violating a slow speed manatee zone. The vessel was stopped the operator showed signs of

impairment. The operator of the vessel was arrested for boating under the influence and provided breath samples of 0.132 and 0.124.

MARTIN COUNTY

Officer Moss observed a vessel on plane in the slow speed zone near the Roosevelt Bridge and Sailors Return Restaurant. During the vessel stop, the operator showed numerous signs of impairment. Standardized field sobriety tasks were performed by the operator and he was placed under arrest for BUI.

Officer Hudson conducted a resource vessel stop at the Stuart Causeway. The operator was in possession of an undersized black sea bass and a shark not in whole condition. The operator was cited accordingly.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officer Brodbeck was monitoring stone crab traps in the water during the closed season. He checked the traps, which were unmarked, and released any stone crabs found. The traps were moved several times, indicating they were being actively fished and not abandoned. Once the season for stone crabs opened, Officer Brodbeck actively monitored the crab traps and was able to locate a trap of similar construction with a trap number, but without any other required markings. Working with the FWC Office of Licensing and Permitting, a subject was identified. Contact with the subject revealed that two individuals were fishing traps together. The second subject was identified and agreed to meet to discuss the crab traps. Officer Spradling joined Officer Brodbeck to assist. The subject was read his Miranda Rights and admitted that the traps were his. Appropriate citations were issued to both subjects.

Captain Clark was in Juno Beach and observed a truck on the side of the road selling seafood. He contacted Officer Brodbeck to follow up with an inspection which revealed no retail dealer license in possession, failure to keep proper records, and a license violation. While following up with the business the next day, three undersized stone crab claws were found. The appropriate enforcement action was taken to address the violations.

Officer Brodbeck was on patrol south of the Palm Beach Inlet when a vessel was observed on plane, in violation of the posted manatee zone. A stop was initiated to address the violation. The vessel was sold through a brokerage in April 2019, yet the new owner was never provided a title to the vessel. Officer Brodbeck educated the owner on the steps needed to get the vessel properly registered and the need to have the broker release the title to the vessel. The vessel owner received a citation for violation of the manatee zone and warnings related to vessel registration violations. Officer Brodbeck will investigate the brokerage for possible title fraud.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officer Brodbeck was on vessel patrol in Riviera Beach when a distress call was overheard. A local charter boat captain advised that a small vessel with an adult and small child was disabled in rough seas and was drifting away from shore. He responded to the call and located the vessel approximately three miles offshore in 4-foot seas. Due to the conditions and age of the young child, the officer took the vessel under tow and brought it to calmer water near shore. Once the vessel and occupants were safely in clam waters, Officer Brodbeck assisted the owner with trouble-shooting the vessel's mechanical problems. The owner was able to get the vessel started and back underway without further incident.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROL

BROWARD COUNTY

While conducting a detail targeting the opening weekend of waterfowl season, Officers Tarr, Hart, Fuller, and Armstrong cited multiple subjects for violations. Violations included two subjects hunting without a federal duck stamp, one subject for over-the-daily bag limit of pintails, one subject for over-the-daily bag limit of fulvous whistling ducks, one subject for over-the-bag limit of scaup, seven subjects for trespassing, and one citation for possession of more than one black bass over 16" in total length.

SOUTH REGION B

CASES

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Officer Stanton was on water patrol and conducted a fishery inspection on a vessel. Six undersized yellowtail snapper, three undersized mutton snapper, two undersized schoolmaster snapper, and one undersized red grouper were located. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Cartaya stopped a recreational fishing vessel at Crandon Park boat ramp and found five undersized triggerfish and three undersized yellowtail snapper. The harvester was cited accordingly.

COLLIER COUNTY

Investigator Carroll and Officers Georgevich and Arbogast were on water patrol when they received information about a vessel pulling stone crab traps near Marco Island. They located the vessel and a resource inspection revealed multiple undersized stone crab claws possessed onboard. The undersized claws were seized, and the subject was cited accordingly.

Officers Georgevich and Arbogast encountered a subject in Big Cypress Wildlife Management Area (WMA) that harvested a deer that did not meet the minimum antler requirements. The deer was seized as evidence and the subject was cited accordingly.

Officers Georgevich, Arbogast and Kleis were on water patrol and observed a vessel not equipped with the proper navigation lights for night operation. As the officers approached, they recognized the vessel as a commercial mullet boat. A resource and safety inspection found that the captain of the vessel had multiple active warrants throughout the state. The subject was arrested and transported to jail.

MONROE COUNTY

Lieutenant Hein was on land patrol in the Islamorada area when the United States Coast Guard contacted FWC Dispatch for assistance regarding a boating safety inspection with a possibly impaired operator. Lieutenant Hein responded and arrived at the requested location of USCG and the vessel in question. Lieutenant Hein identified himself to the occupants aboard the vessel and began speaking with the operator. Lieutenant Hein noticed signs of impairment and requested the operator consent to seated field sobriety tests. The operator was arrested for BUI.

Officer Weichhan and Lieutenant Hein were on patrol and noticed a vehicle with no headlights or tail lights illuminated. They conducted a traffic stop and noticed signs of impairment from the operator. Field sobriety tests were conducted, and the operator was arrested for DUI.

Officers Smith, Piekenbrock, and Lieutenant Payne conducted a dockside fisheries inspection on a commercial lobster vessel. The inspection located three undersize whole live lobster on the deck and 78 wrung lobster tails – of which 67 of the wrung tails were undersize. The captain was booked into Stock Island jail and cited accordingly.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROL

COLLIER COUNTY

Officers Georgevich, Arbogast and Kleis participated in an ongoing targeted enforcement action plan, focusing on panther zone speed enforcement. The highest recorded speed was 88MPH in a 45MPH zone. Officers issued warnings and multiple citations for zone violations.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

COLLIER COUNTY

Collier County 911 received a call about four campers, including small children, being stranded on an island in the Ten Thousand Islands with inclement weather approaching.

FWC units were notified as part of the Marine Emergency Response Team (MERT). Lieutenant Bulger, Officer Oldsen and Officer Knutson arrived first on scene. The individuals were checked for injuries and placed in personal flotation devices onboard the patrol vessel. The Greater Naples fire boat arrived a short time later and transported the campers back home safely.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

COLLIER COUNTY

Lieutenant Shea, Officer Knutson, Officer Araujo, and FWC stone crab biologists, Sullivan and Francis, worked together aboard the 65-foot Offshore Patrol Vessel C.T. Randall pulling stone crab traps offshore of Collier and Lee Counties. The information gathered provides regional and statewide management advice, catch information research for the fishery, and water quality studies that aid the stone crab fishery's return to long-term stability

MONROE COUNTY

Officer Thompson and Officer Weichhan brought a small alligator, rainbow boa, two bush ball pythons, and a red footed tortoise to Key Largo Elementary School for a public outreach event. Officers spoke about the different types of reptiles and encouraged the children not to feed alligators or catch wild snakes.