

FWC DIVISION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT FIELD OPERATIONS

**WEEKLY REPORT
July 17 – 23, 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

ESCAMBIA COUNTY

Officer Royce Johnson and Reserve Officer Lila Wise were patrolling the Bluff Springs area in the Escambia River Wildlife Management Area. They observed a suspicious looking campsite with a van parked nearby. There was no one around and the tag on the van was registered to another vehicle. When the owners returned, Officer Johnson identified the owner of the van. He admitted to attaching a tag not assigned to the vehicle. Additionally, he was driving on a suspended license and was wanted in Bay County for failure to pay child support. Officer Johnson turned the individual over to an assisting Escambia County deputy after issuing him two notices to appear traffic citations.

Officer Keith Clark stopped a vessel in Pensacola Pass and found the operator in possession of two undersize gag grouper and over-the-bag-limit of red snapper. Notice to appear citations were issued for the violations.

Officer Ben Pineda was patrolling the Escambia River conducting boating safety and fisheries inspections. During a vessel safety stop, the operator pulled an undersize red drum out of the live well and asked Officer Pineda what type of fish it was. Officer Pineda responded that it was a red drum and that it was undersize. The fisherman first advised that he found it floating in the water, but later changed the story to catching the fish, keeping it out of curiosity and planning to release it. Officer Pineda issued the subject a notice to appear citation for the violation.

Officers David Jernigan and Keith Clark stopped a vessel in Pensacola Pass and found the operator in possession of over-the-bag limit of red snapper. A notice to appear citation was issued.

Officer Kenneth Manning stopped a vehicle that was driving erratically on Scenic Highway. While speaking to the driver, Officer Manning noticed several signs that the driver was impaired. Lieutenant Brian Lambert was nearby and responded to assist. After performing poorly on all field sobriety tasks, the female driver was arrested and transported to the Escambia County Jail for driving under the influence. She agreed to give a breath sample which resulted in .331 g/210L. The driver had to be transported to Baptist Hospital to get medically cleared before the jail would accept her due to her high breath alcohol level. Approximately five hours later, the driver was medically cleared and was transported back to jail.

Officer Steve Hoomes responded to a boating accident near Quietwater Beach involving two rented personal watercraft (PWC). Both operators knew each other and were operating the vessels in the area. When one of the PWCs stopped for a few moments, the other operator headed straight towards it. Neither operator took evasive action, resulting in a broadside collision. Surprisingly, no one was injured; however, the impacted PWC was badly damaged. A notice to appear citation was issued to the

operator at fault, charging him with violation of a navigation rule resulting in a boating accident.

ESCAMBIA COUNTY COPS

Officer Keith Clark spoke on various wildlife issues to a class of Girl Scouts in Escambia County.

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Lieutenant Mark Hollinhead and Officer Ryan Nelson responded to a boating accident in Destin Harbor that involved a 42-foot stolen vessel. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) stopped the vessel after receiving calls about it recklessly maneuvering around the harbor and almost crashing into other vessels. Officer Nelson spoke with the operator and determined he was impaired from being up all night drinking and using illegal drugs. A bag of cannabis was in the cabin of the vessel and the subject stated he had dumped more overboard when he observed the USCG vessel. The subject was transported to the Okaloosa County Jail where field sobriety tasks were administered and confirmed he was impaired. A breath alcohol sample revealed his breath alcohol content was .108 g/210L. He was booked into the jail and charged with grand theft, boating under the influence, reckless operation and possession of less than 20 grams of cannabis. The vessel was returned to the owner with minor damage.

Officer Matt Webb stopped a vessel in Destin Pass to conduct a fishery inspection. The inspection revealed an undersize amberjack and scamp. The vessel captain was cited for the violations.

Officer Webb stopped a vessel in Destin Pass for a fishery inspection and found a bag limit violation on red snapper. The vessel captain was issued a notice to appear citation for the violation.

WALTON COUNTY

Officers from Okaloosa and Walton Counties responded to a boating accident in Choctawhatchee Bay at the Highway 331 Bridge. The accident occurred when a vessel traveling west struck a bridge piling with three occupants on board. Two of the occupants were treated at a local hospital for minor injuries and released. The third occupant was ejected upon impact and was missing. FWC officers utilized side view sonar to assist the dive teams in locating the missing subject. Approximately five hours after the accident, search and rescue teams recovered the body of the missing subject. Investigators Eddie Gatlin and Shelby Williams are investigating the accident.

BAY COUNTY

Officer Joe Chambers was conducting resource inspections on Deerpoint Lake when he observed a subject on a fishing pier lighting what appeared to be a cannabis cigarette.

As Officer Chambers approached, the subject threw the contraband into the water, threw up his hands, and said, "You got me." A baggie of cannabis and a pack of rolling papers were seized and the subject cited for the violations.

Officer Joe Chambers was patrolling the Cat Creek Section of the Econfina Wildlife Management Area when he observed four subjects at a swimming area consuming beer. The four were cited accordingly.

Officers Joe Chambers and Dennis Palmer were conducting resource inspections at the Hathaway Bridge when a fisher was found in possession of a cannabis cigarette and a bag of cannabis. The proper citations were issued.

Officer Mike Nobles issued a citation to the owner of the derelict vessel for failing to follow a salvage plan. Initially a written warning was issued for the violation and a date was agreed upon for the removal. After the agreed upon date passed, a citation was issued.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

ALACHUA COUNTY

Officer John Duncan was on water patrol on Lochloosa Lake conducting boating safety inspections and checking for bag limits on bream. During one inspection, Officer Duncan approached a vessel and asked the subject how many fish he had. The man replied, "fifty". Officer Duncan asked to count the fish and the man stated he would count them. After he reached fifty, there were fish remaining in the bucket. The subject admitted that he "might be a few over". Eleven fish were returned to the water alive and the suspect received a citation for over-the-daily-bag-limit.

At approximately 2:30 a.m. on June 18, Officer Brad Stanley was driving north on County Road 237 when he noticed a van traveling extremely slow and swerving off and on the road. Officer Stanley activated his emergency lights and the driver eventually pulled over. After trying to talk to the man for several minutes, Officer Stanley observed the driver kept pointing to his ears. Officer Stanley and an Alachua County Deputy arrived who arrived to assist both thought there was a language barrier. The driver was transported to the jail for no driver's license and careless operation. At the jail, an Alachua County Corrections officer began speaking in Spanish, but the subject kept pointing to his ears. They assumed he was deaf, however, when one of the officers stepped behind the subject and clapped his hands, the subject would immediately turn around. The officers were unable to perform a field sobriety task or take a breath test on the subject. The driver will be held at the jail until fingerprints can be reviewed by the FBI. Possible DUI charges will be filed through the State Attorney's Office based on observations made by Officer Stanley.

Officer Joseph Johnston was working Town Lake in the Hawthorne area from a concealed location when he observed four males fishing with a rods and reels. Soon another male rode up on a bike and shortly after, money exchanged hands and a small baggie went into one of the fishermen's pocket. With assistance from Deputy Vickers of Alachua County Sheriff's Office, Officer Johnston retrieved the bag, which contained a small amount of cannabis. All of the men had their fishing licenses and one was charged with possession of less than twenty grams.

CITRUS COUNTY

Officers Justin Henry and James Umhoefer were on patrol in the Citrus Wildlife Management Area targeting illegal night hunting activity. The officers observed a truck slowly travel through the trails working a spotlight from the cab. They stopped the vehicle and found the occupants to be in possession of .22 caliber rifle. The driver admitted to trying to locate a deer to kill. The man was cited for attempting to take deer at night with gun and light.

On July 17th and 18th, Officer Doug Loyed assisted the Citrus County Sherriff's Office (CCSO) with the search and recovery of a missing 17-year-old juvenile male. The juvenile jumped from a drifting vessel into the water in the Tsala Apopka Chain of Lakes near Estate Point. Other occupants observed him on the surface of the water, then disappear. The victim's body was recovered Saturday morning. CCSO is working the incident as a drowning.

GILCHRIST COUNTY

On July 17th and 18th, Officer Justin Allen and Investigator Larry Ayers assisted Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office (GCSO) with another missing male swimmer last seen near the Highway 47 Bridge. Through coordinated search efforts from FWC, GCSO and local rescue personnel the drowning victim was recovered.

LEVY COUNTY

During a detail targeting illegal night hunting activity, FWC Pilot Joe Johnston observed a vehicle working a spotlight throughout a local hunt club. Pilot Johnston monitored the vehicle as he directed Officers Robert Johnston and Garret Fields to the location. The officers made contact with the occupants of the vehicle and located loaded .22 caliber rifle in the front seat of the truck. The officers quickly gained confessions on the group's intent to kill some deer for meat. The occupants were issued court dates for attempting to take deer at night with gun and light. Trespass charges are also pending.

TAYLOR COUNTY

Officers Randy McDonald and Clay Huff were working illegal night hunting activity when they saw a vehicle pull into an adjacent county park and turn off its headlights. Both officers approached the vehicle, and in a concealed position, watched the driver smoke

crack cocaine. The officers arrested the subject for possession of crack cocaine and delivered him to the Taylor County Jail.

DUVAL COUNTY

Officer Sandy Blackburn checked a fisherman who was walking back to his truck at the Little Jetties Park. Blackburn asked the fisherman if he had caught anything and he replied, "Yes, but I don't know what it is." The subject later said that this fish was some kind of trout. When Blackburn asked to see the fish, the fisherman had to remove one bucket, then a cast net to reveal the fish. Upon inspection of the fish, Blackburn discovered that the fish was an undersize spotted sea trout. When the officer explained this to the fisherman he stated, "Oh, those have to be 12 inches in Texas." Blackburn explained the size limits in Florida. She also checked the size limits for spotted sea trout in Texas and found that a spotted sea trout has to be between 15 and 25 inches to possess. Blackburn issued a citation for possession of undersize spotted sea trout.

Officer Jamie Stowell was on water patrol offshore of Jacksonville when he stopped a vessel and performed a boating safety / fisheries inspection. The inspection revealed four undersize black sea bass and over-the-bag-limit of shark. A check of the defendant revealed that he had been issued citations seven times before. Citations were issued for the possession of undersize sea bass and for over-the-bag-limit of shark.

NASSAU COUNTY

Officer Tom Tucker conducted an inspection of a vessel returning to the 14th Street boat ramp from a day of fishing. Officer Tucker asked a subject aboard the vessel if he had caught any fish, to which the subject responded that he had caught a twenty-seven inch red fish. The subject also stated that he had measured the fish with the measuring device on top of his cooler, which measured to twenty-eight inches. Officer Tucker put the red fish on top of the cooler and the fish hung over both sides measuring thirty-one inches in total length. The subject was issued a citation for possession of an oversize red drum.

BRADFORD COUNTY

Officer Ricky Justus witnessed a boat returning to Sampson Lake boat ramp without proper navigation lights. During an inspection of the vessel, Officer Justus discovered four undersize black bass. Both occupants of the vessel admitted to each catching two of the bass. Officer Justus cited both of the occupants for harvesting undersize black bass and both were issued additional written warnings for the same offense. The operator was subsequently issued a written warning for failure to display navigation lights.

NORTHEAST REGION

OSCEOLA COUNTY

Officer Kurt Arendas is conducting a boat accident investigation involving a single boat which sank during bad weather on West Lake Toho. There were no injuries although the boat's occupants were checked out at a local hospital.

ST. JOHNS COUNTY

Officer Rich Wilcox, the local FWC investigator and Reserve Officer David Long conducted surveillance on two fishermen on the Intracoastal Waterway. They saw the suspects pull up behind a residence on the water and drop off a large ice chest. The two got back into their boat and proceeded to the boat ramp. The suspects were stopped and they admitted the ice chest they dropped off contained illegal redfish. The cooler contained 29 redfish, five of which were undersize, five undersize black drum and two undersize sheepshead. The suspects admitted to catching all of the fish with cast nets. Both were charged with taking over-the-bag-limit of redfish, a major violation due to the number of fish, three counts of possession of undersize redfish, four counts of possession of undersize black drum, two counts of possession of undersize sheepshead and one count of unlawful transportation of redfish.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

During fisheries inspections at the U.S. 41 Bridge in Port Charlotte, Officer Adam Resnick performed a warrants check on two individuals and discovered one had an active warrant for his arrest. When Officer Resnick returned to the subjects, the individual with the active warrant had left the area on foot. Lieutenant Mike Frantz, Officers Jason Cooke and Resnick searched the area and located the individual approximately one mile away, walking behind local businesses. After the individual was confronted, he was arrested for the warrant and subsequently booked into Charlotte County Jail with no further incidents.

LEE COUNTY

Officer Jonathan Ruggiero observed an individual fishing at Punta Rassa boat ramp. A fisheries inspection revealed a 17 ¼ inch gag grouper. The fisherman claimed he thought it was "a spotted grouper that needed to be ten inches". The individual was issued a citation.

Officer Demian McColgin was patrolling near the Sanibel Bridge when he observed a subject fishing with a cast net, approximately 40 yards from Bunche Beach. Officer McColgin made contact with the subject and conducted a resource inspection. The inspection revealed several undersize pompano hidden under mullet and sheepshead in

the bottom of a cooler. The subject was issued a misdemeanor citation, which requires an appearance in Lee County court.

Officer Jason Semeyn responded to a capsizing vessel in Boca Grande Pass. While the 18-foot vessel was drift fishing with three persons onboard, the tide and current were opposing each other, causing hazardous conditions. As the small boat began taking water over the stern, the passengers moved to the starboard side. The weight of the occupants, as well as the water within the hull, caused the vessel to list and capsize, ejecting all occupants into the water. The occupants and vessel were recovered without incident.

Officer Jonathan Ruggiero observed several fishermen at Clam Pass on Sanibel Island. After Officer Ruggiero made contact with one of the fishermen, he observed a snook on a stringer. Further inspection revealed two additional snook under a cooler the fisherman was sitting on. The individual received citations for undersize snook and possession of snook during the closed season. Another angler received a citation for failure to possess a nonresident fishing license.

SOUTH REGION A

BROWARD COUNTY

Officer Brian Weis attended a media event at Everglades Holiday Park where FWC Commissioners Barreto and Bergeron spoke about Burmese pythons and other reptiles of concern in the everglades. Participants were screened and issued permits to collect data and remove Burmese pythons and other reptiles of concern. Consequently, the participants went out to Brown's Camp and captured a 10' Burmese python.

Lieutenant Dave Bingham was working Conservation Area 2A when he observed a subject feeding alligators. The subject was cited for the violations.

GLADES COUNTY

Investigator J.W. Armstrong filed charges with the State Attorney's Office representing Glades County in connection with an investigation of taking/possession of soft shell turtles or their eggs taken from the wild during close season (1 May through 31 July). On June 22nd a tip was forwarded to Glades County area FWC Investigators and uniform patrol officers. Information in the tip stated that an unknown person was unlawfully taking and selling 5,000 to 8,000 soft shell turtle eggs from Lake Okeechobee. On July 7, 2009, Investigator Armstrong observed a vessel covered with camouflage material and one occupant checking the small spoil islands in Fish Eating Bay, Lake Okeechobee. After several hours of surveillance, Investigator Armstrong and Lieutenant Edward Brown made contact with the subject on a spoil island where the subject was attempting to hide. Investigator Armstrong and Lieutenant Brown recovered a bucket containing many soft shell turtle eggs, handheld excavating tools,

and fossils from the vessel and subject. Six turtles hatched during the inventory of the one hundred twenty-five seized from the suspects. The evidence was documented and is scheduled for DNA testing.

HENDRY COUNTY

Officers David Burnsed and Sulin Schafer were on water patrol on Lake Okeechobee when they stopped a vessel in the Industrial Canal leaving Roland Martin's Marina. A boating safety inspection was conducted and the operator showed signs of impairment. Numerous empty alcoholic beverages were visible and the officers had a reason to believe the operator might be impaired. After further investigation and field sobriety tasks, it was determined that the operator was impaired. The operator was placed under arrest for boating under the influence and transported to the Clewiston Police Department. The subject gave a breath sample of .194 and .193.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

FWC Investigators from Martin, Palm Beach and Broward Counties responded to an alligator attack on a dog. The dog's owner, David Grounds, intervened to get the dog away from the alligator. In the process, Mr. Grounds grabbed the jaws of the alligator and pried them open. He poked the alligator in the eye and the gator dropped the 43.7 pound Wheaton Terrier. The 7' gator closed its jaws on Mr. Grounds' right hand. Mr. Grounds was injured but expected to recover. The dog was taken to a local veterinarian clinic and is expected to recover as well. The gator was caught by an FWC trapper and removed from the area. The alligator lived in marshy waters behind Mr. Grounds' house. Mr. Grounds saw the alligator prior to the attack and had never had any problems with alligators before. No criminal charges will be filed.

While on land patrol and driving on U.S. Sugar property, Officer Sulin Schafer observed a vehicle with its lights off, traveling in the opposite direction. As Officer Schafer got closer to the vehicle, the car turned its lights on and moved to the field off the north side of the road. Officer Schafer activated her blue lights and stopped the vehicle. The vehicle was occupied by a male driver and a female passenger who was sitting in the back seat. Both said they were just talking. After interviewing the subjects, Officer Schafer found the driver to be in violation of driving while license suspended with knowledge. Dispatch also advised that the driver had been convicted of assault and battery on a law enforcement officer and resisting arrest. Palm Beach Sheriff's Office was contacted and arrived to assist. Both subjects were issued notices to appear for trespassing and the driver was issued a traffic citation for driving while his license was suspended.

On July 19, 2009 at 11:30 p.m. at Lake Worth Spillway, Officer David Fowler cited a subject for possession of a snook during the closed season. A warning was issued for taking an oversize snook.

SOUTH REGION B

MONROE COUNTY

Officer Scott LaRosa is investigating a vessel grounding that occurred south of Whale Harbor Channel involving a 55' trawler that carved a channel approximately 2,000 feet long. The operator, a Jupiter resident, could face civil penalties of \$100 per square foot for damage to sea grass. A biological assessment will determine the extent of the damage.

COLLIER COUNTY

Officer Daniel Stermen located a stolen vehicle in the Picayune Wildlife Management Area. The vehicle was recovered with assistance from the Florida Division of Forestry. The Collier County Sheriff's Office will complete the investigation.

A Broward County man mailed a letter to his family of his intent to go hiking and not return. The National Park Service, FWC, and Collier County Sheriff's Office conducted a three day search in the Big Cypress National Preserve. Officer Hank Juntunen and his k-9, along with a park ranger located the deceased victim. The incident is under investigation.