

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Division of Law Enforcement Weekly Report



Patrol, Protect, Preserve

January 10, 2020 through January 23, 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

FRANKLIN COUNTY

Officer Hartzog and Officer L. Mcleod were on water patrol in the Apalachicola Bay when they observed a boat fishing with several subjects on board. They conducted a resource inspection and found the subjects were in possession of three undersized black drum. The fish were returned to the water alive and the owner of the vessel was cited appropriately.

Officers Lipford and Gerber were conducting vessel patrol on Little Brother's Slough when they encountered two vessels with three subjects on board conducting a logging operation. Upon inspection it was determined the subjects did not have a permit for the area where they were located. The appropriate citation was issued.

GADSDEN COUNTY

Officer Brower responded to shots fired on Dogtown Road. Upon arrival he observed a vehicle shining a light in a manner capable of disclosing the presence of wildlife. Officer Brower conducted a traffic stop and observed three loaded firearms readily accessible inside the vehicle. The two subjects occupying the vehicle were cited appropriately and the firearms and spotlight were seized as evidence.

Nine officers from Gadsden, Liberty, Wakulla, Franklin and Bay counties as well as two investigators, one K-9 Officer and two North Central officers executed a search warrant

in the culmination of Operation “Lil’ Dixie”. The four-day operation was developed from information shared by officers from the North Central Region about hunters traveling to the Northwest Region to hunt the Apalachicola and Tate’s Hell Wildlife Management Area’s (WMA). During the execution of the warrant, officers recovered a cooler containing antlerless deer meat. Statements were taken and a suspect was identified. Charges pending.

JACKSON COUNTY

Officer Humphrey was on land patrol when he stopped to check a hunter who had an antlerless deer in the back of his truck. The hunter claimed he shot the deer very early in the morning and thought it was a buck. The hunter was charged appropriately.

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Officers Hahr and McVaney responded to a call from a woman who heard a gunshot and saw a hawk fall onto the street in front of her home. When they arrived, the woman told the officers that the hawk was injured, but was no longer in the area. She showed them photos of an immature red-shouldered hawk lying on the ground. The officers talked to several neighbors and determined that the shot had come from a residence just across the street. No one was present when they tried to contact the residents, so they returned later and spoke to the homeowners and their adult son. After questioning the son, he admitted to shooting the hawk. The officers spoke to the State Attorney’s Office, which resulted in the subject being charged for violating the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

SANTA ROSA COUNTY

K-9 Officer Hutchinson was on patrol in the Blackwater State Forest when he observed a truck stop near a field. While watching the truck, he observed a bright light shine from the open driver side window. The light was being swept across the field in a manner capable of disclosing the presence of deer. The truck slowly drove along the roadway and continued to shine the field. Officer Hutchinson followed the truck and conducted a traffic stop. While questioning the driver he admitted to shining the field to look for deer. Officer Hutchinson also observed a scoped hunting rifle in the passenger seat of the truck. The driver was charged appropriately, and Officer Hutchinson seized the rifle and the light as evidence.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

CASES

DUVAL COUNTY

Officer LeMaster was on patrol in Palmetto Leaves Regional Park when he came across two people in the park after hours. The male subject had a warrant for assault and for violation of a domestic violence injunction. He was placed under arrest and transported to the Duval County Pre-Trial Detention Center.

Officer Christmas was on patrol when he approached a man who was observed fishing from a kayak near the Apollo Avenue Boat Ramp. The man was asked for his fishing license and the officer learned the man is on the “do not sell list.” The individual was previously cited for fishing while his privileges were revoked. He was cited appropriately.

NASSAU COUNTY

Officers Stuhr and Haskins were on patrol when they initiated a traffic stop on the operator of an ATV driving on a paved roadway. The officers learned the operator had an active warrant issued by the Nassau County Sheriff’s Office for domestic battery. The operator was placed under arrest and transported to the Nassau County Jail.

GILCHRIST COUNTY

Officer Allen received information that a subject was shooting from a vehicle on a county-maintained road. When he arrived on scene, he photographed the tire tracks and collected several .22 caliber shell casings. Officer Butler arrived to assist and found the suspect traveling on a nearby road. A .22 caliber rifle was in the front seat along with ammunition that matched the empty shell casings found at the scene. The subject admitted to stopping and shooting from his vehicle. Further investigation revealed the subject was a convicted felon. Possession of a firearm by convicted felon and attempting take wildlife from county-maintained road and will be direct filed with the Gilchrist County State Attorney’s Office.

LEVY COUNTY

Officer Fox and Lieutenant Griffis responded to a complaint of an overdue vessel in Withlacoochee Bay. The vessel was a commercial oyster vessel and when located the operator was in possession of commercial quantities of oysters. An inspection of the oysters revealed that 52% of them were undersize. Appropriate citations were issued.

ALACHUA COUNTY

Officer Stanley received a call regarding turtles in a neglected state at a residence in Gainesville. Upon arriving, Officer Stanley noticed a yellow-bellied slider that appeared dead in a plastic bin filled with water in the back yard of the residence. Officer Stanley located two additional striped mud turtles in the same container struggling on the surface – there was no dry resting place in the container for the turtles. The turtles were released to an FWC biologist and the owner was cited appropriately.

Officer Starling was on night patrol in Devil's Hammock WMA. He noticed a pickup truck exiting the management area. Upon stopping the truck, the occupants were in possession of multiple firearms and a spotlight. The appropriate citations were issued.

DIXIE COUNTY

Officers Butler and Allen worked a detail focusing on the illegal harvest of oysters. They observed two subjects harvesting oysters in a closed area. While conducting a resource inspection the subjects admitted they knew the area was prohibited for harvest of oysters. Charges will be direct filed with the State's Attorney Office.

HAMILTON COUNTY

Officer Nichols received a call of gun shots coming from Lang Lake Fish Management Area. The officer arrived and observed a pickup truck parked at the ramp and heard gunshots coming from Lang Lake. Two subjects were hunting ducks from kayaks. The area was closed to hunting and the appropriate citations were issued.

CITRUS COUNTY

Officers Ulrich and Browning were on water patrol and observed several groups of hunters in vessels attempting to take ducks. While continuing the watch, the officers observed the ducks being rallied. Citations were issued for the migratory bird violation.

Officer Banks and Reid were on water patrol in St. Martin's River near Salt River. They watched a vessel being operated slowly with bright lights displayed on the bow. The officers observed as the operator of the vessel suddenly increased speed and headed toward a group of houses. As the officers approached the vessel and announced themselves, one of the occupants threw something in the bushes. The officers looked in the bushes and found a red drum that had been gigged. One of the occupants admitted to the violation and the appropriate citation and warnings were issued.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

DUVAL COUNTY

Officers Barry, Haskins, and LeMaster assisted the Duval County Sheriff's Office with a multi-agency search and Nationwide Amber Alert of two children that were missing. Numerous wooded and submerged areas were searched by these officers on foot and by UTV. The children were located after two days in the woods by first responders.

NASSAU COUNTY

Officers Stuhr, Waldo and Culbreth were dispatched to assist the Nassau County Sheriff's Office with a search of two overdue boaters. The subjects allegedly took

canoes from a vendor without paying and paddled up the St. Mary's River. The subjects were located and were brought back to the canoe vendor.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

DUVAL COUNTY

Officer Waldo assisted teaching the FWC law section for a recent hunter safety class at the Jacksonville Gun Club.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

MARION COUNTY

Officer Specialist Rice and Senior Officer Simpson were checking individuals at a boat ramp within the Ocala Wildlife Management Area. During the encounter, the officers detected the odor of marijuana. One subject admitted to being in possession of marijuana. During their investigation, one of the subjects fled the scene on foot. Officers were not able to capture the subject, but he was positively identified and found to have active warrants. While conducting a search of the vehicle and of the subjects on scene, the officers located marijuana, marijuana wax, LSD, and several drug paraphernalia items. Two subjects were placed under arrest and booked into the Marion County Jail on multiple felony and misdemeanor drug charges. A warrant was issued for the subject that fled the scene.

Officer Specialist Rice was working duck hunters in the Ocala Wildlife Management Area and heard two shots after sunset. Officer Rice went to the area of the shots and contacted two hunters who admitted to hunting ducks after sunset. The appropriate notices to appear were issued.

BREVARD COUNTY

Officer Rasey received a complaint that anglers were taking snook out of season. He arrived at the area of the violation and began conducting resource inspections. Two men were found in possession of two snook out of season. Appropriate citations were issued.

Officers Balgo and Hallsten heard shots coming from the Merritt Island Refuge near Pump House Road. The officers located three individuals hunting along the refuge levee. The officers documented several federal refuge violations including hunting on a non-designated day and area, possession of over the 25-shell limit, and permit violations. The documentation was turned over to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Officers.

VOLUSIA COUNTY

Officers Fletcher and Vanas stopped to check a suspicious vehicle after dark in the parking lot of the Lake Dias Fish Management Area. The vehicle was occupied by a man and woman who were consuming alcoholic beverages. A computer check revealed the man had an active warrant from the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The officers detained the man at the request of DHS. An Immigrations and Customs Enforcement Agent traveled to Lake Dias and took custody of the man and the female was released from the scene.

Officer Bertolami was checking shoreline fishermen in the New Smyrna Beach area when he approached three men loading their fishing gear into their truck. He inspected their catch and found a snook that was out of season and not within the allowed slot size limit. They also possessed an under the legal-size limit for grey snapper. Notices to appear were issued for the violations.

LAKE COUNTY

Officer Morrow received a complaint that a subject was fishing and in possession of largemouth bass in an area designated as a catch and release only. The subject was also fishing without the required license and was cited appropriately.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

BREVARD COUNTY

Lieutenant Lightsey spoke to a group of Lion's Den Cub Scouts. The children learned about living with alligators and about the job of an FWC officer. They enjoyed seeing the FWC side-by-side all-terrain vehicle.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

Investigator Guerin received a complaint from a land owner about subjects trespassing on his cattle farm. Four subjects were shooting at hogs close to where the land owner was camping with his family. Investigator Guerin called Lieutenant Van Trees to assist and they found three adults and one juvenile with multiple firearms in their possession. The subjects did not have permission to be on the property, had jumped over a properly marked "No Trespassing" fence to access the private property and had shot a hog. The

three adult male subjects were arrested for felony armed trespassing and booked into the Hillsborough County Jail.

While on patrol near Cockroach Bay, Officer Specialist Caldwell observed two individuals walk out of the mangroves carrying a net and bucket. A resource inspection revealed one subject possessed a snook during a closed season. The subject was cited accordingly.

While on patrol near the Little Manatee River, Officer Rorer observed individuals fishing from the bank of the river. A resource inspection revealed one of the individuals in possession of four undersized mangrove snapper. The individual was cited accordingly.

PASCO COUNTY

Lieutenant Parisoe received a request for assistance from the Pasco County Sheriff's Office about an individual hunting on private property. Lieutenant Parisoe assisted with identifying the private property and the interview of the subject who was illegally hunting. Deputies arrested the subject for armed trespass and charges will be filed with the State Attorney's Office.

Captive Wildlife Investigator Tyer conducted an unannounced inspection on a pet store. During her inspection, she noticed several violations pertaining to the sanitation of some of the bird, reptile and mammal cages. She also found numerous violations with the licensing and paper work requirements needed to buy and sell animals. The facility owner was issued five written warnings as well as one criminal violation for the discrepancies.

PINELLAS COUNTY

Officer Specialist Bibeau observed an individual actively fishing from a bridge and contacted him to conduct a fisheries inspection. The individual was in possession of one twenty-inch snook and one ten-inch gag grouper. The appropriate citations were issued, and the fish were returned to the water alive.

Officer Specialist Bibeau stopped a fishing vessel to conduct an inspection and located eleven out of season and undersized red snapper along with nine grouper fillets and two snapper fillets. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Specialist Bibeau observed a fishing vessel return to a nearby boat ramp and contacted the three occupants to conduct an inspection. He found the individuals in possession of forty-three undersized vermillion snapper, three undersized red grouper, three undersized flounder and one undersized and out of season triggerfish. The appropriate citations and warnings were issued.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

PASCO COUNTY

Officer Rothchild participated in a sponsored fishing clinic at the Withlacoochee River Park in Dade City. Officer Rothchild spoke with nearly 400 children who were present at the event.

SOUTH REGION A

CASES

MARTIN COUNTY

Officers Hudson and Boyd were conducting fishery inspections underneath the Stuart Causeway and observed a bag of fillets inside a cooler. The bag of fillets was snook and the subject was cited accordingly.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Reserve Officer Spradling and Officer Brodbeck conducted a quality control inspection at a seafood market in Lake Worth and found 28 yellowtail snapper, four cubera snapper and two silk snapper steaks that were unsafe for human consumption. Invoices indicated that some Spanish mackerel was purchased from a non-wholesale dealer. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Ames observed a vessel violating a posted slow speed zone and initiated a vessel stop. The subject had an active warrant and was arrested and transported to the Palm Beach County Jail.

Officer Boyd observed a vehicle swerving and not maintaining the speed of traffic. Upon stopping the vehicle for a welfare check, he observed the driver having slurred speech and could detect the aroma of an alcoholic beverage on his breath. Officer Boyd conducted Standardized Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST's) with the driver and arrested him for DUI.

Officer Hudson received a tip about a subject who was catching and selling all sizes of snook. A resource inspection of the subject's cooler revealed three undersized snook which measured, 16.5 inches, 21.75 inches, and 24 inches. The subject was commercially fishing when he caught the snook and was arrested and booked into the Palm Beach County Jail and also received a citation for not having a snook permit.

Officers Spradling, Partelow and Brodbeck were in Lake Worth conducting retail inspections. At a local supermarket, the officers discovered numerous violations, to include seafood offered for sale in unwholesome condition, leakage onto product, invoice violations, and purchasing seafood from unlicensed individuals. Over 60 fish

were seized, and the seafood manager received the appropriate citations and warnings for the violations.

BROWARD COUNTY

Officer Ryan was on patrol and observed an individual returning from duck hunting. An inspection revealed the hunter was over-the-bag limit of pintail ducks. One dead pintail duck was seized as evidence and the subject was cited accordingly.

Lieutenant Laubengerger was conducting marine fisheries inspections in the area of the Boca/Broward Spillway and observed three individuals fishing in the Hillsboro Canal. A resource inspection revealed one individual possessed undersize and out of season snook. Two dead undersize snook were seized as evidence and the appropriate citation was issued.

Officers Armstrong and Nall observed a pickup truck parked at a local spillway. The subject from the vehicle was fishing the spillway and landed a snook. The individual was observed running to his pickup truck with the snook and then back to gather the rest of his gear. As he proceeded to leave the area the officers conducted a traffic stop. A resource inspection located a 22 3/4" snook in the bed of the pickup. The appropriate citations were issued and the snook was returned to the water alive.

MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

MARTIN COUNTY

Officer Hudson was approached by a subject who had a three-foot alligator that crawled through their fence and went into their small backyard pond. The subject had small children that lived at the residence. Officer Hudson went to the subject's house and was able to safely catch and relocate the alligator to a local management area.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

BROWARD COUNTY

Lieutenant Laubengerger and Officers Lopez and Dudas were on vessel patrol at Mizell Johnson State Park when they heard a vessel call the US Coast Guard on the VHF radio. The caller stated there was a vessel fully engulfed in flames in the ICW next to the Hot Water Canal in Ft. Lauderdale. The officers responded and found the vessel against the seawall fully engulfed in flames. A Good Samaritan vessel picked up three individuals who had to jump into the water. US Coast Guard and Towboat US fought the fire. The individuals were taken onto the FWC vessel and interviews were conducted. The boating accident is under investigation.

MARTIN COUNTY

Officers Godward, Moss, Cernuto, Pecko and Investigator Turner responded to a report of a subject that was missing while recreationally boating. FWC officers, along with the St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office, the Martin County Sheriff's Office, and the United States Coast Guard, began a multi-agency search for the individual. The subject was located safely and in good condition seven miles off-shore by USCG aircraft.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

OKEECHOBEE COUNTY

Officers Davis and Crosby participated in a two-day Outdoor Expo at the Okeechobee Agri – Civic Center. They educated the public by answering questions and providing information about boating safety as well as hunting and fishing rules and regulations. Approximately six to eight hundred members of the community and surrounding area attended the two-day event.

SOUTH REGION B

CASES

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Officer Cartaya was conducting resource inspections on the Rickenbacker Fishing Pier. He observed a fisherman tending to his rod and reel and asked to see his fishing license. The man did not have one and a resource inspection of his cooler revealed two grunts, and a stone crab with both claws detached. The subject was cited accordingly.

Officers Presser and Saavedra observed two subjects actively fishing from a vessel. As the officers approached the vessel to conduct a resource inspection, one of the subjects began throwing fish into the water. The officers were able to collect two undersize mutton snapper from the water. One subject was issued a notice to appear for interference with a FWC Officer and possession of mutton snapper less than 18 inches. The second subject was cited for no saltwater fishing license.

COLLIER COUNTY

Officers Georgevich and Araujo observed a vessel fully on-plane in a well-known and marked slow speed zone. While speaking with the operator, the officers observed multiple indicators of impairment. After field sobriety tasks, the operator was arrested for BUI and transported to the Collier County Jail.

Officers Kleis and Arbogast observed a vessel improperly displaying navigation lights and conducted a stop to address the violation. The operator exhibited signs of

impairment and was arrested for DUI. The subject was transported and booked into the Collier County Jail.

Officer Georgevich observed a vessel stop fishing and begin to leave the area after seeing the officer's vessel approach. A resource inspection revealed seven mangrove snapper, five of which were undersized. The subject was cited accordingly.

While conducting panther speed zone enforcement, Officers Georgevich, Kleis, and Arbogast noticed fishing rods and coolers in the back of a vehicle that had been stopped for unlawful speed. A resource inspection revealed an undersized and out-of-season snook. The subject was cited for unlawful speed in the panther zone and for the resource violation.

MONROE COUNTY

Officers Thompson and Hoppe were on land patrol near the Long Key Bridge. They observed three individuals leaving the area with multiple coolers and buckets. A resource inspection discovered 21 undersized mutton snapper. The subjects were cited accordingly.

Officers Weichhan and Hoppe were on patrol in Big Basin near Islamorada. Officer Weichhan stopped a vessel for a registration number display violation and observed signs of impairment from the operator. The operator was arrested for DUI transported to the Monroe County Jail.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROL

COLLIER COUNTY

Officers Reams, Polly, Curbelo, and Kleis participated in an ongoing targeted enforcement action plan, focusing on panther zone speed enforcement. The highest recorded speed was 74 MPH in a 45 MPH zone. Numerous citations were issued for unlawful speed in the zone as well as driving with a suspended or expired license. Officers wrote several warnings and educated the public on the importance of decreasing their speed at night when the panthers are most active.

Officers Georgevich, Arbogast, Kleis, and Curbelo participated in an ongoing effort combatting unlawful speed in a panther zone with a reduced night-time speed limit. The highest unlawful speed cited was 85 MPH in a 45 MPH zone. Among the violators cited, some were recorded at 73 MPH and 76 MPH. Officers issued multiple citations requiring a mandatory court appearance. Two violators were found to be driving with an expired license for longer than six months.

MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

COLLIER COUNTY

Collier County 911 advised FWC of a residential bear disturbance. Officer Rubenstein responded to the scene and observed a young adult black bear guarding trash it had stock piled along the nearby wood line. Officer Rubenstein hazed the bear with aversion techniques, and it left the area. He then showed the family ways to secure their trash and reduce bear attractants. The resident was issued and letter of non-compliance and educated on living with black bears in Florida.

Lieutenant Bulger responded to a report of an injured bird having difficulty flying on Marco Island. Upon arrival, he observed a brown pelican in distress. With help from Marco Island Fire Rescue personnel, he secured it with a net and transported it to the Von Arx Wildlife Hospital at the Conservancy of Southwest Florida.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

COLLIER COUNTY

Lieutenant Mahoney, Officers Conroy, Araujo, and Knutson responded to an emergency call received by Collier County 911, about a motorist on I-75 that observed a small johnboat capsized in a canal along the interstate. Upon arrival, Officer Araujo entered the water and determined no one was trapped inside, but it did have fishing equipment within it. An assisting road ranger stated that he saw two subjects fishing in the boat hours earlier. After an overnight search effort, the owner and adult son were located safe at home in Broward County. The boat was returned to the owner the next day.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Officers Washington, Pestka, and Albert attended career day at Hialeah Gardens High School. They spoke specifically to their police explorer students about the importance of education and good conduct. They also shared their personal journey into law enforcement, the training and schooling to be a law enforcement officer, and offered suggestions for those that would like to go into law enforcement. Many questions were answered during the discussion.

MONROE COUNTY

PIO Officer Dube and Recruiter Pestka gave presentations for the monthly Rotary of Key Largo meeting located at the Playa Largo Resort. Officer Dube showed a short video about the FWC and discussed local Laws and regulations along with local issues and concerns. Officer Pestka gave a brief overview of the hiring process and standards. The presentation ended with a question and answer session.

Officers Thompson, Hoppe, and Weichhan went to a public outreach event hosted by the City of Marathon. The event “Fishing Fun” was held at the Crane Point Nature Center. Officers assisted and set up a booth with informational handouts and wristbands. Officers educated the children on fishing regulations, safe fishing practices, and how to properly handle a caught fish to return them to the water.

COLLIER COUNTY

Officer Rubenstein and Lieutenant Bulger were invited to the Collier Seminole State Park for their weekly campground presentation to discuss Burmese Pythons in Florida. Almost 80 campers attended the event to learn about the history of pythons in Florida, their life cycle, and how they impact native wildlife within Southwest Florida and the surrounding ecosystem.

Officers Rubenstein, Reams, and Georgevich assisted in the delivery of instruction at the local FWC hunter safety training in Collier County. They discussed legal issues surrounding hunting in Florida and answered questions from the 30 class participants.