

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



Patrol, Protect, Preserve

October 11, 2019 through October 24, 2019

This report represents some events the FWC handled over the past two weeks; however, it does not include all actions taken by the Division of Law Enforcement.

NORTHWEST REGION

CASES

BAY COUNTY

Officer N. Basford was conducting vessel patrol in St. Andrews State Park and saw a pontoon boat with several people on board, two of which were children located at the boat ramp. They entered the basin and tied up to the pier. Officer Basford approached the vessel and conducted a boating safety inspection. The operator exhibited signs of impairment and standardized field sobriety tasks were administered. The operator was placed under arrest and booked into the Bay County Jail for BUI and child neglect.

Officers Rice, Brady and Coker were conducting vessel patrol in St. Andrews Bay when they saw a vessel with several people on board returning from an offshore fishing trip. The officers conducted a boating safety and resource inspection of the vessel. During the inspection the officers located seven gray triggerfish, which were all undersize, and the season for gray triggerfish was closed. Appropriate citations were issued.

CALHOUN COUNTY

Officer Burkhead responded to a complaint received from a landowner that numerous suspects were on his property illegally. Officer Burkhead located four suspects illegally harvesting palmetto berries. Appropriate citations were issued, and the berries were returned to the landowner.

FRANKLIN COUNTY

Officer DuBose and Officer Brower were on land patrol assisting the Franklin County Sheriff's Office search for a fleeing felon around the Crooked River area. It was believed that the felon possibly fled via vessel. Officers Dubose and Brower staged at Rock Landing to ensure the felon didn't use the landing as a means for someone to pick him up. A vehicle arrived and contact was made by the officers. Both occupants of the vehicle were in possession of open containers and the driver was knowingly driving while license was suspended or revoked. The appropriate citations were issued.

GULF COUNTY

Senior Officer M. Webb and Officer Specialist H. Webb were working offshore fisheries during the opening weekend of fall snapper season at the Bell Shoal Reef in the Gulf of Mexico. They approached a vessel having Georgia tags with four individuals on board. The captain claimed to have the limit of red snapper, but an inspection revealed that he was over the limit. The appropriate citation was issued.

JACKSON COUNTY

Officer Burkhead received a call from an off-duty FWC officer who was fishing near Highway 90 on the Chattahoochee River. The off-duty officer witnessed an individual using a cast net and believed the person was keeping game fish. Officer Burkhead located the subject and found he was in possession of six black bass, four crappie and several bream. Appropriate citations were issued.

LIBERTY COUNTY

Officer Hildebrand and Dubose were dispatched to assist the Liberty County Sheriff's Office on a report of a missing child. Officer Hildebrand was the first on scene, and after assessing the situation and topography of the location, he advised Officer Dubose to approach from the east. Officer Dubose quickly found the four-year-old child on a nearby road and returned him to his mother.

Officer DuBose was on land patrol in Apalachicola National Forest Wildlife Management Area (WMA) when he saw a vehicle heading west on FH13. The vehicle met the description of a possible subject who had been illegally picking saw palmetto berries. Officer Dubose conducted a traffic stop and saw palmetto berries in the rear of the truck. A search of the vehicle revealed a meth pipe and methamphetamine in the center console. The driver was arrested and charged accordingly.

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Investigator Pifer and Officer Brown were on water patrol in the Santa Rosa Sound when they saw a vessel operating without the required navigation lights. The vessel was stopped, and a boating safety inspection found that one of the subjects on board had

been fishing. During the resource inspection, the officers located an undersized spotted seatrout. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officers Cushing, Land, and Brown were performing offshore vessel patrol when they inspected an anchored vessel with subjects actively fishing. The inspection revealed five red snapper. The season for red snapper was closed and the appropriate citations were issued.

Officers Land and Brown saw two individuals trailering a boat at the Cinco Bayou boat ramp. The officers resource inspection found three undersized mangrove snapper and one undersized spotted seatrout. Appropriate citations were issued.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

WASHINGTON COUNTY

Officer Greene taught the law portion of the FWC Hunter Safety Class at Hard Labor Creek facility. There were approximately a dozen participants.

Lieutenant Walsingham assisted teachers and other instructors at Vernon High School with FWC Hunter Safety Class Range Day. Approximately 60 students participated.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

CASES

CITRUS COUNTY

Officers Browning and Ulrich were on patrol on the Ozello Trail when they came upon a truck parked in the woods hidden behind palmetto bushes in a closed area of the Crystal River Buffer Preserve State Park. The officers heard barking and saw several people with flash lights and dogs with GPS tracking collars approaching their location. All individuals admitted to hunting hogs with dogs on state lands. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Muina and Lieutenant Jones were on water patrol offshore of Homosassa when they located a line of stone crab traps placed in a closed area. The officers documented the violation and contacted the owner of the traps the following day. The owner of the traps advised they were unclear as to where they could fish their gear. Arrangements were made for the owner to meet the officers at the Crystal River Office where the officers provided the owner with copies of the zones and waypoints for the zones. The appropriate citation was issued.

OFFSHORE

Officers Geib, Read and Lieutenant Givens were on a federal fisheries patrol offshore of St. Augustine when they saw a vessel at anchor with two people actively fishing. Officer Read boarded the vessel for an inspection and discovered a red snapper in a live well. A federal citation was issued, and the case will be turned over to NOAA for prosecution.

ALACHUA COUNTY

Officers Stanley and Reith checked a group of subjects hunting ducks in Lochloosa Wildlife Management Area during early duck season. They discovered one individual with an unplugged shotgun and several license violations. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Stanley was patrolling Grove Park Wildlife Management Area and saw a large pile of carpet and household garbage. He found mail with a local post office box address and tracked it to a location a few miles from the area. Officer Stanley interviewed two individuals who lived at the address; both admitted to the violations. Appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Stanley was given information about someone possibly “double dipping” for speckled perch on Orange Lake. He found the suspect vehicle at the boat ramp and waited for them to return. The subject returned, retrieved the truck, and drove to the opposite end of the parking area and unloaded two coolers. A resource inspection discovered the individual was in possession of 102 speckled perch divided between several coolers. The appropriate citations were issued.

LEVY COUNTY

Officer Bell was on water patrol in Cedar Key and saw a commercial oyster vessel with two individuals on board actively harvesting oysters. A boating safety and resource inspection found that the captain did not have a marine sanitation device on the vessel and was also missing some of the required safety equipment. The second individual did not have a current saltwater product license. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Fox was patrolling Gulf Hammock Wildlife Management Area when he checked a subject who had just finished hunting. The subject took Officer Fox to his tree stand where whole yellow corn spread out on the ground within 20 yards of the stand. The subject admitted to placing the bait and hunting over it. The appropriate citation was issued.

DUVAL COUNTY

While on land patrol near the Alimacani boat launch, Officer Geib checked two people fishing from the rocks on the shoreline. The inspection discovered one person with eight undersize lane snapper and several shellfish. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Lentz, working with FWC Investigations, received information of a person who was suspected of illegally trapping migratory birds. During an interview with the subject, Officer Lentz discovered three buntings. The appropriate citations were issued and the birds were released.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

DUVAL COUNTY

Officers Waldo and Culbreth conducted a meeting/outreach with 40 members of North East Hilliard Hunt Club to discuss deer hunting rule changes. After an overview of the new rules by the officers, members asked questions and discussed the new regulations.

LEVY COUNTY

Officer Starling assisted with a youth hunt at a local hunt club. He spoke to the kids about hunting safety and ethics, and their responsibility in conservation. There were children and parents in attendance, many of whom were being exposed to hunting for the first time.

CITRUS COUNTY

Lieutenant Griffis participated in the Right Rudder Aviation Flight School's 1st Annual Aviation Expo at the Inverness airport. Lieutenant Griffis spoke to attendees about how the division utilizes aviation to enhance resource protection and public safety.

Mr. Dixie Hollins hosted a youth hog hunt on his property at Hollinswood Ranch in Crystal River. Lieutenant Griffis came and spoke to the youth and mentors about hunting safety and the new harvest reporting requirements for deer.

MADISON COUNTY

Officer Ransom participated in a local hunt club meeting to discuss and answer questions on deer regulations. Several individuals were in attendance to learn how to use the harvest log, reporting system, and obtain the needed information to achieve compliance. Officer Ransom answered questions on youth hunting weekends, antlerless deer program tagging, and many other general regulations.

Officer Vazquez participated in the law portion of a hunter safety course in Madison. This course allows participants to learn and interact with conservation law enforcement on hunting safety topics. Numerous questions were answered on matters of conservation enforcement, public safety, and various hunting issues. Approximately 25 participants attended the course.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

BREVARD COUNTY

Officer Hallsten observed a group of subjects catch several fish at the Haulover Canal. A resource inspection found the group in possession of nine undersized snook. The appropriate citations were issued.

MARION COUNTY

Officer Specialist Rice and Officer Chvosta were contacted by the Marion County Sheriff's Office regarding a subject who had an alligator as a pet. Upon arrival, the officers entered the residence and saw a small alligator in an aquarium. The subject found the alligator in his mother's yard, caught it, and kept it for a pet. The appropriate citation was issued and the alligator was released.

VOLUSIA COUNTY

Officer Bellville, with the assistance of K9 Officer North and K9 Max, located a baited deer stand in Tiger Bay Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Officer Bellville observed the subject actively deer hunting over the bait the following week. The subject had been cited for placing bait in a WMA two years prior and was issued a notice to appear. The appropriate citation was issued for repeat violations.

PUTMAN COUNTY

Officer Wester was on patrol in Etoniah Creek Wildlife Management Area when he saw a female subject standing next to a truck who stated she was having mechanical issues. Officer Wester surveyed the immediate area and found another subject actively harvesting saw palmetto berries. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Bernard was conducting resource inspections at the Palatka City Docks when he saw a subject cast netting shrimp. Upon inspecting his catch, it was found that the subject was in possession of two black crappie. The appropriate citations were issued.

ST. JOHNS COUNTY

Officer Lawshe received information on a subject hunting over bait in Matanzas Wildlife Management Area (WMA). He went to the area where he observed a truck parked and a subject coming out of the woods. Officer Lawshe contacted the subject and discovered he had placed corn and a camera in the WMA. The appropriate citation was issued.

Officer Thomas checked a group of subjects fishing underneath the Hammock Dunes Bridge. During inspection, she located five undersized mangrove snapper and two undersized flounder. The appropriate citations were issued.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

DESOTO COUNTY

Officer Geeraerts was on water patrol on the Lower Peace River when she observed a vessel with one individual actively fishing. After conducting a boating safety check, Officer Geeraerts asked the subject if he had any fish on board. The subject said he had one snook in a cooler on the boat. She measured the snook and it was undersized. The appropriate citation was issued.

HARDEE COUNTY

Officers Geeraerts, Karr and Kobs were on night land patrol when they observed a vehicle driving at a slow rate of speed. The driver was turning the vehicle's headlights on and off. The officers watched the vehicle continue to move slowly down the road and saw a light shine out of the side windows in a sweeping manner capable of disclosing the presence of wildlife. A traffic stop was conducted and in the truck were two females and two dogs. The dogs had GPS collars around their necks and the driver had a rope wrapped around her shoulder, both methods commonly used for hog hunting. The driver and passenger admitted to hunting for hogs by shining a spotlight onto private property. The appropriate citations were issued.

LEE COUNTY

Officers Self and Furbay responded to a call from the U.S. Coast Guard in the Caloosahatchee River regarding people in a vessel taking and keeping redfish. They found the vessel and conducted a fisheries inspection. The inspection found two redfish in a cooler on the vessel. Appropriate citations were issued, and the two redfish were released.

MANATEE COUNTY

Officer Dalton and Lieutenant Hinds were on water patrol in the area of Terra Ceia Bay. They stopped and performed a fisheries inspection on an individual who had been fishing around the H.E. Boyed Bridge off of U.S. Highway 19. The officers found that the subject had caught and kept five undersized gray (mangrove) snapper. The appropriate citations were issued.

PINELLAS COUNTY

While on land patrol, Officer Specialist Bibeau observed fishing gear and multiple vehicles parked along the mangroves in a heavily fished area. He contacted a group of individuals to conduct a fisheries inspection. Officer Specialist Bibeau located a small fryer nearby with multiple pieces of cooked redfish. One individual claimed responsibility for the fish and was issued the appropriate citations.

Officer Specialist Bibeau and Officer Bibler stopped a vessel returning from offshore. Officer Specialist Bibeau boarded the vessel, conducted a fisheries inspection, and located six undersized and out of season triggerfish, one undersized gag grouper, and one undersized red grouper. An individual onboard the vessel took responsibility for all the fish and was cited appropriately.

While on offshore water patrol, Officer Specialist Bibeau stopped a vessel to conduct a fisheries inspection. Officer Specialist Bibeau boarded the vessel and located a fourteen-inch red grouper. The operator of the vessel admitted that he knew that the red grouper was too small to keep and was cited appropriately.

While on offshore water patrol, Officer Specialist Bibeau stopped a dive boat to conduct a fisheries inspection. He boarded the vessel and located a plastic bag containing fillets. The operator of the vessel admitted that the fillets belonged to an undersized red grouper and was cited appropriately.

While on land patrol, Officer Specialist Bibeau saw an individual actively fishing from a pier. He contacted the subject, conducted a fisheries inspection, and located one undersized gag grouper, one undersized black sea bass, and three undersized mangrove snapper inside a cooler. The appropriate citations were issued.

While on land patrol, Officer Specialist Bibeau saw two individuals actively fishing from a bridge. He contacted the subjects to conduct a fisheries inspection and found the individuals in possession of an undersized mangrove snapper and one twelve-inch gag grouper. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Specialist Bibeau saw three individuals fishing from underneath a bridge. He waited for the subjects to finish fishing and conducted a fisheries inspection. Officer Specialist Bibeau found the individuals in possession of two undersized mangrove snapper and an undersized gag grouper. The appropriate citations were issued.

PASCO COUNTY

Senior Officer Pulaski was on land patrol in the Holiday area. He saw a vessel returning without any operational navigation lights. The operator drove the bow of the vessel into the mangroves and exited to retrieve his trailer. Officer Pulaski contacted the subject and performed a resource inspection where he found a snook in a cooler on the vessel. Snook season is closed, so the appropriate citations were issued.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

PINELLAS COUNTY

Lieutenant Rosas, Public Information Officer Phillippi and Officer Tom Enos attended the “Walk Like MADD” event in downtown St. Petersburg. They represented the FWC in the fight against drunk driving and honored those lives who were lost in tragic boating accidents due to drunk vessel operation.

LEE COUNTY

Officers Garcia, Lejarzar, Hazelwood, Salem and Lieutenant Ruggiero assisted Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserve (CHAP) personnel with conducting their annual critical wildlife nesting shorebird cleanup. The officers volunteered to help clean up fishing line, trash and other debris from islands where various bird species nest. The effort was declared a huge success by CHAP personnel and will be a tremendous help to the nesting species in the area for this coming year’s season.

SOUTH REGION A

CASES

GLADES COUNTY

Officer Madsen saw a vessel actively shining a spot light in an area closed to alligator hunting. Officer Madsen conducted a vessel stop as the vessel approached the boat ramp and discovered two harvested alligators, one of them untagged. Officer Madsen advised the permit holder that he was in violation for failure to tag alligator immediately upon killing, hunting out of area, and failure to sign the alligator harvest permit. Officer Madsen educated the subjects and issued the appropriate citations.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officer Trawinski saw two subjects cleaning fish at Phil Foster Park. He approached the individuals and conducted a fisheries check. Both subjects were in violation of the bag limit and over the size limit of barracuda. There were also fishing license violations and multiple boating safety violations. The subjects were cited accordingly.

MARTIN COUNTY

Officer Hudson saw two individuals fishing underneath the Stuart Causeway. When the officer asked the subjects if they caught anything, they replied that they had only caught a stingray. An inspection of the subject’s cooler revealed approximately 20 fish, four of which were undersized mangrove snapper. One subject admitted to catching the undersized mangrove snapper and was appropriately cited.

Officer Hudson was checking subjects as they left through the Dupuis Wildlife Management Area (WMA) check station during the muzzleloader quota hunt. He saw a subject who appeared to be impaired. He conducted standardized field sobriety tasks and the operator was arrested for driving under the influence. The operator was transported and processed into the Martin County Jail and charged accordingly.

Officer Carroll saw a vehicle speeding and swerving over the Roosevelt Bridge. He conducted a traffic stop and found that the operator's license was suspended and that he appeared to be impaired. The individual was charged accordingly.

Officers Norbrothen and Johnson conducted a commercial fisheries inspection of a vessel cast netting fish in the intracoastal waterway. The inspection found several legal fish in a rear fish hold, and an over the bag limit of silver mullet in a forward hold. At the time of the stop, all commercial harvest of mullet was prohibited, allowing each subject on the vessel to keep his recreational bag limit without the possibility of it being sold. Based on the amount of mullet over the bag limit, the individuals were issued a written warning for the violation.

SOUTH REGION B

CASES

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

While on water patrol for the Columbus Day regatta, Officers Cartaya, Sample, Thompson, Cobb, and Weichhan arrested four subjects for operating vessels while impaired. The subject was charged accordingly.

Officer Cartaya was on land-based water patrol at Watson Island boat ramp when he saw a subject carrying a large white cooler from his vessel to a van parked at the ramp. Officer Cartaya approached and conducted a resource inspection which revealed six kingfish. The recreational limit for kingfish is two per person per day. The subject stated that he was harvesting commercially, and he had his saltwater products license with a restricted species endorsement for kingfish. When asked to produce this license, he provided an expired license. Dispatch confirmed the subject did not have a current, valid license. The subject was cited accordingly.

While on water patrol, Officer Sample observed a vessel being operated after dark without a properly displayed all around white light. He stopped the vessel to address the violation and the operator displayed several signs of impairment. Field sobriety tests were administered, and the operator was arrested for BUI.

Officer Presser was conducting fisheries inspections along the seawall at Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park and saw an individual actively fishing with rods and reels. A

resource inspection revealed the individual was in possession of a bonefish. The subject was cited accordingly.

Officer Presser was conducting fisheries inspections at North Bayshore Park and observed multiple subjects fishing with rods and reels. Upon seeing the officer approaching, one of the subjects picked up multiple fish and threw them into the water. Officer Presser located dead mangrove snapper in the water and issued the subject a notice to appear for interference with an FWC officer.

While on water patrol, Officer Cartaya observed a PWC operator with no lanyard attached. He stopped the vessel to address the violation and the operator exhibited signs of impairment. Field sobriety tests were administered, and the operator was arrested for BUI.

COLLIER COUNTY

FWC received a tip from a concerned citizen about a subject trespassing while harvesting palmetto berries in Golden Gate Estates. Officers Stearns, Knutson and Wagner responded to the area and observed the violation in progress. The subject attempted to flee, but was found and arrested. The subject was charged with resisting without violence and harvesting palmetto berries without a permit.

While on night water patrol, Officer Kleis observed a vessel operating with red and green lights on the stern of the vessel. He stopped the vessel to address the light violation and to conduct a vessel safety inspection. The operator exhibited signs of impairment and refused to participate in field sobriety exercises. Officer Kleis arrested the subject for BUI.

MONROE COUNTY

The SRB Dive Team conducted an underwater assessment of the anchor/mooring systems of vessels located in Lake Surprise, Gilbert's and Jewfish Creek. The team inspected fifteen vessels and found three vessels in violation of anchoring/mooring laws. Twenty uniform boating citations were issued. These citations also acknowledged violations of at-risk vessels.

FWC officers received a tip from a concerned biologist regarding subjects possibly keeping goliath grouper. Officers Foell and Piekenbrock saw three male subjects fishing under the Sugarloaf Key "Jumping Bridge" in the Lower Keys. An inspection revealed one subject had caught and kept a small goliath grouper, two undersized mangrove snapper, and one undersized mutton snapper. The subject was cited accordingly.

Lieutenant Hein was working with Monroe County Sheriff's Deputies in Key Largo. He noticed a truck pulling a vessel that was not properly secured and the vessel trailer had no lights. Lieutenant Hein conducted a traffic stop to address the violations and the

operator exhibited signs of impairment. The operator was arrested for DUI and cited accordingly for the other violations.

Officers Sapp and Cobb were conducting patrol in Key West Harbor and observed a vessel with no navigation lights transiting across the harbor. Officer Sapp conducted a vessel stop and observed signs of impairment from the operator. The subject was arrested for BUI and cited accordingly.

Officer McKay concluded an investigation into a reported violation of the diver down flag law in a case that took place in July of this year off Key Largo. He filed a warrant for reckless operation of a vessel on the captain of a local glass bottom boat operation. The captain had approached two boats that had divers and snorkelers in the water and only turned away at the last moment. Three minutes later, he returned and passed between the two moored vessels that had dive flags displayed and divers in the water. No persons were injured, but video recordings were taken by the reporting party and the closed caption recordings from the glass bottom boat were reviewed. After the State Attorney's Office was consulted, a judge signed off on the warrant and the captain was arrested. The United States Coast Guard has started procedures to suspend the license of the vessel captain. Other actions against the glass bottom boat owner are being pursued through the USCG Captain of the Port.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

MONROE COUNTY

FWC Officers Baumgartner and Tafoya teamed up for outreach at the Ladies Let's Go Fishing program in Tavernier. Officer Baumgartner provided boating and fishing regulations and spoke with them about the importance of conservation, and how FWC helps enforce the regulations. Officer Tafoya gave demonstrations on cast netting, fly casting, and de-hooking techniques. This program is put on annually to encourage ladies of all ages to gain insight on fishing techniques as well as hands-on experience for near-shore and offshore fishing.

Captain Maza, Lieutenant Hein and PIO Dube assisted FWRI staff at the Murray Nelson Center in Key Largo with the Biscayne National Park workshop. They provided assistance with law enforcement questions and Captain Maza provided translation services for any Spanish speaking attendees.