Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Division of Law Enforcement Weekly Report

Patrol, Protect, Preserve

December 13, 2019 through December 26, 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

FRANKLIN COUNTY

Officers M. McLeod, Bell, and Travis were patrolling the Apalachicola Management Area and observed suspicious activity on the Florida River Island after hearing multiple gun shots after dark. They encountered six subjects exiting the area and investigated. During the investigation, one of the subjects admitted to hunting hogs with dogs. While another subject was questioned about fresh blood on his dog box; he admitted to picking up a road killed fox. The subject also admitted to possessing a fox squirrel. The officers also found that another subject was in possession of deer meat without sex evidence. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officers M. McLeod and Travis were on patrol on the Apalachicola River and encountered subjects camping on a house boat. After speaking with the subjects, they determined one of their party was actively placing corn on the wildlife management area. They found the subject, who admitted to placing the bait on public land, and cited him accordingly.

GULF COUNTY

Officers Gerber, Lipford, Basford and Lieutenant Allen were on patrol and saw several vessels near the north end of St. Joseph Peninsula State Park. There were six individuals wading in the shallow water working a large area of seine nets. A resource inspection found three of the nets connected, forming an outer perimeter around a

shallow sand bar. During further inspection of the remaining nets, the officers found two of them measured over the 500 square feet allowed by law and one other net was found to not be marked as required. Appropriate citations and warnings were issued.

JACKSON COUNTY

Officers Humphrey and T. Scott received a complaint about a truck driving along roadways at a slow rate of speed. The complainant also said she heard several rifle shots. The officers responded to the area, heard a gunshot, and saw the truck matching the complainant's description. The officers found the driver in possession of a .308 rifle with a thermal scope. The driver stated he had been shooting at beavers and rabbits along the roadway. Appropriate charges were filed through the State Attorney's Office.

LEON COUNTY

Officer Brower was performing freshwater fisheries inspections at Crowder Landing on Lake Jackson, when he approached a vessel returning just before sunset. Officer Brower inspected a cooler on the vessel which revealed ten legal black bass. He concluded his inspection and as the two subjects were leaving, heard a "flopping" sound against the aluminum boat. Officer Brower stopped the subjects again and found a hole that had been cut in the aluminum bench seat that was covered by a burlap sack. Inside this hidden compartment he found nine additional black bass, seven of which were oversized. Both subjects were issued appropriate citations.

LIBERTY COUNTY

Officer Dubose preformed a freshwater fisheries inspection at Bristol Landing and observed four catfish on the vessel. Further investigation revealed one of the subjects had his fishing privileges revoked two years prior for night hunting. The subject was arrested, and the appropriate charges were filed.

Officer Bell located a bait site prior to the opening day of general gun season in the Apalachicola National Forest. On opening day, he returned to the bait site before daylight. Shortly after sunrise an individual arrived, checked a camera over the bait, and then released deer dogs at the site. The individual admitted to placing the bait and was cited appropriately.

WAKULLA COUNTY

Officers J. Carr and B. Morales were on patrol when they received a complaint from dispatch in reference to illegal net activity in the area of Bottoms Road Boat Ramp. They responded to the area and observed a gray pick-up truck with a tunnel boat on a trailer. The vehicle was occupied by two subjects and the boat and trailer was still dripping water. Officer Specialist C. Mallow arrived on scene to assist with the inspection. They removed a net from the vessel and measured it for compliance. The

net measured in excess of 1500 square feet and had multiple nets connected with no markings. The nets were seized, and the appropriate citations were issued.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

CASES

ALACHUA COUNTY

Officer Stanley was working a detail targeting illegal hunting when he heard multiple gunshots on a nearby property. Upon further inspection, Officer Stanley discovered an individual that had killed an illegal buck deer and a turkey within 50 yards of an area baited with corn. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Drew received information about a possible illegal dove hunt in the southwest side of the county. He responded to the area and discovered multiple individuals hunting over a field that was baited with large amounts of whole corn. The subjects were also shooting after legal hunting hours. Officer Drew issued criminal citations accordingly.

COLUMBIA COUNTY

Officer Bryan was on the Osceola Wildlife Management Area when he heard a gunshot near his location. Arriving where he heard the shot, Officer Bryan observed a hunter parked in the middle of a county-maintained road gathering hunting dogs and placing them into a dog box. The hunter said they had just run a deer across the clear-cut and some of the hunter's party members shot at the deer from the road. Officer Bryan addressed the violation for dog hunting from a county-maintained roadway as well as educating multiple other members of the club.

MADISON COUNTY

Officer Vazquez received information about possible illegal hunting on Twin Rivers Wildlife Management Area. Upon arriving at the location, Officer Vazquez discovered fresh ATV tracks that lead back to a nearby camp. Further investigation revealed a subject who confessed to killing an illegal deer in the management area. The individual was cited accordingly.

CITRUS COUNTY

Officers Browning and Ulrich were on water patrol in Crystal River and observed an open motor boat returning from the gulf with fishing rods and coolers onboard. They conducted a marine fisheries and boating safety inspection and found an undersized gag grouper. A citation was issued.

Officer Barber and Lieutenant Haney received information that two men hunting in the Camp Blanding Wildlife Management Area shot at a doe dangerously close to other hunters. They identified the hunters and located them at their residence. Both men admitted to shooting at deer, but claimed they missed. One of the men was intoxicated and was a convicted felon who had not had his rights restored. He was in possession of a modern muzzleloader and a 30-30 rifle, both of which were loaded. He was arrested and charged with a felon being in possession of a firearm and the guns were seized.

Officers Barber, LeMaster and Lieutenant Haney were working the Camp Blanding Wildlife Management Area Deer Dog Hunt and located a subject who had a cooler containing two deer. The meat was not properly tagged and did not have carcasses with the head and sex evidence still attached as required by law. The hunter was from Volusia County and had previous violations pertaining to illegal deer. He was cited accordingly.

Officer Christmas was working in the Camp Blanding Wildlife Management Area when he located a subject who was hunting without a quota permit or valid guest quota permit. During the inspection, it was found that the hunter was a convicted felon who had not had his rights restored. The hunter was arrested for felon in possession of a firearm and the gun was seized as evidence.

LEVY COUNTY

Officer Fox organized a detail for the annual dog hunt in Goethe State Forest targeting management area violations. As a team, the Levy Squad issued 17 resource citations and 10 warnings over the course of the week.

Officer Willis and Lieutenant Johnston were on water patrol in the Withlacoochee river when they encountered a commercial oyster vessel approaching the dock. Upon inspection, the officers found the harvester was in possession of 15 bags of oysters, none of which were tagged. When the oysters were measured, 31% of the oysters were undersized. The harvester also had an active warrant out of Dixie County stemming from a previous oyster violation. The harvester was arrested on the warrant, cited for the violations, and 15 bags of oysters were seized and returned to the water.

Officer VanNess was conducting water patrol in the area of the Withlacoochee Bay when he inspected a commercial oysterman harvesting oysters. Upon measuring the oysters in one of the bags, he discovered 14% undersize. A resource citation was issued, and the undersize oysters were returned to the water.

OFFSHORE PATROL VESSEL CRYSTAL RIVER FIN CAT

Officers Suttles and Hughes were on patrol aboard the offshore patrol vessel Fin Cat and conducted a marine fisheries inspection on a commercial shrimp boat harvesting in federal waters. Officer Hughes found that the vessel was harvesting shrimp in federal waters without the required Federal Gulf Shrimp Permit. Officers Suttles and Hughes

cited this vessel in August of this year for the same violation. The citation will be turned over to NOAA for prosecution.

OFFSHORE PATROL VESSEL SENTINEL

Officers Geib, Read and Lieutenant Givens, conducted a marine fisheries inspection on a recreational fishing vessel with two people on board at anchor near Montgomery Reef. The two fishermen were found to be in possession of red snapper. They also possessed black seabass without heads and fins intact. A federal citation was issued and will be forwarded to NOAA for prosecution.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING

ALACHUA COUNTY

Officer Stanley and Lieutenant Justus attended the annual Tacachale Christmas parade in Gainesville. Tacachale is the oldest and largest community for Floridians with developmental disabilities. A patrol vehicle and airboat were used for display in the parade. Approximately 500 people were in attendance.

Officers Drew and Stanley attended the annual Bass Pro Shops Christmas Wonderland parade in Gainesville. A patrol vehicle and an airboat were used for the parade and led Santa Claus to the store for everyone to visit. Approximately 1200 people were attendance.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

VOLUSIA COUNTY

Officer Cornell was checking shoreline fishermen compliance in the Daytona Beach area and approached a female actively fishing on one of the local bridges. A check of her cooler found undersize gray mangrove snapper. The appropriate citation was issued.

MARION COUNTY

Officer Specialists Dias and Rice followed up information concerning illegal hunting in the Indian Lake State Forest. The officers observed a subject operating an ATV dressed in camouflage enter the state forest. The officers heard three gun shots and after a brief chase, apprehended the subject. The subject was in possession of a 12-gauge shotgun, turkey calls, and illegal drugs. K9 Officer Simpson and K9 Moose arrived to assist and found two freshly killed fox squirrels and several spent 12-gauge shotgun shells. A records check revealed the subject was a convicted felon, as well as a habitual traffic

offender. The subject was transported to the Marion County Jail and the appropriate citations were issued.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

Officers Garcia and Lejarzar were on water patrol and observed a man attempting to snag fish in Punta Gorda Isles. The officers observed several cast nets and blood on the deck of his boat. The subject did not have a valid commercial license or a recreational license and possessed mullet in an area and time when the possession of mullet is prohibited. The man was issued a misdemeanor citation and several warnings.

Officer Salem responded to a call about a man who shot an illegal deer. When he arrived on scene, Officer Salem saw a buck with approximately seven-inch antlers and only two points on a side. Bucks must have an antler with at least a ten-inch main beam or three points on one side in order to be legal. The subject was issued a misdemeanor notice to appear.

Officers Hazelwood and Midolo were patrolling an access road for a wildlife management area during a family hunt. They found a man and a youth hunter dragging an antlerless deer. While harvest of an antlerless deer was legal on the management area property, antlerless deer were closed to harvest anywhere outside that property. The man admitted that he instructed the youth to shoot the deer even though he knew it was on private property. The appropriate citation was issued.

HARDEE COUNTY

Officer Livingston saw a vehicle driving slowly towards his location on a road where night hunting violations have occurred in the past. He saw a spotlight being shined out of the passenger side window and conducted a stop. There were five people inside the truck, and they admitted to shining the spotlight and that they were going to shoot an animal if they found one. Inside the vehicle was a loaded .22 caliber rifle and a crossbow with two bolts (arrows) within reach of the occupants of the vehicle. The rifle, LED spotlight and the crossbow were seized as evidence. A notice to appear was issued to each of the five subjects.

PINELLAS COUNTY

Officer Specialist Bibeau and Officer Burks observed individuals actively fishing from a seawall. The officers conducted fisheries inspections and found one individual in possession of an eleven-inch gag grouper. The appropriate citation was issued and the gag grouper was returned to the water alive.

Officer Specialist Bibeau and Officer Burks observed an individual actively fishing from a bridge. They contacted the individual and conducted a fisheries inspection. They located four reef fish fillets inside a five-gallon bucket. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Specialist Bibeau and Officer Burks observed an individual fishing from a rock jetty. The officers contacted the subject and found him in possession of ten mangrove snapper, eight of which were undersized. The appropriate citation was issued.

Officer Specialist Bibeau observed two individuals digging through rocks, attempting to harvest crabs. He contacted the individuals, conducted a fisheries inspection, and found them in possession of forty-six whole stone crabs and eighty undersized stone crab claws. The appropriate citations were issued.

MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

LEE COUNTY

Officers Garcia, Rogers, Stapleton, Thompson and Captain Carpenter, along with Lee County Sheriff's Office Marine Deputies, assisted FWRI staff with the rescue of an injured manatee in Saint James City. It was transported to the zoo in Tampa for treatment.

Lieutenant Ruggiero responded by vessel to assist area FWC biologists with a manatee rescue in Saint James City. The manatee was beached between some docks. Volunteers helped the biologists lift the manatee and secure it in a harness. The manatee was attached to the side of the FWC patrol vessel and towed to a nearby boat ramp where it was transferred to a rescue truck. The manatee was taken to Saint Petersburg for rehabilitation.

SOUTH REGION A

CASES

BROWARD COUNTY

While patrolling offshore near the area of the Commercial Pier, Officer Nall conducted a resource inspection on divers exiting the water onto their vessel. The inspection revealed undersized spiny lobster, undersized red grouper, four undersized and out of season hogfish, and over the bag limit of hogfish. A notice to appear was issued

Officers Lopez and Larosa were on nighttime vessel patrol in Hollywood. The officers stopped a vessel for operating at night without navigation lights. The operator of the

vessel was arrested for an active warrant out of Miami-Dade County that was extraditable and transported to the Broward County Jail.

Officers Seldomridge and Fuller were on water patrol in Pompano when they observed a vessel with fishing rods on board. They stopped the vessel to conduct an inspection and located one undersized red grouper and seven undersized gray triggerfish. A notice to appear was issued and the fish were returned to the water alive.

Officer Dudas and Lieutenant Brock were on water patrol in Fort Lauderdale when they observed a large cabin vessel violating a slow speed manatee zone. The officers stopped the vessel to address the violation and saw signs of impairment from the operator. The operator was arrested for boating under the influence.

HENDRY COUNTY

Officer Specialist Allen checked three duck hunters in a canoe participating in the Storm Water Treatment Area Five quota duck hunt. The subject in control of the canoe presented 16 ducks on a stringer. When the officer said he was going to search the canoe for more ducks, the man produced four more ducks that were in the bottom of the canoe. This put the men two ducks over the collective daily bag limit of 18. The subject was issued a citation for not having any personal flotation devices and the violations regarding migratory birds will be filed with the Hendry County State Attorney's Office.

MARTIN COUNTY

Officers Moss and Ames were conducting a federal fisheries inspection and observed a vessel anchored with fishing lines in the water. Officer Moss conducted a vessel stop and the fisheries inspection revealed six red snapper located at the rear of the vessel and two in a cooler located at the bow. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officers Hudson and Pecko conducted a fisheries inspection on a wholesale and retail dealer. The officers located five undersized stone crab claws and ten bags of filleted black grouper. The owner could not produce the trip tickets or invoices for the black grouper. The owner was cited accordingly.

Officer Norbrothen received a request from the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) regarding an investigation of an individual deer hunting over bait in Tennessee. The individual lived in Martin County and the TWRA officers asked for FWC's help to serve the subject with a criminal notice to appear in Tennessee. The individual was aware of the investigation and accepted the notice to appear without incident.

Officer Hudson responded to a complaint about a subject who caught a snook and buried it in the sand next to his cooler at the Hobe Sound Beach. The officer arrived on scene and observed the subject intensely watching the entrance to the beach while he was fishing. The subject was using small live bait that is common to snook fishing. The

officer approached the subject and found buried a 31-inch snook in the sand below his cooler. A notice to appear was issued.

Officers Hudson and Godward responded to a complaint of an individual keeping a snook out of season at Twin Rivers Park. The officers arrived on scene to find the subject had already left. The officers were able to obtain the subject's address and went to the residence. The subject told the officers he knew they were there for the 25-inch snook, which was still in the cooler on ice in the garage. The appropriate citations were issued.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officer Brodbeck was on vessel patrol near the Palm Beach Inlet when a commercial charter dive boat was observed returning from offshore with spearfishing equipment and gear used to harvest lobster in plain view. A vessel stop was initiated to conduct a resource inspection. It was found that four divers harvested 34 lobster, which was ten over the bag limit and one was undersized. One diver took responsibility for the violations. The appropriate citations and warnings were issued and ten lobster were returned alive to the water.

Officer Brodbeck was on vessel patrol near Palm Beach Inlet when a vessel was observed on plane in a marked Slow Speed/Manatee Zone. A vessel stop was initiated to address the violation and the operator displayed signs of impairment. Seated field sobriety tests were conducted, and the operator was arrested for BUI and transported to the Palm Beach County Jail.

Officer Riggs observed an individual fishing under the Spanish River Blvd Bridge and conducted an inspection. The subject was in possession of ten undersized mangrove snapper and fishing without a license. The individual was cited accordingly.

OKEECHOBEE COUNTY

Officer Hausler conducted a derelict vessel investigation on Taylor Creek. After locating and notifying the owner, records revealed the owner had a lengthy history with FWC law enforcement and other local agencies. The owner also had a history for failure to appear in court. Officer Hausler placed the owner under arrest and booked him into the Glades County Jail where the subject was also issued citations for dumping raw sewage into the waterways, and for his vessel registration being expired over six months.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officers Nasworth and Flynn were conducting vessel patrol on Lake Okeechobee and observed a subject actively fishing. They conducted a resource inspection and discovered the subject was in possession of multiple black crappie less than 10 inches. A notice to appear was issued.

Officers Riggs and Brodbeck stopped a vessel returning from fishing offshore at Phil Foster Park because it didn't have a functioning all-around white light. Four subjects were onboard with fishing rods. A boating safety inspection and fisheries inspection revealed expired flares, improper display of registration numbers, no valid certificate of registration, and 38 snapper – three being undersize. The operator was issued citations accordingly.

ST. LUCIE COUNTY

Officer Arnold observed a slow-moving vehicle with several occupants shining lights into a field. The property was private and is known to have an abundance of game. While maintaining sight of the vehicle, he observed subjects exit and fire a rifle into the field. Minutes later he observed the subjects return to the vehicle with an animal, which appeared to be a hog. A stop was conducted, and the subjects were identified. An investigation determined that all three subjects were in possession of loaded firearms. A dead hog was observed in the bed of the truck. The subjects were cited accordingly.

Officer Payne was on patrol at an area boat ramp when he observed a commercial fishing boat returning to shore with an expired Florida registration. A computer check confirmed the registration violation. A resource and license inspection revealed the captain did not have a current and valid Saltwater Products License with a Restricted Species endorsement. Two crew members were also harvesting resources without a Saltwater Products License. Several safety equipment violations were addressed, and the appropriate citations were issued.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officer Norbrothen, along with Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office deputies, responded to a report of a man who was bitten by a snake in J.W. Corbett Wildlife Management Area. The victim believed the snake was venomous and began to feel dizzy after the bite. When the officer arrived on scene, the bite location was visibly swollen and painful to the touch. The victim was transported to a local hospital where antivenom had been flown in for treatment.

MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

ST. LUCIE COUNTY

Lieutenant Rogerson was invited to a youth robotics club to present information on invasive reptiles affecting the area; such as Agama lizards. The group is working on a project to help control and/or eradicate these species from one recreational park. Currently, they are in the process of creating inexpensive trapping enclosures made with common household recyclable materials. Once a viable prototype is produced and

testing is completed, production will commence, and traps will be provided to the public for use.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROL

BROWARD COUNTY

While conducting a detail targeting the opening weekend of waterfowl season, Officers Tarr, Hart, Fuller, and Armstrong cited multiple subjects for violations. The violations included two subjects hunting without a Federal duck stamp, one subject for over the daily bag limit of Pintails, one subject for over the daily bag limit of Fulvous Whistling Ducks, one subject for over the bag limit of Scaup, seven subjects for trespassing and fishing within STA ¾, and one citation for possession of more than one black bass over 16 inches in total length.

SOUTH REGION B

CASES

COLLIER COUNTY

While patrolling the shoreline of Naples Bay in downtown Naples, Officer Conroy was flagged down by another vehicle. The concerned citizen stated there was a vehicle throwing glass bottles out the window, swerving on the road, and the occupants were hanging out of the car. Officer Conroy obtained the vehicle description and located it nearby. She observed it drive off the road, fail to stop at two stop signs, and then swerve into the other lanes with coming traffic. Officer Conroy stopped the vehicle and conducting a DUI investigation that determined the driver was impaired by pain pills and alcohol. The driver was arrested for DUI.

MONROE COUNTY

Investigator Powell received information from a Monroe County Sherriff's Deputy that the US Marshalls were attempting to locate a person wanted for involuntary manslaughter out of North Carolina. Investigator Powell and Officer Kiefer used their local area knowledge of Boot Key Harbor to assist US Marshalls in locating the subject. FWC and CBP-Air Marine Agents arrived on scene and placed the subject into custody. Officer Kiefer and Investigator Powell transported the subject to the Monroe County Jail.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROL

COLLIER COUNTY

Officers Polly, Arbogast, Rubenstein, Conroy, and Lieutenant Bulger conducted a targeted enforcement action focusing on navigational light and boating under the

influence (BUI) violations. The operation coincided with providing law enforcement support for Marco Island's annual Christmas boat parade, seeking to educate the public about the importance of navigational lights and required vessel safety equipment at night. The officers stopped 10 vessels, issuing four citations and 10 warnings. Officer Polly issued an individual two criminal citations for possessing undersize mangrove snapper and sheepshead.

MONROE COUNTY

Several Monroe County officers participated in a Special Operation called" Freezer Burn." The officers were conducting marine resource and marine sanitation device inspections on several trawling vessels at anchor near Key West. Four vessels were found to be discharging raw sewage directly into the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and the captains were cited appropriately. While conducting an inspection on the commercial vessel, Miss Kathi, Officer's Cobb and Sapp observed the vessel discharge several gallons of oil and diesel overboard. The discharge was documented with photographs and camera footage. The captain of the vessel was issued a Federal Citation for discharging into sanctuary waters. The case is being sent to NOAA for enforcement.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Officer Cartaya and Duty Officer Collins attended Hialeah Career Day. This outreach event provided over one hundred elementary students with the opportunity to learn about different careers through conversations with officers and demonstrations of equipment. FWC officers introduced students to boating safety, ethical sportsmanship, and responsible recreation.

FWC Miami Officers met their 'littles' of the Bigs in Blue school-to-work program. The volunteering officers participate in this program and are involved in one-to-one mentoring with these high school youth. Through this partnership with Big Brothers/Big Sisters, FWC gives back to the community by hosting youth from Miami Jackson High at their workplace. They enjoyed breakfast and lunch together and the officers exchanged their contact information with the students. K-9 Officer Negron conducted a demonstration with K-9 Maggie for the students.