

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Division of Law Enforcement Weekly Report



Patrol, Protect, Preserve

June 26, 2020 through July 2, 2020

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

NORTHWEST REGION

CASES

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Officer Specialist J. Rockwell was working water patrol and checked the west jetties for spear fisherman. Officer Rockwell observed multiple subjects in the water with no divers down flag and one possessing a speargun. The appropriate citation was issued.

Officer Specialist J. Rockwell was checking the east jetties for spear fisherman. Officer Rockwell observed one subject in the water with no divers down flag and a speargun. The appropriate citation was issued.

WALTON COUNTY

Officers Brooks and Graves conducted surveillance on property where traps had been set at the entrance of gopher tortoise burrows. The officers observed a subject digging at one of the burrows and it was later determined he was setting another trap. A gopher tortoise which had been removed from the property was later found in the subjects' vehicle. The subject was charged for possession of a gopher tortoise (Threatened Species), and destruction of a gopher tortoise burrow.

Officers Graves and Yates investigated an incident involving a bear that was shot. During their investigation they documented conflicting stories involving the bear and later determined it did not pose a threat when a subject exited his vehicle and shot the

bear multiple times after it had retreated up into a tree. The subject was charged with killing a Florida black bear and careless display/discharge of a firearm.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

CASES

ALACHUA COUNTY

Officer Harris was on patrol at Marjorie Rawlings boat ramp when he observed the operator of a vessel returning from a day of fishing. He conducted a fisheries inspection and discovered the individual with 60 bluegill. The appropriate citation was issued.

Officer Reith and Investigator Bembry were on state land patrol in High Springs when they observed an ATV operating on the highway. After stopping the ATV and interviewing the operator, they discovered the individual was in possession of methamphetamines and drug paraphernalia. The individual was arrested and transported to Alachua County Jail.

CITRUS COUNTY

Officer VanNess and Lieutenant Jones made four cases involving the harvest of undersized oysters and failure to process oysters within required harvest times. Those found in violation were issued a notice to appear.

Officer Muina was conducting a fisheries inspection on a vessel that was found to be in possession of five undersized mangrove snapper. One of the occupants admitted to catching the undersized fish and was issued a citation.

Lieutenant Jones was on water patrol on the Homosassa River when he observed the operator of a vessel in violation of the manatee idle speed zone near Pine Island. A vessel stop and fisheries inspection reveal that the operator was in possession of one undersized gag grouper, one undersized red grouper, one undersized hog fish and one grey trigger fish out of season. The operator was issued appropriate citations.

NASSAU COUNTY

Officer Tucker inspected a vessel at the North End boat ramp. During the inspection, Officer Tucker found the two fishermen were each in possession of an undersized cobia. The fish were seized, and the fishermen were issued written warnings for the violations.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

LAKE COUNTY

Officers Vanas and Fletcher were on water patrol on Lake George near the Silver Glen Spring, when Officer Vanas observed a large vessel exiting the spring area and heading towards Lake George. When it appeared that the vessel saw the marked patrol vessels Officer Vanas watched the original operator switch places with another occupant onboard. A vessel safety stop was performed, and during the stop signs of impairment were noticed from the original operator. Officer Vanas performed Standardized Field Sobriety Tasks on the original operator and he was arrested for boating under the influence and transported to the Lake County Jail.

VOLUSIA COUNTY

While on water patrol on the St. Johns River near the High Banks boat ramp in Orange City, Officers Hastings and West stopped a vessel to address a slow speed zone violation. During the stop Officer Hastings observed multiple indicators of impairment being exhibited by the operator. After a boating under the influence (BUI) investigation, the subject was arrested and transported to the Volusia County Jail.

MARION COUNTY

Senior Officer Wear successfully completed an in-depth investigation regarding the illegal harvest of deer during closed season. Utilizing physical and digital evidence, Officer Wear was able to document a subject illegally harvesting deer, as well as the steps the subject took to digitally cover up their crime. Charges were filed with the State Attorney's Office.

ST. JOHNS COUNTY

While on a late night/early morning patrol, Officer Specialist Thomas contacted a group of boaters at a small boat ramp on the Intracoastal Waterway. The group of 11 boaters, all in their late teens, had been boating with no navigation lights displayed on their vessels. When Officer Thomas approached the group, one operator sped off with one female occupant in the water next to the outboard engine and holding on to the stern of the boat. Officer Thomas located the vessel owner and with his assistance, was able to meet and interview the operator. Officer Thomas cited the operator for reckless operation of a vessel, operating a vessel with no navigation lights, possession of alcohol by a person under 21, operating a vessel while exceeding the maximum persons capacity, and violation of the State Road 206 slow speed zone.

BREVARD COUNTY

Officer Beck was on water patrol on the Indian River near the 192 Causeway when he observed a vessel underneath the causeway displaying a diver's down flag between the

bridge pilings. Another vessel on a full plane began approaching the bridge and drove under the causeway passing next to the vessel displaying the divers down flag. The subject was educated and cited for failure to operate at a slow speed with the required distance for a diver's down flag.

Officers Johnson and Marroquin were conducting Joint Enforcement Action (JEA) patrol approximately 22 miles offshore when they observed a vessel actively fishing in federal waters. Officer Marroquin boarded the vessel to conduct a fisheries inspection and found two undersized cobia on board. The vessel captain was cited accordingly.

Officer Marroquin was driving to the Titusville Field Office after assisting Volusia County officers during a boating safety detail. He observed a vehicle driving erratically and stopped the vehicle to check on the driver. The driver showed signs of impairment and was arrested for driving under the influence and transported to the Brevard County Jail.

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

Officer Marroquin observed a vessel violating a slow speed zone near Sebastian Inlet and conducted a vessel stop to address the violation. While speaking with the operator, Officer Marroquin observed signs of impairment. The operator refused to perform Standardized Field Sobriety Tasks and was arrested for operating a vessel while normal faculties were impaired. The operator was booked into the Indian River County Jail.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

PUTNAM COUNTY

Lieutenants Dickson and Creech, and Officers Guirate and Hayes responded to assist Putnam County Sheriff's Office with a missing person. The subject was elderly with onset of dementia and was last seen on his side-by-side. FWC units located the subject and found that his side-by-side had been stuck and disabled. The subject was successfully reunited with his family.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

LEE COUNTY

FWC Officers and Investigators responded to a boating accident that occurred on the Estero River in Lee County. Vessel One, with two people on board, was operating on plane heading up-river on the left side of the channel. Vessel Two with four people on board, was heading down-river operating on the right side of the channel. As both vessels approached a blind curve, they were on the same side of the channel striking each other. Vessel Two continued on its path and ended up in the mangroves. Three

passengers on board Vessel Two were taken to a local hospital. No one was injured on Vessel One. Both vessels were photographed, processed and returned to their respective owners. This is an ongoing investigation.

Officer Price responded to a boating accident at Punta Rassa boat ramp. When he arrived at the ramp, he found two vessels on scene. Officer Price determined one of the vessels was tied to the dock while the operator of the other vessel was attempting to reverse. The throttle shifter got stuck in reverse and the vessel scraped down a large portion of the docked vessel, ripping off the rub rail. A boating accident report is being completed.

SARASOTA COUNTY

FWC Officers and Investigators responded to a boating accident involving serious injuries. Two personal watercraft were operating along the Myakkahatchee Creek which is off the Myakka River. PWC Two slowed down in front of PWC One, causing PWC One to strike PWC Two. The operator of PWC Two suffered serious internal injuries and was admitted to a local hospital. The operator of PWC One suffered a broken right arm, was treated and released from a local hospital. Both vessels were photographed, processed and released to their respective owners. This is an ongoing investigation.

SOUTH REGION A

CASES

MARTIN COUNTY

While at the Sandsprit Park, Officers Pecko and Godward conducted a fisheries inspection on a vessel at the boat ramp. During the inspection, Officer Pecko found six undersized mahi mahi in a cooler. The subject also did not have a valid registration certificate. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Hudson was dispatched to a call about a speared snook under the bridge at the Jupiter Lighthouse. Officer Hudson observed two individuals dive under the water and remove three speared snook and hand them to the subject on shore who concealed the snook in the bushes. One of the subjects saw the Officer's truck and they began to leave with a spear gun and dive equipment, leaving the snook in the bushes. The officer stopped the subjects and upon inspection observed holes in the snook from a speargun. Due to the level of the criminal violation and the subject's residency status, Border Patrol was dispatched to the officer's location. The three subjects were charged a total of nine misdemeanors. Six citations were issued for possession of undersized and out of season snook, illegal method of take for snook, no snook stamp, and no nonresident saltwater fishing license. One of the subjects had eleven aliases with active warrants from the FBI/Border Patrol and Palm Beach County. The subject was taken into custody

and booked into the Palm Beach County Jail. Additional charges were filed for providing a false name and interfering with an investigation.

Officers Moss and Rogers conducted federal water patrol on the Atlantic Defender Offshore Patrol Vessel. The officers left from St. Lucie Inlet and traveled 20 miles offshore. They patrolled Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) offshore of Vero Beach, which is closed to bottom fishing, and observed a stationary boat with numerous fishing rods on board. The vessel remained stationary for several minutes and then left the area on plane. As the officers approached in the patrol vessel it came off plane and was stopped for a resource inspection. The activity of the boat was consistent with bottom fishing and the subjects said they were fishing a wreck within the closed HAPC area. The subjects GPS showed the area they were fishing was clearly marked fishing restricted. A federal citation was issued accordingly.

While assisting an FWC biologist with a large injured leatherback turtle that had been hit by a boat, Officer Hudson heard a call from dispatch reference a possible impaired boater operating a Personal Watercraft (PWC) in the area. Officer Hudson observed a PWC matching the description, operating at a high-speed heading towards a large wake. The PWC accelerated and launched completely out of the water, sending both the male operator and female passenger airborne. The officer quickly responded and verified that both subjects were uninjured. The male operator was visibly impaired and Officer Schroer arrived on scene to assist with the intoxicated female passenger who was interfering with the stop. Standardized Field Sobriety Tasks were utilized, and the operator was arrested for BUI and transported to the Martin County Jail.

ST. LUCIE COUNTY

Officers Rogers and Moss were on Federal JEA patrol on the Atlantic Defender, approximately 10 miles offshore east of the Fort Pierce Powerplant. The officers made multiple vessel stops and conducted fisheries inspections. One stop involved a vessel with two persons on board in possession of multiple reef fish and snapper species. The reef fish and snapper were almost all in compliance and the subjects were able to positively identify all the reef fish and almost all snapper, except two red snapper for which the season is closed. The subjects were educated on the different reef fish, snapper regulations, and issued federal citations for possession of red snapper during closed season.

SOUTH REGION B

CASES

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Officers Hedgepeth, Despian and Cartaya logged significant resource cases in Biscayne Bay while on water patrol. Citations were issued for over the bag limit for

hogfish, undersize hogfish, undersize mutton snapper, parrotfish not kept alive, parrotfish over 12 inches, and undersize mahi mahi.

COLLIER COUNTY

Officer Rubenstein was on patrol in the Ten Thousand Islands wildlife refuge and observed an individual cast netting in a popular bird watching area. Upon inspection of his catch the individual was found to be in possession of a juvenile tarpon and a blue gill that had been harvested with an illegal method. The individual was cited accordingly.

Rangers at Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park reported they were unable to locate the owners of a vehicle still in the park an hour after closing time. Officer Plussa responded, located the owners of the vehicle, and found that some of the individuals were consuming alcohol the park. They were cited accordingly.

FWC received a report from park rangers that an unpermitted tour group was trespassing on a closed boardwalk at Fakahtachee Strand Preserve State Park. Officer Plussa responded and found the group in the act of crawling under the closure barricade walking back to their large van. Officer Plussa cited the leader of the group for trespassing in a closed area of the park.

MONROE COUNTY

Investigator Mattson received an internet tip about a Key West man posting photos with a lemon shark head on Facebook. Investigator Mattson determined that the photo was taken off Wisteria Island. Investigator Mattson interviewed the subject via telephone and obtained a signed arrest warrant for two charges: may not harvest or land a prohibited species from Florida waters and may not remove a prohibited species from Florida waters. Investigator Mattson located the subject on his sailboat in the area of Dinner Key in Miami. Officers Saavedra and Delgado found the subject on board the vessel and took him to jail.

Officer Hettel observed a pickup truck parked at the east end of Niles Channel Bridge and four subjects fishing. Four gray snapper were located in the open bed of the pickup truck and a goliath grouper was found in a cooler. The subject was cited accordingly.

Officer Hettel was on patrol in Big Pine Key when a person informed him that an individual was taking undersized mutton snapper from the Spanish Harbor Fishing Bridge and placing them in a vehicle. After locating the vehicle, Officer Hettel contacted two subjects fishing together. A resource inspection revealed both subjects had a total of 16 various undersized snapper in the cooler located in the vehicle. Both subjects were issued notices to appear in court.

Investigator Mattson was in the area known as the Triangles. This area is within 3 nautical miles where it is illegal to spearfish. Investigator Mattson observed a man free dive down and spear a fish. Investigator Mattson approached the vessel to perform a

resource inspection. The subject speared an undersized red grouper and was cited accordingly.

Investigator Mattson was on unmarked water patrol and observed a PWC maneuvering at high speed in the area oceanside of Key Largo. He stopped the PWC and identified the operator as a 13-year-old male from Miami. The subject was issued warnings for operating a PWC underage and no boater's safety ID card. His mother was issued two notices to appear. One for allowing underage operation of PWC and another for failure to transfer PWC title which was purchased in November 2019.

Investigator Mattson was on unmarked state water patrol when he observed a vessel in the Islamorada area engaged in spearfishing, and a woman swim a red grouper back to the vessel. As Investigator Mattson approached the vessel, a man was in the water with a speargun. The man was cited for spearfishing in the Upper Keys.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

COLLIER COUNTY

FWC was contacted by the United States Coast Guard Station Ft. Myers Beach about a passenger aboard a charter vessel that had suffered a seizure and struck his head multiple times. Officer Plussa coordinated the FWC response with Naples Fire Rescue. Once at the docks, the individual was transported to the hospital for medical treatment.

WILDLIFE RESPONSE

COLLIER COUNTY

While on patrol, Officer Plussa was waved down by a resident who stated two large bulls had surrounded him while mowing his back yard. Officer Plussa recognized the two bulls as belonging to a private stakeholder. Officer Plussa managed to lead both bulls over half a mile back to their owner. It was later discovered the pasture fence wire had been intentionally cut by unknown subjects.

FWC Officer Plussa was contacted about a vessel landing at Second Chance Critical Wildlife Area and provided photos of the violation. He determined the vessel belonged to a well-known boat club. He contacted the club management and explained the violation, asking them to educate their members as to the Critical Wildlife Area closures whenever embarking on a club vessel.