

2018

Boating Accident Statistical Report



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Division of Law Enforcement

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2018 Boating Officer of the Year



Officer Juan Blanco

Officer Juan Blanco began doing volunteer work for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) in 2010 and fell in love with the agency and mission. His love for the outdoors led him to study and receive a diploma in 2011 in wildlife and forestry conservation.

After graduating FWC's Academy Class 28, he returned to Miami-Dade County as an officer. Juan constantly refers to his job as "the career that I dreamed of". Juan has taken a leadership role in Boating Under the Influence (BUI) and Driving Under the Influence (DUI) enforcement within his assigned patrol area. His passion for public safety through education and enforcement of impaired operators led him to become a Breath Test Operator and attend the Standardized Field Sobriety Task Proficiency training and Seated Battery Proficiency training. Juan's services and expertise are routinely sought after by his fellow officers. Juan participated in multiple BUI saturation details in Miami-Dade County this year and he has personally made over 25 arrests for BUI. He also issued 124 boating citations and numerous resource and boating safety warnings. Even more impressive, is he assisted with multiple BUI investigations in which he mentored many officers in BUI procedures and has made 50 BUI arrests, collectively with his squad.

Juan has not only excelled in boating safety and BUI enforcement but also in resource protection. Juan has participated in commercial fisheries details and has taken a proactive approach in learning both commercial and recreational fishery regulations in his area. He worked with The National Park Service on multiple commercial fisheries inspections and enforcement.

Juan's work ethic has influenced his peers to understand the importance of public service and public relations. He is a strong believer in education and has led and participated in over a dozen "Career Days" at local schools. He is constantly called upon by fellow officers to assist in public outreach events due to his passion to educate the public and reach the next generation. Juan also takes advantage of every encounter with the public as an opportunity to educate, recruit and simply have a positive interaction.

2018 Boating Educator of the Year



Steve Marshall

Steve Marshall has worked for FWC/Game and Freshwater Fish Commission for over 32 years. He has been working on FWC's boating and fishing camps since 2006 and began working with FWC's Florida Youth Conservation Center Network (FYCCN) since its inception in 2010.

Steve is currently a Partnership Coordinator for FYCCN and he works hard to develop and retain partnerships with organizations that provide outdoor experiences for youth in Florida and to make sure the kids experience the outdoors. Steve strives to make sure kids have a wonderful outdoor experience and learn how to participate in boating and fishing.

These camps were originally only fishing camps. Steve realized that many kids could someday use boats when they were fishing, so it made sense to incorporate boating safety into the camps. Several years ago, Steve began including the boating safety course into the camp curriculum. Kids (ages 9 to 15) get out in canoes, kayaks, or Jon boats powered by small electric motors. Youth campers can take a boating safety course at the end of the camp. The most important part is to experience boating in a safe atmosphere (on a small body of water with adult supervision) while learning about safe boating. For many of these kids, this was their first experience with boating and boating safety. The combination of practical boating experience, combined with the safety knowledge, is something that makes these camps different from many others.

Steve has also worked with the Florida Fishing Academy (FFA) in Palm Beach County in supporting their after-school youth programs. The FFA have used the boating instruction plan from FWC's Fishing and Boating Camp as a platform to teach more than a thousand kids in 2017.

Steve is involved with the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF). He has worked to make sure the RBFF Hispanic outreach was established in Miami-Dade County in the form of the Vamos A Pescar (Take Me Fishing) event. Currently, Steve is working with Palm Beach County on a similar program that expands youth participation in boating and fishing. Overall, Steve has put a great deal of time and effort into ensuring that thousands of kids over his career have been introduced to boating and boating safety instruction. For many of these kids, this is the perfect time for them develop safe boating habits that will serve them well for the rest of their lives.

INTRODUCTION

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), powered by science-based leadership, is committed to creating a sustainable and healthy future for Florida's fish, wildlife, water and habitat resources. The FWC serves Floridians and visitors alike in a variety of ways, most of which revolve around our mission of managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people. The Division of Law Enforcement (DLE) is perhaps the most visible tool within the FWC's "tool belt" used to meet its goal of providing healthy resources for safe, satisfied customers.

THE DIVISION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

Roles and Mission

The FWC is the only state agency in Florida tasked with the management of the state's fish and wildlife resources. As a primary responsibility, the FWC's Division of Law Enforcement focuses on enforcing regulations aimed at protecting and sustaining these resources both for their long-term well-being and the benefit of Florida's residents and visitors, all the while blending in its unique and specialized public safety role. The Division's mission is clear... "Protecting Florida's natural resources and people through proactive and responsive law enforcement services."

Responsibilities

The FWC Division of Law Enforcement provides protection to those who enjoy Florida's natural resources, while also enforcing resource protection and boating safety laws. Officers patrol rural, wilderness, inshore and offshore areas, and where other law enforcement agencies do not routinely patrol. FWC officers have the authority to enforce all the laws of the state and are cross-deputized to enforce federal fisheries and wildlife laws.

In the course of carrying out their broad responsibilities, FWC officers seek every opportunity to educate and introduce Floridians and visitors to the wonders of Florida's fish, wildlife, and natural resources, as well as safe boat operation and safety equipment requirements.

The Division also provides general law enforcement services as part of Florida's statewide emergency response network. Because of their unique jurisdiction and specialized training and equipment, FWC is also charged with protecting the state's waterways and critical infrastructure during times of heightened security threat levels. As seasoned first responders, FWC officers are trained to move fast and efficiently.

Moving forward into the future, FWC will continue to pursue and apply advances in technology to improve response to both conservation and general law enforcement incidents. When duty calls, FWC will always be among the first to respond, providing aid as needed. Until then, FWC will continue to lead the way in natural resource protection, proactive boating safety law enforcement and education are what we do best.

Uniquely prepared

On the water, in the woods and in the air, FWC law enforcement officers are uniquely situated and equipped to identify and respond to illegal activity and promote public safety, particularly in the maritime and wilderness areas.

Core Missions

The FWC protects Florida's people and natural resources. The Division of Law Enforcement is an integral part of the agency and is vital in fulfilling the agency's responsibilities. These core missions reflect the unique capabilities, training and equipment our personnel use to achieve those responsibilities.

Resource Protection and

Access: State and federal fisheries and wildlife law enforcement. Threatened and endangered species protection. Captive and nonnative wildlife management. Habitat protection. Investigations. Education and outreach programs developing the next generation that cares.

Environmental Protection:

State and federal environmental law enforcement. Cultural and natural resources protection and preservation. State lands and water quality protection. Investigations. Education and outreach programs developing the next generation that cares.

Boating and Waterways:

Boating rules and regulation enforcement. Boating safety campaigns and education. Access to public waters. Waterway management and accurate signage. Boating accident investigations. Derelict vessel prevention and investigation. Vessel theft and title fraud investigation.

Public Safety:

Provide a safe experience for residents and visitors engaged in outdoor activities. Interagency support and coordination. Specialized response units. Disaster response. Search and rescue. Intelligence and security. General and specialized law enforcement services. Critical incident investigations.

Intervention equals prevention on the water

FWC officers help to ensure Floridians and visitors are safe when they are on the water. The FWC accomplishes this through proactive law enforcement by initiating boating safety, fisheries, and hunting inspections and identifying and minimizing potential navigation or environmental hazards in the waterways.

FWC's Boating and Waterways Section supports officer efforts by coordinating statewide boating safety efforts. Some examples of support include education campaigns, ensuring waterway markers are accurate and maintained, permitting and marking speed-regulated areas, coordinating initiatives aimed at removing derelict vessels and improving public boating access.

With close to a million vessels, Florida leads the nation in the number of registered vessels. As a negative consequence of high vessel numbers and our mild climate, Florida also leads the nation in the number of boating fatalities in the nation annually. The vast size of our inland, coastal and offshore patrol areas combined with a significant population of avid and diverse boaters, presents a unique and daunting challenge for FWC and our local and federal maritime enforcement partners.

Boating education is critical

The 2018 Boating Accidents Statistical Report indicates there were 628 reportable boating accidents and 59 boating related fatalities in the calendar year. This total includes four missing persons who at the end of 2018 have not been located or accounted for and their circumstances suggest that death or serious injury has occurred. Many of the deaths were due to victims falling overboard and drowning. A large number of the deaths could have been prevented if the victims had worn life jackets. FWC continues efforts to reduce the number of boating-related fatalities through education about the importance of wearing life jackets while boating.

Florida's current boating safety education law only applies to boaters born on or after January 1, 1988 operating a motorized vessel of 10 horsepower or greater. The face-to-face contacts by FWC officers and our partner agencies are a critical part of our outreach efforts and education to the boating public. These statistics show us that the boat operator most likely to be involved in a boating accident is a middle-age or older male who has boating experience yet has never learned the most important safety considerations by having taken a boating safety course. When officers observe boating violations or perform resource enforcement activities, they conduct boating safety inspections aimed at both identifying and preventing violations or accidents. FWC officers make boating safer and ultimately save lives.

Safe boating is a choice

Florida is a leader in promoting boating accident prevention. The FWC, in association with the National Safe Boating Council, Bombardier Recreational Products Inc., West Marine, and the USCG has launched a statewide boating safety campaign as part of a national initiative. The "Wear It Florida" campaign encourages boaters to wear life jackets anytime they are on the water and educates boaters about the ease and convenience of inflatable life jackets. The campaign is designed to reach the public through a variety of methods including media events, exhibits, personal contacts, social media, radio and televised public service announcements.

--- Division of Law Enforcement Values ---

Integrity

We value candor, honesty and the highest standards of ethical behavior and are committed to upholding our positions of public trust.

Professionalism

We value the skillful performance which demonstrates a clear sense of commitment and direction in an environment that encourages teamwork and innovation.

Dedication

We value the motivation and dedication with which our members serve the visitors and residents of Florida.

Adaptability

We value our unique capability to adapt and respond appropriately to diverse circumstances in all environments.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The 2018 Boating Accidents Statistical Report is compiled by the Boating and Waterways Section of the FWC's Division of Law Enforcement. Most of the data contained in this report is gathered from boating accident investigative reports submitted by FWC officers and our marine law enforcement partners.

At the end of each calendar year, boating accident data is compiled and assembled into Florida's annual report. The FWC's Boating and Waterways Section analyzes this information and uses it to formulate proactive plans aimed at reducing the number of boating accidents and their related injuries, fatalities and property damage. This information is also reported to the USCG's Boating Safety Division in Washington, D.C., to be included in the national database consisting of data from all U.S. states and territories.

The statistics reflect data from "reportable boating accidents" that occurred in Florida. Boating accidents must meet at least one of the five criteria below to be classified as reportable:

- A person dies.
- A person disappears under circumstances that indicate possible death or injury.
- A person receives an injury requiring medical treatment beyond immediate first aid.
- There is at least \$2,000 aggregate property damage to the vessel(s) or other property.
- There is a total loss of a vessel.

The number of vessels registered in Florida increased slightly in 2018. With 950,740 registered vessels, Florida leads the nation in registered vessels. Additionally, it is estimated that up to one million non-registered vessels actively use Florida's waters, and this segment of the boating population appears to still be growing. Our waterways show the strains of congestion as each year brings more residents and visitors together to utilize our abundant water resources and enjoy Florida's boating lifestyle.



Officer Lane Kinney and Investigator John Brown rescuing a boater that had capsized his vessel after losing control of it on Holmes Creek. Officers conducted a Boating Under the Influence (BUI) investigation after noting the operator exhibited signs of intoxication. The officer's investigation resulted in the operator being arrested for BUI.

2018 SUMMARY

BOATING ACCIDENT REVIEW

- Florida leads the nation with a total number of **950,740** registered vessels in 2018.
- There were a total of **628** reportable boating accidents in 2018.

REPORTABLE BOATING ACCIDENT

- Collision with vessel was the leading type of accident with a total of **178 (28%)**.
- Towed watersport activities were involved in **8 accidents**, resulting in **8 injuries**.
- Paddlecraft (canoes, kayaks, rowboats, paddleboards) were involved in **13 accidents** resulting in **nine fatalities** and **eight injuries**.
- **July** was the month with the highest number of accidents (**90**).
- **Monroe County** reported the highest number of accidents and injuries (82 total accidents with five fatalities and 29 injuries).

REPORTABLE BOATING FATALITIES

- **56 fatal accidents** for 2018 resulting in **59 fatalities**.
- **32%** of the fatal accidents were **falls overboard** (18 accidents). Boaters falling overboard remains the leading type of boating fatality.
- **The leading cause of death** in fatal boating accidents was **drowning** with **29 fatalities (49%)**.
- **October** was the deadliest month in 2018 with **8 fatalities**.
- Alcohol or drug-use is reported to have played a role in **19%** boating fatalities.
- **86% (51)** of the victims of fatal boating accidents were **males**.
- **82% (51)** of the 62 operators involved in fatal accidents were **age 36 or older**.
- **82% (51)** of all vessels involved in fatal accidents in 2018 were **21 feet in length or less**.

REPORTABLE BOATING INJURIES

- There were **628 accidents** resulting in **307 injuries**. The rate of injury was **32 injuries** per 100,000 registered vessels.

REPORTABLE PERSONAL WATERCRAFT ACCIDENTS

- Personal watercraft (PWC) accounted for 14% of all registered vessels in Florida.
- PWC were involved in 19% (120) of reportable boating accidents.
- **Rented PWC** represented **45% (78)** of PWC involved in accidents.
- **54% (65)** of PWC accidents involved a **collision with another vessel**.
- **51%** of PWC accidents occurred in Miami-Dade (20), Monroe (16), Pinellas (13), and Okaloosa (12) counties.
- **7 fatalities** resulted from the 120 PWC accidents.
- **87 people** were injured in PWC accidents.

BOATING EDUCATION STATISTICS

- FWC issued **48,771** Boating Safety Education ID Cards in 2018.
- **64%** of the cards were issued to persons born on or after January 1, 1988.
- Of the 48,771 cards issued, 35,440 were to males, 13,281 were to females. 50 did not provide their gender. An additional 973 cards were printed for lost, damaged and information changes.
- **77%** of the **operators** involved in fatal accidents had **no formal boater education**.

Boating accident statistics for 2018 were compiled on April 3, 2019. Reports received after that date were not included in the following data. In 2018, there were four missing persons reported. There has not been any updated information as to their status as of the date of this report compilation. The four missing persons have been included in the fatality data.