

# 2019

## Boating Accident Statistical Report



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Division of Law Enforcement

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## 2019 Boating Officer of the Year



Officer Britton Corbin

Officer Britton Corbin graduated from Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Academy Class 23 in June 2014. He was assigned to his childhood hometown of Okaloosa County, where he continues to serve as a patrol officer.

Officer Corbin dedicates his energy to ensuring the safety of the public and the conservation of Florida's natural resources. He views every day on patrol as an outreach opportunity, making sure he communicates with the public while displaying professionalism, honesty, and integrity. He engages young people with a smile and understands the importance of leaving them with a positive experience from their encounter with an FWC officer. Britton participates in volunteer and educational opportunities in the community. Recently he attended an event for the Destin Beach Safety Junior Lifeguards at Henderson Beach State Park. He discussed the importance of conservation, boating safety, PFD wear, and the responsibilities of being an FWC officer.

Officer Corbin exemplifies the meaning of leadership by example. His work ethic reveals his overall attitude, which is positive and contagious. He helps without being asked, accomplishes the goals he sets for himself and helps others achieve success and greatness. Britton distinguishes himself from others by seeking and accepting challenges through new learning experiences, career development courses and on-duty experience. This benefits the state, the agency, Floridians and visitors by providing a safer place for the boating public, fishermen and hunters.

Officer Corbin played a pivotal role with the success of Operation Hornet's Nest, a concentrated BUI enforcement detail at Crab Island. This very popular shallow body of water in Destin attracts thousands of boats throughout the busy summer months. He has made 18 BUI arrests in the short span of the four-month summer boating season in the region. Officer Corbin implemented a detail, joining efforts with Fort Walton Beach Police regarding public safety concerns with anchored vessels at or near the Fort Walton Beach Landing. Operation Clean Landing focused on MSD compliance on area waterways.

## 2019 Boating Educator of the Year



Dan McIntyre

Dan McIntyre has been a Coast Guard Auxiliarist since 2008. He is a veteran who served in the Coast Guard Reserve for 42 years, retiring in 2000 with the rank of Chief Warrant Officer, CW04. Dan was recalled to active duty in 2002 and served for another 2 1/2 years as a Performance Excellence Consultant at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. He has had an exemplary record of service with the Auxiliary and has earned numerous awards and promotions as he has moved up the ranks. He was finally allowed to really retire in 2005.

In 2015 Dan found his calling when he became fully engaged in the area of Recreational Boating Safety Public Education. Motivated by the increasing number of drowning fatalities among children in Florida each year, he decided to seek a solution. He researched child water-related accidents and statistics and consulted with other Coast Guard Auxiliary and organizations. He finally adapted a syllabus that had been shared by Auxiliary Flotilla 14-1. Dan then envisioned teaching children how to be safe in the water, around boats and how to respond to water emergencies. His goal was to grow more responsible boating adults by developing a simple, yet impactful course that would instill basic water safety concepts in 9-year old students. That spring, Dan partnered with the Brevard County School Board to deliver a unique course to third grade elementary school students entitled "Boats N ' Kids".

Since that humble beginning, the Brevard Schools have asked Dan to return every year with class sizes averaging 15 to 30 students. From 2015 to 2018, he served over 2,300 volunteer hours as a Recreational Boating Safety instructor or facilitator. Dan's work has resulted in the delivery of 120 "Boats N ' Kids" classes at 31 Brevard County schools that have produced 1,959 third-grade graduates. Dan achieved this level of success while also delivering a full schedule of adult and youth "About Boating Safely" classes. During that same period, he taught or facilitated 52 adult classes at 14 schools resulting in the graduation of 619 adult, and 1,533 youth graduates under the age of 17.

As a result of Dan's dedication and hard work, the "Boats' N Kids" class safety initiative has become a 7th Coast Guard Auxiliary District priority after the 2019 National Executive Board Meeting. Dan is planning for implementation of a new program with instructor activities designed for 6 to 11-year old in groups. The program will focus on life jackets, dockside safety, boating safety, environmental stewardship, and basic emergencies, designed to be taught with a team of two or more instructors. In his current position as Assistant District Staff Officer for Public Education, Dan has embarked on an ambitious plan to export this class beyond Brevard to encompass schools throughout the Auxiliary 7th District Area of Responsibility which includes Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

## 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.

### **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 registered vessels, Florida leads the nation in that category. As a negative consequence of high vessel numbers and our mild climate, Florida also leads the nation in the number of boating fatalities 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 2019 Boating Accidents Statistical Report indicates there were 723 reportable boating accidents and 66 boating related fatalities in the calendar year. This total includes seven missing persons who at the end of 2019 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 2019 Boating Accident 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 2019. With 961,266 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.



Officers Philippi and Angelis working the Gasparilla event in Tampa, January 2019. This event draws thousands of boaters annually. The FWC Gulf Sentry is pictured in the background.

## 2019 SUMMARY

### BOATING ACCIDENT REVIEW

- Florida leads the nation with a total number of **961,266** registered vessels in 2019.
- There were **723** reportable boating accidents in 2019.

### REPORTABLE BOATING ACCIDENT

- Collision with vessel was the leading type of accident with a total of **205 (28%)**.
- Towed watersport activities were involved in **9 accidents**, resulting in **1 fatality** and **12 injuries**.
- Paddlecraft (canoes, kayaks, rowboats, paddleboards) were involved in **21 accidents** resulting in **14 fatalities** and **13 injuries**.
- **May** was the month with the highest number of accidents (**97**).
- **Monroe County** reported the highest number of accidents and injuries (88 total accidents with seven fatalities and 57 injuries).

### REPORTABLE BOATING FATALITIES

- **58 fatal accidents** resulting in **65 fatalities**.
- **40%** of the fatal accidents resulted from **falls overboard** (23 accidents). Boaters falling overboard remains the leading type of boating fatality.
- **The leading cause of death** in fatal boating accidents was **drowning** with **43 fatalities (66%)**.
- **October** was the deadliest month in 2019 with **11 fatalities**.
- Alcohol or drug-use is reported to have played a role in **32%** boating fatalities.
- **91% (59)** of the victims of fatal boating accidents were **males**.
- **68% (44)** of the 65 operators involved in fatal accidents were **age 36 or older**.
- **67% (42)** of all vessels involved in fatal accidents in 2019 were **21 feet in length or less**.

### REPORTABLE BOATING INJURIES

- There were **324 accidents** that resulted in **453 injured persons**. The rate of injury was **47 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 26% (186) of reportable boating accidents.
- **Rented PWC** represented **43% (105)** of PWC involved in accidents.
- **47% (86)** of PWC accidents involved a **collision with another vessel**.
- **36%** of PWC accidents occurred in Miami-Dade (26), Monroe (21), and Pinellas (20) counties.
- **6 fatalities** resulted from the 186 PWC accidents.
- **169** people were injured in PWC accidents.

### BOATING EDUCATION STATISTICS

- FWC issued **54,472** Boating Safety Education ID Cards in 2019.
- **66%** of the cards were issued to persons born on or after January 1, 1988.
- Of the 54,472 cards issued, 39,980 were to males, 14,479 were to females. 13 did not provide their gender. An additional 266 cards were printed for lost, damaged and information changes.
- **80%** of the **operators** involved in fatal accidents had **no formal boater education**.

Boating accident statistics for 2019 were compiled on April 1, 2020. Reports received after that date were not included in the following data. In 2019, 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.