

# **FWC DIVISION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT FIELD OPERATIONS**

**WEEKLY REPORT  
August 14 - 20, 2009**

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**

### **OKALOOSA COUNTY**

Officer Steve Bartlett checked a returning commercial fishing vessel in Destin. The inspection revealed 30 undersize trigger fish. The vessel captain was cited for the violation.

Officer Matt Webb conducted fishery inspections on the Shalimar Bridge. One subject fishing from the bridge was in possession of undersize mangrove snapper. The subject was cited for the violation.

Officers Matt Webb and Ken White were working the annual Destin Poker Run in which about 160 large go-fast vessels were registered to participate. During the event, Officer Webb received a call from the Destin Coast Guard Station that a male subject with tattoos on both arms was drunk and had just left the Destin Harbor area on a blue personal watercraft (PWC). The officers located and stopped the subject and immediately noticed signs of impairment. The PWC operator was transported to the Coast Guard Station for field sobriety tasks. The subject's performance further indicated impairment. The PWC operator provided a sample of his breath which registered .097. The subject was charged with boating under the influence and transported by Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office to the county jail.

Officer Steve Bartlett responded to a boating accident in Destin after an occupant fell in a vessel and injured his head. The subject was transported to Sacred Heart Hospital in Sandestin. The accident is under investigation.

Officer Matt Webb responded to a single vessel accident in Santa Rosa Sound. The incident occurred when the vessel hit a wake while traveling too fast. The operator and two occupants were injured from the impact caused by the wake. One of the occupants was flown to Sacred Heart Hospital in Pensacola. The other two were treated at a local hospital. The operator was later cited for failure to operate at a safe speed.

Officer Van Barrow conducted surveillance for illegal hunting on a peanut field in Escambia Farms. The officer had knowledge of a deer being shot on the field the night before. He later identified a subject who returned to the field to hunt again. The subject admitted to shooting the deer and produced a deer depredation permit that was only valid for other farm fields in a different part of the county. Lieutenant Mark Hollinhead and Officer Danny Arnette later assisted Officer Barrow with interviewing the depredation permit holder to determine his involvement. Charges are pending.

Officer Steve Bartlett observed a subject exiting the Okaloosa County Fishing Pier with an oversize red fish. Local officers have increased patrols on the pier after receiving numerous complaints about illegal fish being kept. The subject was cited for possession of an illegal size redfish.

## WALTON COUNTY

Lieutenant Mark Hollinhead was returning from attending a meeting in Panama City. As he traveled westbound on I-10 near the Walton/Holmes County line, he arrived at the scene of a serious single vehicle accident which had just occurred. Apparently, the truck in which two occupants, a mother and child, were riding left the roadway and collided with a pine tree ejecting the mother. The truck came to rest with the passenger side pinned against a pine tree. Lieutenant Hollinhead quickly provided his location to Dispatch and requested emergency medical response. Lieutenant Hollinhead then went to the passenger side of the vehicle where he observed a small child pinned. The child had severe head trauma, was unresponsive and not breathing. Lieutenant Hollinhead worked to free the child and performed CPR with the assistance of a nurse who stopped at the accident site, until medical emergency responders arrived on scene and took over. The child was transported by ambulance to a local hospital and then transported to Sacred Heart Hospital in Pensacola. As of Monday, August 17, the child, was listed in critical condition. The 38-year-old mother suffered serious injuries and was taken by ambulance to Sacred Heart Hospital where she is in stable condition. On Wednesday, August 19, the child was in critical care, but is stable.

## BAY COUNTY

Officer Nick Price conducted a fisheries inspection on a vessel in St. Andrews Bay. The occupants advised they had one black grouper and some dolphin. Further inspection revealed they were in possession of 60 dolphin which is twice the legal bag limit for the three people on board. A citation was issued to the vessel owner for taking over the daily bag limit of dolphin.

Officer Dennis Palmer was on water patrol in Crooked Island Sound when he observed a vessel with four snorkelers around it. Officer Palmer conducted surveillance and when he checked the snorkelers, they said they were harvesting sand dollars. A check of their catch bags revealed they were harvesting bay scallops. A citation was issued for harvesting scallops in a closed area.

Officer Joe Chambers was on water patrol on Deerpoint Lake when he checked a vessel with two fishers. During the inspection, one subject opened his tackle box and in plain view was loose cannabis which he immediately dumped overboard. Officer Chambers later located a plastic bag of cannabis and some rolling papers. Citations were issued.

## GULF COUNTY

Officers Tony Lee and Nick Price were on water patrol in St. Joe Bay when they observed a vessel anchored in the southeast corner harvesting scallops despite the deteriorating weather. An inspection of the vessel revealed the six occupants had harvested 13 gallons of whole bay scallops and were in the process of harvesting more. One subject aboard the vessel claimed responsibility for the bag limit violation

and was cited. The occupants were allowed to keep their vessel limit of 10 gallons and 3 gallons were released back to the water alive.

## **NORTH CENTRAL REGION**

### **DIXIE COUNTY**

Lieutenants Roy Williams, Jay Russell and Officer Jeff Summers conducted an airboat familiarization class for Hamilton County Sheriff Harold Reid and seven of his deputies. The class was conducted on the Gulf out of Suwannee.

### **DUVAL COUNTY**

Officers Sandy Blackburn, Tim Sweat and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Officer Walter Duran observed a vessel operator violate the manatee zone at Sister's Creek. After initiating a vessel stop and making contact with the operator, the officers noticed signs of impairment from the operator. Officer Blackburn administered field sobriety tasks which the operator performed poorly. The vessel operator was arrested and transported to the Duval County jail for boating under the influence. During the arrest, the subject stated that his wife was supposed to pick him up at the marina because he had too much to drink.

Investigators Tim Sweat and Chip Butler are investigating a single fatality boating accident that occurred on Sunday, August, 15<sup>th</sup>. A 39-year-old male was boating with a female companion on Julington Creek in a 20' flats boat. At some point, the man fell from the boat into the water and disappeared. Water patrol units from FWC, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, Clay County Sheriff's Office and U.S. Coast Guard searched the area until late evening. The following morning the search began again with the addition of air support and the Jacksonville Fire Rescue Dive Team. The search continued until the victim's body was located on Tuesday, August 18<sup>th</sup>. The investigation is continuing.

### **GILCHRIST COUNTY**

Officers Todd Nichols and Justin Allen were targeting illegal night hunting activities in a remote location when they observed a vehicle shining a light in a manner to disclose wildlife. The officers stopped the vehicle and found blood stains inside a toolbox which prompted further investigation. With the assistance of Lieutenant Roy Williams, Investigator Larry Ayers, K-9 Officer Sam Dishman and Officer Travis Cooper; the officers discovered they had stumbled onto a poaching ring which led to the discovery of numerous deer carcasses, two large eight-point buck heads, and 29 bags of deer meat freshly processed. The officers also obtained confessions from the suspects for the illegal taking of three alligators, one hen turkey and one cormorant. The suspects were charged with four counts of taking/possession of deer during the closed season, four counts of illegally taking alligators, two counts of taking hen turkey during the closed

season and two counts of illegally taking a protected migratory bird (cormorant). Charges are being filed with the Gilchrist County State Attorney's Office.

## LEVY COUNTY

Officers Robert Johnston and Garret Fields were on patrol targeting illegal night hunting when they located a truck slowly traveling down the road working a spotlight. The officers stopped the vehicle and found the occupants in possession of a .22 caliber rifle. The men admitted that they were looking for something to kill. The officers issued citations for attempting to take wildlife at night with a gun and light.

Officer Sam Dishman was on patrol when he located a truck that had just left a local hunt club heading towards him. As the vehicle passed by, it veered into Officer Dishman's lane causing him to retreat to the ditch. The officer caught up to the vehicle and got the driver to stop. Upon approaching the driver, it was immediately apparent that the operator was impaired, and the subject openly admitted that he had been drinking and smoking marijuana at his hunt camp most of the day. He then produced a bag of marijuana to Officer Dishman. The subject was administered the field sobriety tasks in which he performed poorly. He was booked into the Levy County Jail for DUI and possession of marijuana.

## NASSAU COUNTY

Investigator Tim Sweat concluded an investigation and cited a 17-year-old juvenile for taking deer out of season. Investigator Sweat received information from a complainant that the juvenile had illegally taken a doe deer out of season. The juvenile was observed taking the deer to his home strapped to a riding lawn mower. Investigator Sweat arrived at the location and talked with the juvenile and his father. The juvenile admitted to shooting the deer while he was hog hunting. A .270 rifle and the deer meat were seized at the scene and the juvenile received a notice to appear on the charge.

## **NORTHEAST REGION**

### BREVARD COUNTY

Officer Corey Bridwell was on land patrol with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Officer Jane Whaley. They were patrolling Patillo Creek Road in the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge at night and observed a vehicle on the refuge. A stop of the vehicle revealed three males in possession of 18 fish. The fish consisted of seven sheepshead, six of which were undersize, two sand perch, two pinfish and seven mullet. All three men admitted to catching the fish with a cast net found in the trunk. Citations were issued for undersize sheepshead and for no non-resident fishing license. Officer Whaley issued a federal citation for fishing without a refuge permit and a warning for trespass after dark on a federal wildlife refuge.

Officers Bryan Lee and Chase Platt worked the opening weekend of the alligator hunt by airboat on the St. John's River marsh. Four cases were made for hunting alligators outside an assigned Alligator Management Unit. The locations of these cases included the Duda Canal, Mormon Canal and south of Lake Hell 'en Blazes.

Officers Tim Miller and Cody Loeffler received information regarding a deer that was taken during the closed season near Palm Bay. The officers went to the suspect's residence and investigated. The 19-year old male was found to be in possession of a fresh buck head with antlers still in velvet. The head and a .30-06 rifle were seized as evidence and a statement obtained. Charges are pending.

## MARION COUNTY

Officer Kat Kelley received information that an individual had a gopher tortoise in a small cage on his front porch. She went to the residence and found the caged tortoise. The individual had a non-extraditable warrant out of Pennsylvania. Officer Kelley returned the tortoise to the area from which it had come and issued the subject a citation for the possession.

Officer Kelley went to Orange Lake to check on pre-season airboat activity and found seven airboats on the lake. After checking the second one returning, she found the operator was under the influence of an alcoholic beverage. She conducted the investigation and booked him into the county jail for BUI.

Officers Kelley and Emily Vought returned to Orange Lake to check the returning hunters. At around 4:00 a.m., while they were at the ramp speaking to a Marion County deputy who had pulled up, Officer Kelley observed a van pulling into the park that was similar in appearance to a vehicle involved in the illegal taking of alligators. As the vehicle approached, Officer Kelley attempted to stop it. The vehicle continued on past them with Kelley giving chase across the parking lot. The deputy got in his car and caught up to the vehicle with his blue lights on. Officer Kelley found an open container with the passenger. Officer Vought found paraphernalia and a pipe in plain view on the seat when the passenger got out of the vehicle. Officer Kelley, smelling an alcoholic beverage on the driver's breath, performed HGN and advised the deputy of her suspicion. The case was turned over to the deputy.

## OSCEOLA COUNTY

Officer Paul Mendez and Lieutenant Guy Carpenter II set up surveillance on two airboats on Lake Jackson. When the airboats came in, the officers stopped them to conduct resource and boating safety inspections. During the inspections, they smelled the distinct odor of burnt cannabis. During the subsequent search, Officer Mendez found one of the operators to be in possession of cocaine. The subject was arrested and booked into the county detention center. During post Miranda questioning, the man's airboat passenger admitted to smoking cannabis earlier, but was no longer in possession of any.

## PUTNAM COUNTY

Officers Mark Tharp and Jeff Hickman were on patrol of Crescent Lake when they observed several subjects placing free floating baits out in an attempt to catch alligators during the statewide alligator hunt. The licensed hunter was cited for unlawful method of taking alligator and released.

Lieutenant George Pottorf observed a Volusia County man taking game fish by the use of a cast net in the St John's River near the city of Welaka. As the officer approached, the subject attempted to throw back the game fish but was stopped by Lieutenant Pottorf. The subject was cited and released for unlawful method of taking game fish.

## SOUTHWEST REGION

### CHARLOTTE COUNTY

Officers Adam Resnick and Jason Cooke were participating in a Punta Gorda fireworks show, as water patrol units. The officers observed an individual operating his vessel in a careless manner among other vessels. The officers stopped the vessel and detected signs of impairment. The operator was brought to shore and given field sobriety tasks and was subsequently arrested and booked into the Charlotte County jail, where he refused a breath test.

### HARDEE COUNTY

Officers in South Polk County and Hardee County conducted a detail targeting illegal fishing and trespass in the phosphate mine areas. During the detail, Lieutenant Rodger Brutus observed a suspicious vehicle traveling south on County Road 663 in Hardee County and called for assistance. Pilot Mike Wood and Officer Jerry Carter responded by helicopter and observed the occupants of the vehicle shining a light in a manner capable of disclosing deer. Lieutenant Brutus stopped the vehicle and found the two occupants in possession of a .308 caliber rifle. One occupant admitted to "looking for wildlife." Both subjects were charged with attempting to take deer at night with a gun and light. The gun and light were seized.

### HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

Officers William Holcomb and Richard Dearborn responded to an armed trespass incident near Highway 39. The officers located two subjects in possession of a hog and two rifles and trespassing on private property. When confronted, both subjects fled on foot, with one subject being immediately apprehended. A search of the property was conducted utilizing Hillsborough County deputies, K-9, a helicopter and additional FWC officers, in an attempt to locate the second suspect, who had multiple felony warrants for his arrest. The suspect who was initially apprehended was charged for resisting an officer without violence, armed trespass, possession of less than 20 grams of cannabis

and drug paraphernalia. The remaining individual was identified through interviews and an arrest warrant was obtained for armed trespass, resisting an officer without violence and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

## LEE COUNTY

Lieutenant Darrin Riley, Officers Jonathan Ruggiero and Gregory Bryson conducted a search-and-rescue near the Sanibel Causeway. This search was initiated after an individual went fishing on August 15 in a 12-foot vessel while Tropical Depression Claudette was forming over the Fort Myers area. The individual tied his vessel to the Sanibel Causeway and climbed a 70-foot ladder, walked to his vehicle and left the area without informing anyone of his whereabouts. After locating the individual's vessel trailer without the vehicle in the parking lot of a local boat ramp, it was determined the individual was not missing. After several hours, the individual was located at a church attending Sunday Mass.

Officer Demian McColgin was on patrol in eastern Lee County in the panther corridor when he observed a suspicious vehicle parked along a landowner's fence line. Officer McColgin began investigating and while he was at the vehicle, he observed a subject in the wooded area. When the subject saw Officer McColgin, he fled deeper into the woods. A Lee County Sheriff's Office agricultural deputy arrived to assist. Within a short time, the officers located three subjects who had entered the property to gather palmetto berries. The subjects were arrested and charged with trespassing on private property and booked into the Lee County jail. Several large bags of palmetto berries were taken from the subjects and given to the landowner.

## OKEECHOBEE COUNTY

Officer Matthew Ervin was checking alligator hunters on the opening night of the public alligator hunt in Pool C of the Kissimmee River when he encountered a subject attempting to take an alligator illegally with a baited hook rather than a two-inch peg, as permitted by law. The hunter received a citation for the misdemeanor.

Later that night, Officer Ervin checked two subjects at the S-65, C Lock public boat ramp in possession of an alligator. Officer Ervin found that the CITES tag in the alligator had not been locked as required by law. Both subjects received citations.

## OSCEOLA COUNTY

Officers Kevin Sweat and Dirk Williamson were on patrol on Lake Kissimmee, looking for subjects attempting to take alligators the night before the public alligator hunt was to open. Shortly after going on the water, the officers observed several subjects in a boat hunting alligators. The officers made contact and discovered that the hunters had already taken one alligator. The subject possessing the permit was issued a notice to appear for illegally taking an alligator and the alligator was seized.

Later that night, Officers Sweat and Williamson watched two more subjects on Lake Kissimmee attempt to take an alligator and observed one of the men throw a harpoon. The subjects were issued notices to appear for attempting to take alligators during closed season.

On the opening night of the public alligator hunt, Lieutenants Tim Riordan and Joe Allen were conducting an air surveillance flight over Lake Kissimmee when they observed a light being displayed from a vessel in Jack's Slough Canal in the Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area. Officer Williamson responded to the vessel's location and subsequently charged the three occupants with failure to hunt within their designated area and failing to tag two alligators that they had harvested. Prior to the subjects being stopped, they were observed hunting for a third alligator, even though they had only two tags for Lake Kissimmee.

Officer Dirk Williamson was on patrol on Pool A of the Kissimmee River when he observed three subjects using various methods to take an alligator. Officer Williamson then observed the subjects attempting to retrieve an alligator. When the hunters were checked, Officer Williamson discovered two of the subjects did not have an agent's license and therefore received notices to appear in court. The other individual, who had a permit, will be charged by direct file for violating the alligator hunt permit by allowing unlicensed individuals to attempt to take alligators.

## PINELLAS COUNTY

Officer Dieter Iten, was on land patrol and was conducting a marine fisheries inspection of a vessel with two individuals onboard near the Don Cesar boat ramp. The subjects were in possession of two snook out of season. They were both issued notices to appear and the snook were seized and donated to a local charity.

## POLK COUNTY

Officers Adonious Duhart, Stephen Judah and Reserve Officer David Weekly were checking alligator hunters at the Lake Hancock boat ramp. While checking a vessel that had approached the ramp, the officers found the occupants in possession of an alligator without a CITES tag attached. Officer Duhart charged the permitted hunter with failure to tag the alligator.

## **SOUTH REGION A**

### BROWARD COUNTY

Lieutenant Dave Bingham responded to a complaint of a large snake roaming free in a residential neighborhood. Lieutenant Bingham arrived and located an eight-foot Columbian Red-tail Boa. The snake was caught and turned over to a care facility pending an investigation.

## COPS

This week brought an end to the “ride-alongs” with Planet Green’s film crew. Production should be completed in time for the program to air in the fall.

## GLADES COUNTY

Officer David Burnsed was on water patrol in Lake Okeechobee working the opening night of alligator hunt season. Officer Burnsed’s efforts yielded citations that had been issued to occupants of three vessels who were attempting to take alligators outside of their assigned area.

## PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officer A.J. Maynard was on patrol in Belle Glade during the opening night of alligator hunt season. He observed three subjects in a boat “working” a light. An inspection revealed that the subjects did not possess the required permit. The subject who had the CITES tags assigned to him was issued a citation for the violation.

Officer David Burnsed was on water patrol in Lake Okeechobee, working the second night of alligator hunt season, when he was summoned to a boating accident that occurred in the Bear Beach area. Officer Burnsed arrived to find an airboat lying on its side. The boat had struck some metal pipes that had been driven into the bottom yet were projecting out of the water. Though the occupants were thrown from the vessel, they were not injured. A boating accident investigation was completed.

## **SOUTH REGION B**

### COLLIER COUNTY

Officer Daniel Stermen assisted the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve park manager by escorting several Florida lawmakers through the park. The day included a guided walking tour of the park as well as a swamp buggy ride.

### MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

While patrolling the west end of the C-8 Canal, Officer Mike Albert noticed a vehicle parked in a posted “no trespassing” area of a nearby lake. Officer Albert arrested one subject for an active arrest warrant. A second subject initially provided a false identity. Officer E. Sullivan arrived to provide assistance. The second subject was eventually identified and arrested for a warrant for two counts of grand theft. A third subject who possessed a valid driver license, was issued a warning for trespassing and allowed to leave.

Officers Erik Sullivan and Mike Albert were patrolling along Miami’s Venetian Causeway checking bridge fishermen. They encountered a subject fishing in a posted “no fishing

from bridge" area. The subject was arrested for an active warrant and local police transported him to jail. Before his departure, the subject was issued a warning for not possessing a land-based saltwater fishing license.

#### MONROE COUNTY

A settlement of \$5,000 was reached for damage assessment and restoration costs for an incident involving a 36' sailing vessel that ran aground at Newfound Harbor causing damage to hard stony coral within the National Marine Sanctuary. Officer Seth Wingard responded to the vessel grounding in November 2005, which caused 122 square feet of damage. Since then, restoration to the trench and reattachment of coral has been completed.