

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

**WEEKLY REPORT  
October 16 - 22, 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 Keith Clark checked a vessel in Pensacola Bay with two occupants onboard. The vessel operator asked Officer Clark how many sharks they could keep. Officer Clark replied "Two". During the safety equipment check, the vessel operator took a shark from the cooler and threw it overboard, leaving two more sharks in the cooler. Officer Clark issued a notice to appear citation for interference with an FWC officer.

Officer Keith Clark checked a commercial fishing vessel in Pensacola Bay. He found a deckhand who did not possess the required saltwater products license. A notice to appear citation was issued for the violation.

### **SANTA ROSA COUNTY**

An FWC employee for the Florida Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) assigned to the Pensacola field office was conducting saltwater fisheries surveys on the Gulf Breeze side of the Three Mile Bridge fishing pier. She was approached and harassed several times during the day by a male subject. During the final contact in the early evening hours, the 47-year-old male (with witnesses present) physically grabbed the female employee and made statements of a sexual and threatening nature to her. She resisted and instructed the subject to leave. The man eventually left the area after sitting in his truck and watching her from a distance. The employee was afraid to leave the occupied pier until the male left, fearing he would follow her. After the subject left the area, she reported the incident to her immediate supervisor who was near the Pensacola field office and alerted Lieutenant Dan Hahr. Lieutenant Hahr obtained a sworn statement and is investigating the incident.

### **SANTA ROSA COUNTY COPS**

Officer David Jernigan represented the FWC Division of Law Enforcement at the L & N Train Depot Centennial celebration conducted at the Milton historic depot. Officer Jernigan displayed a marked patrol truck and patrol vessel at the outreach event. He answered many questions and handed out educational pamphlets. He also talked to several people who were interested in becoming FWC officers.

### **OKALOOSA COUNTY**

On October 17, Officers Van Barrow and Danny Arnette along with Investigators Eddie Gatlin and Shelby Williams conducted surveillance around an area that had been baited with deer pellets and a salt block on Eglin Wildlife Management Area. A hunter was later observed hunting from a tree stand approximately 25 yards from the baited area. The subject admitted to placing the bait around his tree stand. He was cited for placing and exposing bait on a wildlife management area.

Three subjects fled from their vehicle when they were stopped by Crestview Police Department officers. A search of the vehicle revealed a dead spotted fawn that had been shot and hidden in the trunk. Officer Alan Kirchinger met with the patrol officers the next day and obtained information about the registered owner of the vehicle. One suspect was later identified and interviewed. The investigation is ongoing.

#### WALTON COUNTY

Officers Don Walker and Espy Letcher checked a subject hunting near an area where a deer attractant had been broadcast on the ground in the Point Washington Wildlife Management Area. The subject was cited for placing and exposing bait on a wildlife management area.

#### BAY COUNTY

Lieutenant Mark Clements responded to a hunting complaint in northern Bay County. Upon knocking on the subject's door, he observed a potted marijuana plant growing in the front window. Officer Dennis Palmer arrived to assist and located the subject hanging a deer stand in the woods. When asked about the plant, the subject said it was for his personal use. Citations were issued.

### **NORTH CENTRAL REGION**

#### ALACHUA COUNTY

Officers Dustin Bonds and Brad Stanley were working a complaint just outside of the Gainesville city limits in an undeveloped subdivision. A brown pickup had been seen shining a spotlight on several occasions in the subdivision. Around 8:20 p.m., the officers observed the brown pickup pull into the subdivision and immediately shine the empty lots with a spotlight. After the pickup circled the subdivision, the officers stopped the truck which contained a loaded rifle. The adult male driver and his juvenile son were very surprised. The driver was issued a criminal citation for possession of gun and light at night.

#### DIXIE COUNTY

Officer Todd Nichols responded to a report that two subjects had unlawfully killed an alligator in the town of Suwannee and left the area. Further investigation revealed fresh alligator blood on a dock and a vehicle and suspect description. After a brief search, Officer Nichols found the vehicle and two suspects fishing in a remote area near another boat ramp. Interviews revealed they had caught the alligator on a fishing plug and killed it. They left the area and discarded the alligator remains in a creek. During a search of the vehicle, a small amount of cannabis was located. Statements, photos and evidence samples were taken. The subjects were charged with the unlawful taking of alligator and possession of cannabis less than twenty grams.

## BAKER COUNTY

Officer Donald Pettyjohn conducted an investigation into the dumping of household garbage on a land owner's property. The officer identified and questioned a suspect and secured a confession to the crime. The subject was charged for violation of the Florida litter law.

## CLAY COUNTY

Officer Michael Heath was dispatched during the early morning hours to a night hunting complaint. Sheriff's deputies stopped a vehicle after witnesses reported the driver shot at a deer. Officer Heath arrived to find a loaded Marlin .22 caliber magnum rifle and spotlight in the vehicle. After being advised of Miranda rights, the subject admitted to shooting at a deer on the side of the highway. Officer Heath seized the firearm and spotlight along with several rounds of ammunition. The case was presented to the State's Attorney Office for filing.

## DUVAL COUNTY

Officer Aaron O'Reilly noticed a commercial fisherman selling ribbon fish near the shrimp docks in Mayport. O'Reilly saw the fisherman dump the fish into a cooler then place the cooler into the back of a vehicle. The vehicle owner then gave the fisherman money. When O'Reilly questioned the fisherman, he found the subject did not have the proper retail license. A citation was issued.

Officers Aaron O'Reilly and Bob Brienza responded to a complaint of someone selling undersize fish at the Beach Boulevard Flea Market. They checked several vendors and found one who was offering undersize bluefish for sale. The officers found a total of 17 undersize bluefish and cited the vendor for the violation. The fish were seized as evidence.

## **NORTHEAST REGION**

### INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

While on water patrol, Officer Curtis Suggs received a complaint about a subject taking oversize redfish at the Sebastian Inlet State Park. Officer Suggs responded and found a subject on the tip of the jetty with two oversize redfish measuring 30 and 40 inches. When asked about the illegal fish, the subject stated the fish were given to him. The subject was written a citation for possession of oversize red drum and taking over the daily bag limit of red drum.

### OSCEOLA COUNTY

While on water patrol on East Lake Toho, Officer Paul Mendez and Lieutenant Guy Carpenter II observed two men in an Alabama boat without its required navigational lights on. During the subsequent vessel stop, the officers observed several fishing poles and other fishing equipment inside the vessel. After conducting a resource inspection, Officer Mendez found the men, one from Alabama and the other from Georgia, to be in possession of five undersize bass. They were issued notices to appear for the violation.

While on patrol in Bull Creek Wildlife Management Area, Officer Caitlyn Staskiewicz and Lieutenant Carpenter stopped a Brevard County hunter to conduct an inspection of his licenses, vehicle and hunting pack. Officer Staskiewicz found a half gallon freezer bag containing whole corn inside the toolbox of the subject's truck. She did not reveal her discovery and continued the inspection, making note of the truck's description. After concluding the inspection, the officers gave the hunter a while to get into the woods, then located his truck. They tracked the subject about a mile into the woods, where they found him walking away from a tree stand. Officer Staskiewicz explained the reason for the second inspection and then inspected the area around the tree stand. She found two sites baited with whole corn within 25 yards of the stand. Officer Staskiewicz photographed the corn and documented the hunter's information. A hunting over corn in a wildlife management area case will be direct filed to the State Attorney's Office.

#### PUTNAM COUNTY

Officers Troy Starling and Ryan Haney received a complaint from animal control that an individual was in possession of gopher tortoises. The officers responded to the residence and confirmed the violation. One suspect was issued a citation for possession of gopher tortoise.

#### ST. JOHNS COUNTY

Officers Rich Wilcox and Lee Lawshe worked a dove hunt. When they checked the field, they found it was baited with cracked corn and bird seed. They issued citations to four hunters for hunting doves over bait.

#### VOLUSIA COUNTY

Officer Clay McDonough was awarded a Certificate of Appreciation from New Smyrna Police Chief R.P. Pagano for "recognition of the excellent skill demonstrated during an emergency call for service on August 10, 2009, involving a suicide threat, which resulted in surrender without further incident." In the early morning hours of August 10, the New Smyrna Police Department SWAT team was called to respond to a despondent adult male who had barricaded and armed himself aboard a vessel. Officer McDonough was on scene and knew this individual. Officer McDonough was asked to speak via cell phone with him and shortly following their conversation, the subject voluntarily surrendered.

## **SOUTHWEST REGION**

### **CHARLOTTE COUNTY**

Officers Jason Cooke, Adam Resnick and Barry Shaw, and personnel from the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and Lee and Charlotte County Sheriff's Offices, answered two separate vessel in distress calls from the USCG. One call involved a 40-foot catamaran with two individuals onboard that was sinking four miles off Gasparilla Pass. Another call involved a 15-foot sailboat with two minor occupants onboard near Punta Gorda. Through a coordinated effort, the occupants in both vessels were rescued.

### **HERNANDO COUNTY**

Lieutenant Kevin Grover, Officers Joshua Allison and Joe Wolff, along with K-9 Mojo tracked two subjects who fled from Lieutenant Grover after he observed them archery hunting in a Wildlife Environmental Area, which was closed to hunting. The subjects were tracked to an area where it is believed they left in a vehicle. Deputies who were assisting stopped the vehicle and arrested several subjects for resisting arrest without violence, hunting in a closed area, and no hunting license or archery permit.

Officer Scott Peterson located a subject who killed a spotted fawn. The subject said he did not see the spots on the 35-pound deer when he shot it. The subject was charged with taking a spotted fawn.

### **LEE COUNTY**

Lieutenant Darrin Riley and Officers Brian Cazalot, Justin Koble, Jason Cooke and Jay Ewing conducted a stone crab detail in Lee and Charlotte Counties. The officers checked approximately 12 lines of commercial crab traps, as well as 10 recreational divers. Officer Cooke cited four individuals for 21 undersize crab claws. Officers Cazalot, Koble and Ewing issued five written warnings for improperly tagged traps. One set of crab traps is being investigated for having tags attached which were not assigned to them.

Officer Robert O'Horo was on patrol in Babcock Ranch when he responded to a lost hunter incident involving a father whose 15-year-old son had failed to meet at a pre-designated place and time. The son was three hours overdue. Lieutenant Mile Frantz arrived to assist and the lost hunter was located.

### **OKEECHOBEE COUNTY**

Officer Matt Ervin was on water patrol on the Kissimmee River near Paradise Run when he observed several subjects fishing. During a fisheries inspection, Officer Ervin found one subject in possession of two eight-inch bass and one nine-inch bass, which were well under the Lake Okeechobee 18-inch minimum size limit for the area. The subject was issued a citation for the violation.

## PASCO COUNTY

Lieutenants Kevin Grover and Pamela Hoback and Officers Joshua Allison and Joe Wolff responded to an incident regarding two subjects who were trespassing. The officers stopped the subjects who said they were hog hunting on Southwest Florida Water Management District property and lost their dog. In an effort to locate the dog, the individuals entered private property and were chased by the landowner. The subjects were charged accordingly.

## PINELLAS COUNTY

Officer Will Wiedner was at the Fort DeSoto boat ramp conducting a vessel safety inspection on a recreational vessel. The operator was in possession of one redfish, one sheephead, one black drum, one gag grouper, and three mangrove snapper, all beheaded and eviscerated. The individual was also in possession of one undersize gag grouper and four shark fillets. The subject was issued the appropriate citations for possession of fish not in whole condition.

## SARASOTA COUNTY

Officers Adam Brown, Andrew Brown, Matt Griffith and Nick Ridgway participated in a presentation at Infinity Middle School in Sarasota with approximately 30 students and teachers in attendance. The presentation consisted of various topics such as how to become an FWC officer, daily duties and responsibilities that accompany the job. Officer Griffith left a lasting impression on the audience with the help of his K-9 partner, Tucker. There was also a 24-foot patrol boat and an FWC patrol truck on display. The crowd had the opportunity to get a close-up view at a gopher tortoise from Wildlife Center in Venice and a five-foot alligator. The FWC licensed trappers were a big hit when they stopped by the school to let the students view nine alligators that were in a transport trailer.

## **SOUTH REGION A**

### BROWARD COUNTY

Officers David Weis and Tyler Harrison were on patrol checking ramps when they saw a suspicious vehicle at a boat ramp off U.S. Highway 27. Upon investigation, they saw a bloody foot and realized the subject in the vehicle was deceased. The Broward County Sheriff's Office was called to investigate what appeared to be a homicide.

Officer Darral Thomason heard gunshots coming from the L-5 levee in Holey Land Wildlife Management Area. Four subjects were found to be shooting a shotgun. One subject was cited for target shooting and consuming alcohol while discharging a firearm.

Officers Darral Thomason and Eric Alford received a call that subjects were taking undersize pompano at a fishing pier. Both officers cited two different groups of subjects for possessing the illegal fish.

#### MARTIN COUNTY

Officer Ray Woolrich was on patrol when he observed a light being "worked" in the area of Highway 711 and Becker Groves. He confronted three subjects covered in blood. A twelve hour investigation by canine units and officers yielded the discovery of three deer carcasses. Criminal charges are pending against the three subjects for taking deer by unlawful method, trespassing, possession of antlerless deer, and hunting at night with a gun and light.

#### OKEECHOBEE COUNTY

Officer Sulin Schafer was dispatched to a local hospital to assist Investigator Chris Harris with interviewing a subject involved in an airboat accident. During the interview, it was discovered that two other subjects were still at the scene of the accident. Lieutenant Ed Brown responded to the scene. The hospitalized subject said that after the accident, he walked to Okee-Tantie Campground and spoke to a guard. The subject was transported to his house, did not report the accident until the next morning, and claimed the cause of the crash was equipment failure. All of the subjects sustained only minor injuries. Officers continue to investigate.

#### PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officer Jamie Young was checking fishermen at Jupiter Inlet when she encountered one subject in possession of twenty-one bluefish. A citation was issued for the over-the-limit violation.

Officers Varnadoe and Weis were on night patrol at a boat ramp inside Everglades and Francis S. Taylor Wildlife Management Area, when they observed a vehicle enter the area. The vehicle started doing "donuts" and spinning its wheels in a careless/reckless manner. The officers stopped the vehicle and Officer Weis approached the driver's window. When the driver opened it, Officer Weis immediately saw smoke and smelled marijuana coming from the interior. A small bag of marijuana was observed in the vehicle. The driver was cited for careless driving and marijuana possession.

#### ST. LUCIE COUNTY

While on patrol in western Fort Pierce, Officer Brandon Lasher heard a gunshot and investigated. He observed a vehicle with a subject shining a light from it in a suspicious manner. Officer Lasher stopped the vehicle and observed two loaded rifles between the front seats and a spotlight hooked to a battery on top of a dog box. Officer Kyle Patterson responded to assist. A dead rabbit was also located in the bed of the truck. One subject was cited for illegally hunting at night with a gun and light.

## COPS

Officer Randolph Irwin attended a safety fair at Port Saint Lucie's Oak Hammock K-8 School. He spoke to approximately 150 students about being a wildlife officer, the importance of boating safety, and caring for the environment.

## **SOUTH REGION B**

### MONROE COUNTY

Investigators responded to a complaint of a Burmese python located in the back yard of a residential neighborhood. The homeowner did not know how the snake got there or who owned the snake. Investigators captured the 8' snake and had it scanned for a microchip, but found none. The snake was delivered to the U.S. Geological Service in Key Largo where biologists will conduct a necropsy.

Officer Steve Dion responded to a diving accident resulting in a fatality in Boca Chica Channel. A diver in the water was unable to board his vessel and his companion got into the water to help him. Both divers got caught in a strong current and were separated from their vessel. One man was able to hang onto a bridge structure until he was rescued.

Officer Robert Dube was interviewed by Telemundo, Channel Five in Dade County on the recent arrests made by FWC for trap molestation occurring in the Florida Keys.

### COLLIER COUNTY

Several FWC officers, along with Collier County Sheriffs' Deputies, set up a checkpoint in Picayune Strand State Forest Wildlife Management Area during the opening of muzzleloader season. Approximately sixty vehicles were checked resulting in several warnings and one citation issued. Most of the individuals checked expressed gratitude to the officers for conducting the checkpoint.

Officers Doyle Cook and Marc Shea rescued two bikers who were lost in the Picayune Strand State Forest Wildlife Management Area. The husband and wife relayed GPS coordinates from their cell phone and were located near the horse trail access off Benfield Road.