

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Law Enforcement Weekly Report



Patrol, Protect, Preserve

October 19, 2018 through November 1, 2018

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

CASES

ESCAMBIA COUNTY

Officer Allgood was working the Escambia River and saw a fire at a campsite. He approached the campsite and saw two subjects fishing. As he approached the subjects, he saw an alligator snapping turtle tied off to a tree on the bank. One subject admitted to catching and tying the rope around the turtle's head. After removing the rope from its head and ensuring the turtle was safe, Officer Allgood seized the turtle to take to the fish hatchery. Officer Allgood issued both subjects citations for no camping permits and the male subject was issued a citation for possession of an alligator snapping turtle.

GADSDEN COUNTY

Officer Brower was on land patrol when he received a phone call from Officer Hildebrand regarding a jeep that was stuck on the Ochlocknee North Wildlife Management Area. Officer Hildebrand said he saw a picture on social media of the stuck jeep. Officer Brower proceeded to the area, saw tire sign that drove around a gate with a closed road sign, and followed the tire sign to the jeep. He contacted dispatch to get the registered owner's name and phone number and contacted the owner to meet him at the management area. A tow truck was called and became stuck while traveling to the jeep. A larger tow truck was called, and the jeep was successfully extricated. Officer Brower issued the appropriate citations.

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Officers Jarvis and Maltais were on vessel patrol and saw a 28-foot sailboat hard aground in the Santa Rosa Sound at an area known as Spoil Island. The sailboat was leaning on its starboard side with the mast laying half on the sailboat and half in the water. As the officers pulled along the vessel, the owner of the vessel was onboard. The sailboat is the primary residence for the vessel owner. The owner was cited and issued a notice to appear citation for a derelict vessel and was provided an informational package of his right to due process. The owner stated he will have the vessel removed as quickly as possible.

Officer Wilkenson was on land patrol traveling westbound on Highway 98 approaching Evergreen Drive when he saw a stationary vehicle, parked half on the right lane and the other half off the shoulder of the road. He conducted a welfare check on the driver and to address the safety issue. As the officer approached the vehicle, he saw the vehicle was running and both left tires were blown off the rims. Officer Wilkenson saw an individual in the driver's seat. The individual was unresponsive and appeared to be passed out. He tapped on the driver's side window to waken the driver. It took several attempts to wake the driver. Once the driver awoke, he opened the driver's side door, and the officer asked if he was alright. Officer Wilkenson could smell a strong odor of an alcoholic beverage coming from the driver. Upon asking the driver for his driver's license, vehicle registration and proof of insurance, the driver appeared to be confused and dazed. Officer Wilkenson requested the driver perform field sobriety tasks and he consented. The driver was arrested for DUI and transported to the Okaloosa County Jail. The driver provided two breath samples, resulting in 0.158 blood alcohol content and 0.159 blood alcohol content.

Officer Nichols received a complaint from the assistant park manager at Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park regarding a camper disturbing the peace by using loud vulgar language. The manager told the camper this would not be tolerated. The next day, the manager again received another complaint that the same camper was continuing to use loud vulgar language. The manager requested FWC to issue a no trespass warning to the camper. Officer Nichols issued the no trespass warning without incident.

Officer Corbin was on land patrol conducting fisheries inspections at the Shalimar Bridge when he saw an individual filleting a red drum on the concrete barrier on the bridge. As the officer continued to monitor the subject, he saw the individual retrieve a second red drum from a bucket and start to fillet the fish. As the officer approached the subject, the individual started throwing the skins of the redfish off the bridge and into the water. Officer Corbin quickly identified himself and instructed the subject to stop. Upon inspection, Officer Corbin determined the fish filleted were red drum and undersized. The individual was cited and issued a notice to appear citation for failure to land fish in whole condition and possession of undersize red drum.

Officer Corbin received a complaint from a property manager regarding an unauthorized sailboat being docked at the condominium's marina. A few days later, he received a call that an individual was on the sailboat. Officer Corbin responded by vessel. When he

arrived, he identified the individual as the owner of the sailboat and recognized him as someone he had previously cited with a criminal citation for failure to transfer vessel title. FWC Tallahassee Regional Communication Center confirmed that the individual has an active felony warrant out of Okaloosa County for violation of probation. The individual was placed under arrest and transported to the Okaloosa County Jail.

Officer Specialist Maltais located a subject's tree stand and a camera while scouting Eglin Wildlife Management Area. He saw kernels of corn spread out in the field near of the stand. When he returned the next day, he saw a camouflaged subject in the tree stand. The subject admitted that he placed the corn on the field. The subject was cited and issued a notice to appear citation for placing bait on a management area.

SANTA ROSA COUNTY

Officers Lewis and Hoomes investigated a complaint of a vessel that was dumped in Blackwater River State Forest. After trying to locate the vessel's origin, the officers utilized Google satellite imagery to locate the vessel at a residence near where it was later dumped. The officers interviewed a subject at the residence. The subject was cooperative and admitted to dumping the vessel. Charges were filed for misdemeanor littering, and the subject removed the vessel from the forest.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Officer Specialist Bartlett responded to a call regarding a lost subject on Eglin Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The wife of the missing subject called Eglin Range Patrol. Information received that the missing subject went hunting on Eglin WMA the previous morning. He sent a text to her around 8:00 PM stating that he was lost in the woods and was planning on sleeping there until morning if he was not able to make it back to his truck. The wife provided the Eglin Range Patrol an area where she believed he hunted. Due to the dropping temperatures and rain moving into the area, Officer Bartlett advised FWC Dispatch that he would respond and requested assistance from Officer Wilkenson and K-9 Officer Hutchinson with the search. After further communication with the man's wife, the officers began their search in the East River Archery Unit. The Eglin Range Patrol pinged the missing subject's cell phone to narrow the officers' search area. At approximately 5:00 AM, the missing subject, along with another subject (companion), were located safe and unharmed.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

CASES

CITRUS COUNTY

Officers Banks and Browning were working commercial oyster harvesting when they saw a commercial vessel in a closed area. During a resource inspection, the officers discovered that over 50 percent of their oysters were undersized. The subjects were issued a notice to appear for harvesting in a closed area, failing to cull oysters and possession of undersized oysters.

DIXIE COUNTY

Officer Butler received information that two subjects were actively robbing commercial blue crab traps in a local creek. He arrived on scene and approached the subjects. During a resource inspection, Officer Butler discovered two large coolers containing blue crabs in the back of the subjects' vehicle. During an interview, both subjects admitted to removing the crabs from the commercial crab traps. Both subjects were subsequently arrested and booked into the Dixie County Jail for felony trap robbing.

Officer Butler was working plain clothes water patrol when he saw two commercial oyster vessels entering a prohibited area. Officer Butler concealed his patrol vessel and watched the subjects as they began to harvest oysters. He made contact and issued each subject a notice to appear for harvesting oysters in a prohibited area.

GILCHRIST COUNTY

Officers Allen and Wiggins were on patrol when they saw a parked vehicle on water management property that is closed to hunting. They saw items in the back of the truck that indicated the person was hunting. They waited for the subject to return and made contact. The subject was carrying a muzzleloader and stated he had been hunting. Charges for hunting during closed season will be direct filed with the Gilchrist County State Attorney's Office.

SUWANNEE COUNTY

Lieutenant Humphries and Officer Boone discovered a parked vehicle in the middle of a county grade while patrolling Suwannee County. Just ahead of the vehicle was a man dressed in full camouflage, walking down the road. The subject was looking for a deer that had been shot earlier that morning. Officer Boone, while talking to the subject, noticed dried blood in the bed of the truck. Further investigation revealed that the subject had killed a doe deer, two days earlier during crossbow season. The subject provided a statement and revealed the location of the recently killed doe deer. The charge of taking doe deer during a closed season will be filed with the state attorney's office.

FEDERAL WATERS

Prior to the opening of stone crab season, the Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) 2005 Fincat conducted a patrol in federal waters off Citrus, Hernando and Pasco counties to determine compliance with the closed areas. During the patrol, a line of traps was found

in the closed area off Hernando County. The location was documented, and a patrol established to apprehend the suspect.

On opening day of stone crab season, Officers Canfield and Creel aboard the OPV 2005 Fincat, located and stopped the suspect vessel engaged in pulling traps in the closed area. During the stop, it was also found that the vessel was not registered. Officer Canfield issued the violator a citation for traps in a closed area, a citation for operating an unregistered vessel and a warning for a buoy violation. The violator was also directed to remove his traps from the closed area.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

CLAY COUNTY

Lieutenant Haney spoke to 120 fourth grade students at Keystone Heights Elementary School to discuss the importance of conservation and protecting the Florida Everglades. The students learned about the Everglades Ecosystem and were excited to hear first-hand about real world experiences from an FWC officer.

MADISON COUNTY

Officer Vazquez participated in the law portion of a hunter safety course. This course allows participants to learn and interact with conservation law enforcement on hunting safety topics. Numerous related questions were answered on the matters of enforcement, public safety and various hunting related questions. Approximately thirty-five participants attended the course.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

Officer Matthews was on patrol when he saw a group of subjects loading cast nets into their truck. He conducted a resource inspection and discovered a 16.75-inch snook and an egg bearing blue land crab, which is currently in a closed season. The subject was cited accordingly and both the snook and blue land crab were released alive.

MARION COUNTY

Officer Chriest received information regarding possible illegal hunting activity inside Gores Landing Wildlife Management Area (WMA). During the investigation he discovered signs of hunting activity including a deer carcass with the head removed. In addition, the officer located what appeared to be a recent kill site and a tree stand nearby. Officers conducted surveillance of the location for nearly three weeks. Officer

Seiler, with the help of Officers Simpson, Dias, and FWC K9 Moose located a subject hunting with a muzzle-loader. The subject was issued written warnings for illegal entry to WMA, multiple license violations, and issued a notice to appear for hunting Gores Landing WMA during the closed season.

Officer Rice was contacted by U.S. Forest Service officers to take lead on an illegal dumping investigation. The violation occurred in the Lake County portion on the Ocala Wildlife Management Area, where subjects dumped 6,620 pounds of construction material on a forest road. The officers located a piece of mail within the debris with a name and address. Officer Rice conducted an interview with the homeowner and learned that a company was hired to do repair work at the home. After several interviews with the company owner and employees, Officer Rice located the two suspects who were employees with the company. One of the suspects admitted that the two dumped the materials on the forest road instead of disposing of it properly. Arrest warrants were obtained for both suspects for felony dumping.

ORANGE COUNTY

Based on intelligence developed by the Internet Crimes Unit, captive wildlife investigators responded to a residence and discovered the homeowner in possession of four reticulated pythons. The owner was cited for possession of conditional species without a license and failure to maintain conditional species within a locked cage. Several written warnings were also issued. The owner voluntarily surrendered ownership of the snakes, one of which was about 15 feet long, to the FWC for permanent placement at a licensed location.

VOLUSIA COUNTY

Officer Edson was conducting marine fisheries inspections along the coastline when he encountered a male subject in possession of two undersized grey snapper. Officer Edson cited the subject for the violation.

Officers Bertolami and Ward responded to a request for assistance from the Ormond Beach Police Department in searching for a male subject who may have fallen from Granada Bridge. The officers located the deceased male subject in the Intracoastal Waterway and assisted in recovering him from the water.

Officer Ward received a complaint about an ongoing trespass issue where hunting equipment was found on posted private property. Officers Ward and North arrived to survey the area of the complaint with the property manager. While in the area, the officers saw a male subject enter the property by climbing through a barbed wire fence and retrieve some of the hunting equipment. The subject was charged with trespassing on private property.

PUTNAM COUNTY

Officer Bernard was in Etoniah State Forest Wildlife Management Area (WMA) when he saw a bag of corn in the back of a vehicle. Upon contacting the driver, it was found that he was hunting and stated that he did not place any bait in the WMA. Officer Bernard and the subject walked back to the area he was hunting, and a large number of crushed acorns were found on the ground. The subject stated that his friend set up the stand and he saw a pile of something but did not go look at it. The other subject was contacted and admitted to placing the bait in the WMA. The first subject was charged with hunting over bait in a WMA and the second subject was charged with placing bait in a WMA.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

OSCEOLA COUNTY

Lieutenant Hudson represented FWC at the Wounded Warrior Outdoors annual wild hog and alligator hunt in Osceola County. This event provides veterans the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors, while challenging them physically beyond what they previously believed was possible. This event is always a great success and is a way to show our nation's warriors they are not forgotten.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

LEE COUNTY

Officers Furbay, Price and Lieutenant Ruggiero responded to the Franklin Locks in regard to a report of a hit and run boating accident. The complainant said he was tying up his vessel to a dock on the Caloosahatchee River when another large vessel failed to slow down as it went past. The larger vessel's wake pushed the victim's boat into the dock causing damage. The complainant attempted to get the other vessel to stop, but it kept on going. The incident is being further investigated at this time.

Officers Winton, Hazelwood and Lieutenant Spoede were on offshore patrol when they saw a fishing vessel being operated in a common fishing area. The officers initiated a vessel stop to conduct a fisheries inspection. It was determined that the operator was in possession of two undersized tripletail. The subject was issued a notice to appear for the violations and was provided a current copy of state fishing regulations.

MANATEE COUNTY

While on air patrol in the fixed wing aircraft, Pilot Fields and Lieutenant Van Trees saw a commercial fishing vessel with numerous nets in the water that appeared to be tied together. The aerial officers saw a lone subject using more than two nets to fish and called waterborne Officers Bibler and Infante to respond by boat and check the netting

operation for illegal configuration. After inspecting how the commercial subject had set up his nets illegally, Officer Bibler cited the subject for fishing with more than two nets from a vessel and then seized three large seine nets as evidence of the illegal operation.

Officer Davidson was on land patrol around the Braden River. While on patrol, he received a dispatched complaint that someone had left an unattended and baited gator hook in the Braden River. He found the baited hook and waited for someone to return and check it. Late that night, an individual came to check the baited gator hook. Officer Davidson cited the subject criminally for leaving an unattended gator hook and using a wooden peg that was too large. The individual will have to appear in court for his violation.

PINELLAS COUNTY

Investigator Tsongranis, and Officers Litherland and Pettifer responded to a delayed report of a hit and run boating accident in Tarpon Springs. Investigator Tsongranis and Officer Litherland followed up on the information given at the reported location of a local marina. They were able to obtain independent witness statements and security footage of the accident. The officers identified the owner/operator of the hit and run vessel which had recently been sold. After being interviewed and confronted with the video footage of the accident, the operator admitted to hitting the other vessel and leaving the scene without reporting the accident. He was cited for leaving the scene of a boating accident (not involving injury) and failure to report a boating accident.

Officer Bibler was on water patrol when he received a dispatched complaint of numerous subjects fishing around a submerged rock pile and harvesting snook in St. Petersburg. Officer Bibler set up surveillance of the subjects in some nearby bushes and watched them harvest what appeared to be redfish. He called Officer Caldwell to help watch the subjects, so they would have multiple vantage points to see any violations. Three subjects left the fishing area holding various types of fishing gear and a large net. Officers Bibler and Caldwell stopped the subjects as they arrived at their vehicle to conduct a fisheries inspection. Inside the net were three redfish, one of which was over the slot limit. There was also one undersized snook. Both species are under a special closure due to an executive order related to the recent red tide. After reading Miranda to all three subjects, Officer Bibler determined who the fish belonged to. The subject was cited for numerous fisheries violations.

SARASOTA COUNTY

Officer Grenz was on water patrol close to Turtle Beach. While on patrol, he performed a boating safety inspection on a vessel. During the inspection, it became apparent that the operator of the vessel was under the influence of either drugs or alcohol. Officer Grenz had the operator perform some field sobriety tasks to determine the subject's level of impairment. After the investigation was completed, Officer Grenz placed the

operator of the vessel under arrest for boating under influence and he was taken to the Sarasota County Jail. He will have to appear in court for his violation.

MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

LEE COUNTY

Officer Furbay and Officer Price received and investigated a complaint about some construction going on around an active bald eagle's nest. When the officers arrived on scene, there was heavy machinery being operated near an active eagle's nest. An investigation revealed that the nest was not documented, and no permits had been obtained to do work around the nest. The superintendent of the site was contacted, and work was stopped to prevent any further possibility of taking or disturbing the eagles. USFWS was alerted and the information was relayed to them to complete any necessary permitting. The case is ongoing.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROLS

PINELLAS COUNTY

Officers Hughes, Smith, Alvis, Investigator Dallarosa, and Lieutenant Wells received information from a commercial crabber that his traps were being robbed on the Anclote River. They developed a directed conservation patrol plan to identify a suspect and make an arrest. They worked with FWC's intelligence unit and state-wide investigations to set up surveillance cameras. The suspect was watched pulling traps by an officer in a concealed location and another officer responded by airboat to intercept the suspect's vessel. The suspect was interviewed and post Miranda, admitted to pulling crab traps. The trap owner was contacted, and he advised the officers that he did not give anyone permission to pull his traps. The suspect was booked into the Pinellas County Jail for felony blue crab trap molestation, theft of blue crabs, harvest of blue crabs after hours, possession of undersize sheepshead, and illegal methods of harvest of sheepshead. He was also issued four uniform boating citations.

SOUTH REGION A

CASES

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officers Carroll, Morrow, and Simons responded to a request for assistance from the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office and the Florida Highway Patrol, about armed carjacking suspects. Upon arrival on scene, the subjects had abandoned their vehicle and fled on foot into a heavily wooded area. Officer Carroll and Officer Morrow retrieved a swamp buggy and Officer Simons responded via FWC aircraft to assist with locating

the subjects. After several hours, the subjects were located and apprehended without incident.

Officer Nasworth was patrolling Lake Okeechobee when he saw a vessel operating without navigation lights. He conducted a vessel stop and saw large fishing poles with weighted treble hooks attached. He asked the operator if they had been alligator hunting and he advised Officer Nasworth that he had been. Officer Nasworth asked the operator for his alligator hunting tags and the operator said that he was using his brother's tags. Officer Nasworth asked the operator if his brother was on the vessel with him and he was not. Officer Nasworth issued the operator a citation for hunting alligator without a permit.

Captive Wildlife Investigator Toby encountered two individuals who were smoking marijuana in a county park. He issued two misdemeanor citations to each for the illegal possession of marijuana and for the illegal possession of drug paraphernalia. The marijuana and paraphernalia were seized for evidence.

BROWARD COUNTY

Captive Wildlife Investigator Corteguera responded to an escaped fox that a local law enforcement agency recovered. He was able to locate the owner of the fox and return the animal after ensuring proper enclosures were in place. One misdemeanor citation was issued for the escape.

GLADES COUNTY

Officer Nasworth was patrolling Lake Okeechobee when he discovered a wooden peg with a piece of chicken on it, hanging near the shoreline. He also saw occupants in a vessel actively alligator hunting in the area. Officer Nasworth conducted a resource inspection and saw the occupants of the vessel had harvested an alligator. After additional discussion and investigation, Officer Nasworth issued a citation for an illegal method of taking alligator.

MARTIN COUNTY

Officer Brodbeck was on vessel patrol in Hobe Sound when two subjects were cleaning fish at a marina. A resource inspection was conducted, and he located two mangrove snapper that were less than the required 10 inches, as well as one mutton snapper which was undersized. One subject took responsibility for the violations. Officer Brodbeck issued one misdemeanor citation for undersized mutton snapper and a written warning for possession of undersized mangrove snapper. The fish were returned to the water.

Officers Rogers and Morrow saw a vessel just offshore displaying a dive flag. Upon boarding the vessel, the subjects were found to have one lobster less than the recreational bag limit. While completing a boating safety inspection, the vessel's divers

surfaced, bringing four lobster onboard. The subjects, who had previously been warned regarding undersize lobster, were issued a misdemeanor citation for violating the recreational daily bag limit of spiny lobster.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

BROWARD COUNTY

Lieutenant Laubenberger attended the Honor Flight out of Ft. Lauderdale /Hollywood International Airport as the Broward Police Multi Agency Honor Guard Commander. The Honor Guard rendered honors for 75 WW II veterans who were returning from their memorial flight to Washington D.C. The Honor Guard escorted the veterans past approximately 1,000 well-wishing spectators at this patriotic event honoring their WW II service.

SOUTH REGION B

CASES

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Investigator Martin was on water patrol near Card Sound Bay in response to complaints from a commercial subject of trap molestation. Upon locating a blacked-out jon boat with three persons on board, she witnessed the operator dump an unknown large object into the water. She was unable to observe anything on the bay floor at night, but the coordinates of the stop and the occupant's identities were recorded. The operator was issued a citation for operating without navigational lights. She returned the next morning to the recorded coordinates and located a large white mesh bag on the bay floor. With the help of Biscayne National Park officers, she spent the next 30 minutes diving and recovering a total of 417 wrung lobster tails and several out of season stone crab claws. Warrants were obtained out of Monroe County and the subjects were arrested and charged with felony possession of wrung spiny lobster tails, as well as several misdemeanor charges.

Officer Fernandez was on land patrol near Homestead and saw two people on a levee that appeared to be looking at something. Upon a closer inspection, he noticed there was a bird trap hanging from a tree. After contacting them and checking the area, he found 4 bird traps deployed with 4 migratory song birds (painted bunting, indigo bunting and 2 blue grosbeaks). Both subjects were cited for the violation.

MONROE COUNTY

Lieutenant Cox and Officer Powell created a Targeted Enforcement Action (TEA) for trap marking violations and SPL/RS violations. They checked trap lines around the lower keys and found many violations from one specific buoy display. Officer Powell

researched the endorsement number and found the associated SPL only had a crawfish endorsement. Lieutenant Cox and Officer Powell counted and documented the number of traps in the water. There were 511 violations (improperly displayed endorsement numbers). Officer Powell later witnessed a vessel carrying stone crab traps out to the Atlantic. This vessel was to only be working crawfish traps as previously identified. Officer Powell and Officer Messier stopped the vessel and determined the captain did not have an SPL for stone crab for the vessel and did not have the endorsement numbers for the traps on the vessel. This increased the number of violations to 519 second-degree misdemeanor charges. The investigation is ongoing.

Officers Hettel and Cobb were on water patrol in Key West Harbor when they spotted a small vessel with no navigation lights visible after sunset. The vessel also did not display a registration decal. During the interaction with the vessel's operator, Officer Hettel identified signs of impairment and detected the odor of an alcoholic beverage. The subject was transferred onboard the patrol vessel to perform standardized field sobriety tasks. Based on Officer Hettel's observations and the operator's performance on the field sobriety tasks, the operator was placed under arrest for BUI. He was transported to the Monroe County Jail where he provided two breath samples of .175 and .170. He was cited accordingly for the uniform boating infractions and safety violations.

COMMUNITY-ORIENTED POLICING:

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Officer Washington met with a group of students from the Associated Marine Institute (amikids.org), neighboring the Miami Regional Office to teach them about Boating Safety. He used the NASBLA-approved boater education course curriculum as a guide to explain the lessons and importance of safe boating.