

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



Patrol, Protect, Preserve

February 21, 2020 through February 27, 2020

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

SANTA ROSA COUNTY

Officers Wilkenson and Roberson responded to a night hunting complaint about an individual on an ATV with a loaded rifle. The subject trespassed onto a hunt club property nearby. K-9 Officer Hutchinson arrived to assist, and the subject was located. The subject admitted to hunting on the property at night with a gun using his ATV lights. He was cited accordingly.

K-9 Officer Hutchinson was patrolling a road adjacent to the Blackwater State Forest when he observed a bright light being shined into the tree line after sunset. The light was being shined from a subject who was riding a bicycle and holding a hunting rifle. Officer Hutchinson conducted a stop on the bicycle and the subject admitted to shining the light to look for wildlife. Officer Hutchinson seized the rifle and the subject was cited accordingly.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

CASES

BAKER COUNTY

Officer Burnsed located a bait site in the John Bethea State Forest portion of Osceola WMA. He documented the site and monitored it for activity. After a few days Officer Burnsed found two hunters, hunting over the bait. One hunter admitted to placing the bait and the other hunter admitted to adding fresh bait, prior to hunting. Both hunters were cited accordingly.

COLUMBIA COUNTY

Officer Yates received information through the agency Wildlife Alert program of individuals taking over the bag limit of largemouth bass. Officer Yates identified two individuals that were involved in harvesting a total of thirteen largemouth bass from a local lake. After interviewing the two involved, a confession was obtained. The appropriate charges were direct filed with the Columbia County State Attorney's Office.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

MADISON COUNTY

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 about conservation enforcement, public safety and various hunting issues.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

SUWANNEE COUNTY

Lieutenant Humphries and Officers Boone and Davenport responded to a request for assistance from the Suwannee County Sheriff Office and EMS. At a local boat ramp, a subject's vessel was pulled away by the swift current of the Suwannee River. The subject was last seen floating down the river hanging onto the side of the boat in distress. Officers Davenport and Boone quickly responded and rescued the subject.

LEVY COUNTY

Officer Fox was on patrol at the Highway 40 boat ramp in Yankeetown when he noticed a commercial oyster vessel with two harvesters coming into the boat ramp. Officer Fox conducted a resource inspection on the vessel and Officer Suttles arrived to assist. The harvesters had 16 bushels of oysters on board. The oysters were not tagged as required. The subjects were cited accordingly, and the oysters were returned to the water.

Officer Fox was on patrol near Yankeetown Marina when he conducted a resource inspection on a commercial oyster vessel. The inspection revealed that 24% of the oysters inspected were undersize. Officer Fox cited the subjects accordingly.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

BREVARD COUNTY

Officer Maslo conducted an inspection of a man fishing under a bridge. Her inspection revealed the man was wanted out of Leon County for writing worthless checks over \$1,500. The man was placed under arrest for the warrant and delivered to the Brevard County Jail.

LAKE COUNTY

Officer Teal and Lieutenant Chase observed a vehicle traveling at a slow rate of speed, shining a spotlight from the driver's side into an open field. A stop was initiated, and the subject had a concealed firearm and a rifle with an additional light affixed. The rifle also had a bullet chambered. The subject admitted to hunting from the roadway and was cited appropriately.

Officer Sweet received information about an illegally taken deer. Officers Phillips, Teal and Sweet investigated identified a subject. The subject admitted to shooting the deer using his vehicle headlights in the middle of a county road. The officers seized an eight-point buck and the appropriate charges were filed with the State Attorney's Office.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

Officers Hazelwood, Garcia, Salem, Price and Lieutenant Ruggiero responded to a call at a local management area about a lost woman and found two deputies talking with a male and female subject. After an investigation, the FWC Officers arrested the man for domestic violence and delivered him to the county jail.

MANATEE COUNTY

Officers Hughes, Godfrey, Alvis, Investigator Williams and Lieutenant Wells conducted a multi-day offshore patrol on the 85' Offshore Patrol Vessel Gulf Sentry. The officers were focusing on inspecting commercial reef fish vessels for compliance with state and federal laws. They were approximately forty nautical miles west of Manatee County when they inspected a commercial longline vessel. The officers issued the vessel captain/owner warnings for no current saltwater products license with a restricted

species endorsement on board and no federal reef fish permit with a longline endorsement on board. A federal citation was issued for inadequate turtle mitigation gear onboard.

While patrolling the South Skyway Relief Bridge, Officer Gonzales observed two subjects fishing from the bridge. A fisheries inspection revealed that one of the subjects had caught and was in possession of fourteen gray snapper. All fourteen gray snapper were less than ten inches in length. The gray snapper were seized and returned to the water and the subject was issued a notice to appear.

While patrolling the South Skyway Relief Bridge, Officer Gonzales observed a individual fishing under the bridge. A fisheries inspection revealed the subject was in possession of thirteen gray snapper. All thirteen gray snapper were less than ten inches in length. The gray snapper were seized and returned to water and the subject was issued a notice to appear.

While patrolling the South Skyway fishing area, Officer Dalton observed several individuals fishing near the bridge. Fishery inspections of the subjects revealed one of the anglers had caught and was in possession of eighteen gray snapper and four sheepshead. All eighteen gray snapper were less than ten inches in length and two of the sheepshead were less than twelve inches in length. The gray snapper and undersized sheepshead were seized and returned to the water and the subject was issued a notice to appear.

While patrolling the South Skyway Relief Bridge, Officer Gonzales observed two subjects carrying fishing equipment while walking to their vehicle from the bridge. One of the subjects saw Officer Gonzales and tossed a bait bucket into the nearby bushes. Officer Gonzales retrieved the bucket and found a spotted seatrout along with a gray snapper and a sheepshead in the bucket. The subject was issued a notice to appear.

PINELLAS COUNTY

Officer Godfrey and Officer Specialist Alvis were working commercial individual fishing quota (IFQ) landings for grouper/snapper commercial vessels. They noticed that a vessel was landing before the required advance three-hour notification. The officers contacted the captain of the vessel and explained the violation to him. The officers also ran a check on the captain and found an active warrant out of Lee County for fisheries violations. The captain was arrested for the warrant and booked into the Pinellas County Jail.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

Every year the Florida State Fair is held in Hillsborough County at the State Fairgrounds for two weeks. FWC set up a well-planned display for the public to view and understand the many roles of the Commission. Thousands of people stopped by the display and picked up informational brochures. Many questions were answered by uniformed officers and other FWC personnel.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

PASCO COUNTY

Multiple FWC personnel and agencies responded to a report of an overdue PWC out of Port Richey. Members of the United States Coast Guard, Pasco Sheriff's Office, Port Richey Police Department, Port Richey Fire Department, and Division of State Parks searched the coastline and surrounding state park boundaries. The PWC was located by the Coast Guard with no one aboard. The following morning the subject was located on a stilt house by members of the Pasco County Sheriff's Office Aviation Unit.

SOUTH REGION A

CASES

MARTIN COUNTY

Officer Kirkland was patrolling Allapattah Flatts WMA when she observed a vehicle parked at one of the access gates. She heard a gunshot, then three more shots. A short time later two men dressed in camo and carrying shotguns came out of the woods. They admitted to hunting and harvesting snipe. The officer advised the hunters that it was closed season. They did not have a migratory bird permit and one did not have a hunting license. They were cited accordingly.

Officer Webb was contacted in reference to a vehicle off trail in the Dupuis Wildlife Environmental Area (WEA). He found a truck hidden in the bushes containing dog boxes and heard dogs in the distance. Officer Webb contacted Martin County Sheriff's Office, who offered to assist with their air unit. The helicopter observed three subjects with five dogs pursuing wildlife illegally. The subjects were contacted and cited accordingly.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

While conducting offshore federal patrol near Palm Beach County, Officers Rogers and Schroer conducted a fisheries inspection on a local charter vessel. With paying customers on board and in possession of king mackerel, the charter captain did not have a valid saltwater charter head boat license and a federal pelagic permit required to harvest pelagic species while in federal waters. The charter captain was cited accordingly.

While on patrol in Corbett WMA, Officers Norbrothen and Merizio observed an ATV enter the area. A traffic stop was conducted, and the subject admitted to illegally entering the management area and knowing that ATVs are not allowed in the WMA. The subject was cited accordingly.

MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officers Mann, Langley, and Riggs assisted FWC manatee biologists at the Boynton Beach boat ramp capture an injured manatee. The injured manatee was rescued and taken to the Miami Sea-aquarium for rehabilitation.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officer Langley was on patrol when he spotted a drifting unmanned dinghy. The engine was up, and the vessel appeared to have broken free from a larger vessel. Officer Langley secured a line to the bow of the dinghy and towed the vessel into shore. He tracked down the owner and returned the vessel.

SOUTH REGION B

CASES

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

While conducting a boating incident investigation, Officers Osorio and Hernandez observed the vessel did not have a Florida registration number. Further investigation revealed the vessel did not have a Hull Identification Number permanently affixed and the possessor/buyer failed to transfer title and did not register the vessel as required by Florida Statute. The appropriate citations were issued, and the vessel was seized.

COLLIER COUNTY

Officer Arbogast observed an individual exiting the mangroves on the side of a local county road, adjacent to a prohibited shellfish harvesting zone. The individual possessed approximately 70 oysters, all of which were undersized and did not have a valid fishing license. He was cited accordingly, and the oysters were returned to the water.

MONROE COUNTY

Officers Thompson and Hoppe were checking shrimpers around the Jewfish Creek Bridge in the Key Largo area when Officer Hoppe observed an individual walking along a bank. After asking him to retrieve his fishing license, the subject opened his car door and the officers smelled marijuana. When asked, the subject produced a baggy with five grams of marijuana. A search of the vehicle revealed more than 9.5 grams of marijuana, THC Wax concentrate (felony) and drug paraphernalia. The subject was arrested for possession of felony synthetic narcotics, marijuana and drug paraphernalia and was transported to the Monroe County Jail.

DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROLS

MONROE COUNTY

FWC officers conducted an interagency cooperative effort to ensure liveaboard compliance in the Upper, Middle, and Lower Keys. Liveaboard vessels were checked for compliance with USCG safety equipment, registration requirements, nighttime anchor lighting, MSD compliance, and other law enforcement issues within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary's "No Discharge Zone".

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING – EXPANDING PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Officer Ingellis, Investigator Stiffler and K-9 Officer Negron provided a career day presentation at Aventura charter school in Miami Dade. They brought the K-9 for a demonstration as well as alligators. They discussed the responsibilities of an FWC officer and how to be good stewards of the environment.

Several Officers from the South Region, including Broward, Monroe, and Miami-Dade County staffed the FWC booth for the Miami International Boat Show. Officers interacted with many visitors and provided education on boating safety, agency goals, fishing and hunting, and recruitment. The total guest attendance was upwards of 100,000 people. Many stakeholders and marine organizations were given information on how to become involved with FWC special initiatives, activities, and campaigns such as the Florida coral crew.

MONROE COUNTY

Officers Kiefer and Piekenbrock met with the residents of Royal Palm Trailer Park on Big Pine Key to conduct public out-reach and answer any questions about FWC Officer duties and state fishing regulations. The Monroe County Sheriff's Office and the Key West Police Department K-9 division were also in attendance.

Officers Sapp and Kiefer spoke to several hundred students at Sugarloaf School for Safety Day. Multiple agencies were in attendance including Key West Police Department, Monroe County Sheriff's Office, Customs and Border Patrol, Florida Highway Patrol, Monroe County Fire Rescue, and Trauma Star. The event included the landing of the Trauma Star Helicopter and a demonstration by KWPD's K-9 unit. Several vessels and other lifesaving equipment were on hand for the students to see firsthand. Officer's Sapp and Kiefer spoke to the students about boating safety, safety gear, and making float plans.