

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



*Patrol, Protect, Preserve*

**May 29, 2020 through June 4, 2020**

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

**NORTHWEST REGION**

**CASES**

**BAY COUNTY**

Officers Hahr and Hicks were patrolling Grand Lagoon in Panama City when they observed a man on a personal watercraft (PWC) operate into the idle speed/no wake zone on plane and then make a U-turn and speed back through the zone. The operator exhibited signs of impairment and Standard Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST) were utilized. He was arrested for BUI.

Officers Hahr and Hicks were patrolling Grand Lagoon in Panama City when a personal watercraft (PWC) was observed violating the idle speed/no wake zone. Upon stopping the vessel, the officers observed that the PWC had no numbers or registration decal. After the operator was cited for the speed zone and registration violations, the officers met with his father, who explained that he had obtained the PWC from a friend who could not register the vessel due to not having a title. The man was charged with failure to obtain a title for the vessel upon purchase.

Senior Officers M. and H. Webb along with Lieutenant M. Guy were working marine fisheries and boating safety in the Panama City Pass. They stopped an inbound 23 ft vessel that was returning from fishing with two subjects were on board. An inspection revealed the captain was in possession of two gray triggerfish out of season. The captain was issued a notice to appear citation.

Officers Coker, N. Basford and Lieutenant Price were on water patrol in Grand Lagoon when they observed a rental pontoon boat trying to pull into the slip on the dock. The operator gave the vessel too much forward throttle and nearly knocked down one of the rental employees who was trying to guide the boat into the slip. The employee boarded the pontoon boat and took control to pull it into the slip. The officers approached to conduct a boating safety check and the operator showed signs of impairment. Standard Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST) were utilized and the operator was arrested for boating under the influence.

Officers Alsobrooks and Hellett were patrolling at the Cherokee boat ramp on Deer Point Lake when they observed a subject operating a small vessel. As he approached the boat ramp, the officers observed the operator drinking from a Michelob Ultra Beer bottle. The operator noticed the Fish & Wildlife Commission (FWC) truck in the parking lot and lowered the beer bottle into the water. The officers let the subject load his vessel before making contact. In the process of loading the vessel onto the trailer the operator accelerated rapidly in the no-wake/idle speed zone near the boat ramp while other vessels were close by. The operator showed signs of impairment and was asked to complete a battery of Standard Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST). The operator was arrested for boating under the influence and also issued a citation for littering.

## ESCAMBIA COUNTY

Officer Specialist Allgood was at the Navy Point Boat Ramp when he observed a vessel violate the idle speed zone. When he spoke to the operator about the violation several signs of impairment were detected. Standard Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST) were conducted and the operator was arrested for boating under the influence and booked in the Escambia County Jail.

Officer Specialist Allgood along with Officer Graves worked a detail concentrating on fisheries enforcement in the gulf water off Pensacola Pass. Four citations were issued to different vessels for possession of red snapper during a closed season.

Officer Specialist Allgood and Officer Manning documented several violations dealing with fisheries enforcement. They issued three citations for possession of red snapper in closed season, five citations for possession of triggerfish in closed season, one citation for possession of an undersized amberjack and one citation for not landing a shark in whole condition.

Officer Specialist McHenry and Pettey conducted a fishery inspection on a vessel with several people fishing for spotted seatrout. A fisheries inspection located five spotted seatrout over 19 inches. Only one spotted seatrout over 19 inches is allowed on a vessel. The vessel operator was issued a citation for the violation.

Lieutenant Lambert was at the Navy Point Boat Ramp when he observed a personal watercraft (PWC) violating the idle speed zone. When Lieutenant Lambert stopped the vessel and spoke to the operator in reference to the violation, he noticed several signs

of impairment. Standard Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST) were conducted and the operator was arrested for boating under the influence. The operator later refused to give a breath sample and was booked into the Escambia County Jail.

## GULF COUNTY

Officer Gerber was conducting boating safety and resource inspections when he observed a charter captain cleaning several fish at the boat ramp. Upon inspection, he found the subject to be in possession of three undersize mangrove snapper. Also, the subject's charter captain's fishing license was expired. The appropriate citations were issued.

## OKALOOSA COUNTY

Officers Hahr and Mursch were patrolling the Yellow River when they stopped a vessel to conduct a fisheries inspection. They observed that the woman operating the boat was exhibiting signs of impairment and Standard Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST) were conducted. The operator was arrested for boating under the influence.

Officer Brown and Lieutenant Bartlett were on water patrol in the area of Crab Island when they stopped a personal watercraft (PWC) for violation of the idle speed/no wake zone. While addressing the boating violation, they found the individual had an active felony arrest warrant. Another PWC nearby was observed violating the idle speed zone and operating in a reckless manor near other vessels. The officers utilized the patrol vessel siren to get the attention of the operator and then directed him to pull along the portside of their vessel. As the PWC approached, the individual with the active warrant jumped from his vessel and onto the back of the other PWC. Both subjects fled the area and were able to get into a vehicle and leave. Charges of fleeing and eluding by vessel and leaving the scene of a boating accident have been filed against both suspects with the State Attorney's Office.

Investigator Pifer was on land patrol at a local boat ramp when he observed a vessel returning to the ramp with one individual and fishing gear on board. A vessel stop was initiated to conduct a saltwater fisheries and license inspection. A cooler on board contained one Spanish mackerel and three spotted seatrout, two of which were undersize. The subject was issued the appropriate citation.

Investigations Lieutenant Bartlett and Investigator Pifer were on water patrol when they observed a vessel violating the idle speed-no wake zone near the entrance to the United States Coast Guard (USCG) Station Destin. A vessel stop was initiated to address the violation and to conduct a boating safety inspection. The operator displayed signs of impairment and Standardized Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST) were conducted. The operator was arrested for boating under the influence.

Officers Hahr and McVaney were patrolling Crab Island in Destin when they observed a vessel leaving the area after dark. They observed a navigation light violation and

approached the vessel as it was heading to a marina. As they watched the boat, they observed the operator having difficulty docking the boat. The operator displayed signs of impairment and Standard Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST) were conducted. The subject was arrested for BUI.

## SANTA ROSA COUNTY

Officers Roberson and Hutchinson were patrolling the Escambia River when they observed two subjects on a vessel near the bank of the river. After watching the vessel, the officers approached and contacted both subjects. The officers observed untagged bush hooks, live game fish and a flathead catfish in the vessel. Further investigation revealed the subjects had set out several bush hooks earlier in the evening and had baited one of the lines with a live gamefish. The subjects were both issued citations for possessing untagged bush hooks and for using gamefish as bait on bush hooks.

Officer Ramos patrolled the Blackwater River concentrating on public safety in the congested waterway. He conducted two separate Boating Under the Influence (BUI) investigations resulting in the arrest of each impaired operator and transport to the county jail. Officer Ramos contacted 50 vessels and issued 30 boating warnings or citations to boaters. Common violations included insufficient number of personal flotation devices (PFD), operators on personal watercraft not wearing a PFD, and infants on a vessel without a PFD. Various other safety, registration and restricted area violations were also addressed.

## WAKULLA COUNTY

Investigator II B. Hughes, Officers C. Bradshaw and N. Korade were on water patrol in the St. Marks River. They saw a vessel operating on a full plane in a posted slow speed minimum wake zone. They stopped the vessel to address the violation and the operator showed signs of impairment. Standard Field Sobriety Tasks (SFTS) were conducted and the operator was arrested for BUI and taken to the Wakulla County Jail.

Officers J. Carr and S. Gray were on water patrol in the Wakulla River. They stopped a vessel and the operator showed signs of impairment. Standard Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST) were conducted and the operator was arrested for BUI and taken to the Wakulla County Jail.

While conducting boating and safety and resource inspections, Lieutenant S. Olson observed a vessel operating on a full plain in a posted slow speed minimum wake zone. The vessel was stopped at Shields Marina and Officer J. Carr arrived and assisted in the inspection. The vessel operator showed signs of impairment and Standard Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST) were conducted. The subject was arrested and taken to the Wakulla County Jail.

## WALTON COUNTY

Officer Letcher responded to a single vessel boating accident in Choctawhatchee Bay that occurred when the operator lost control of a vessel and crashed into a dock. When Officer Letcher arrived, he observed the impact from the crash caused the vessel to run up onto the dock and only the stern was still in the water. The homeowner reported the operator had left the area and did not have permission to be using the vessel. The dock and vessel sustained damage, but no one was injured in the accident. The operator was located and charged appropriately.

## **NORTH CENTRAL REGION**

### **CASES**

#### **DIXIE COUNTY**

Lieutenant Futch observed several individuals acting suspicious at a local boat ramp on the Suwannee River. One subject began to operate a vessel in reckless manner and showed signs of impairment. Standardized Field Sobriety Tasks were administered, and the operator was arrested and taken to the Dixie County Jail.

Captain Huff and Lieutenant Futch were working the Suwannee River and observed a vessel approaching a boat ramp. They contacted the operator for a vessel safety inspection and noticed signs of impairment. The subject refused to submit to field sobriety tasks and refused to submit to a breath test. The subject was arrested for operating a vessel while impaired and transported to the Dixie County Jail.

#### **DUVAL COUNTY**

Officer Sankey received a call from Officer Burnsed regarding two trespassers on timber property that is fenced, gated and properly posted. Officer Sankey responded and found the subjects vehicle parked right in front of the closed gate with a sign clearly marked no trespassing. Officer Sankey followed tracks down to where the two subjects were fishing. Both subjects had expired freshwater fishing licenses and were issued a citation for trespass and warnings for an expired fishing license.

#### **GILCHRIST COUNTY**

Officer Sheffield was working on the Suwannee River and stopped a vessel to conduct a vessel safety inspection. During the inspection he observed the operator display signs of impairment. Standardized Field Sobriety Tasks were administered, and the operator was arrested and taken to the Gilchrist County Jail.

Officer Specialist Cooper was parked in a concealed location near a local farm field and observed a subject enter the field and begin to pick watermelons and place them in his truck. Officer Cooper contacted the farmer and verified that no one had permission to

take the watermelons. Officer Cooper contacted the subject and charged him with trespass and theft.

## NASSAU COUNTY

Officer Specialist Stuhr conducted a resource inspection on a subject fishing on the George Crady Fishing Pier. The subject was in possession of an egg bearing stone crab and was issued the appropriate citation.

## SUWANNEE COUNTY

Officer Ransom received a complaint regarding subjects firing into a local pond in a residential area near Live Oak. Upon arrival Officer Ransom observed an individual actively shooting at an alligator while the other subjects were trying to entice the alligator closer with squid. Interviews revealed two different subjects had attempted to take the alligator with the rifle. The two subjects were given a notice to appear for attempting to take alligator and the firearm was seized as evidence.

## TAYLOR COUNTY

Officer Touchton stopped a vessel occupied by two subjects to perform a vessel safety inspection. Both subjects were under the age of 21 and in possession of over thirty cans of beer. The appropriate citations were issued.

Officer Touchton was on water patrol in the Keaton beach canal and observed a vessel approaching his location after sunset not displaying the proper navigational lights. A vessel stop was conducted, and the operator displayed signs of impairment. The operator was arrested for boating under the influence and was booked into the Taylor County Jail.

## UNION COUNTY

K9 Officer Specialist Gill was called to assist Union County Sheriff's Office in locating evidence used in a kidnapping. He deployed K9 Friar along a major highway searching the shoulder. After several minutes K9 Friar located a small piece of plastic belonging to a pistol grip and then located the pistol nearby. The evidence was collected by Union County Sheriff's Office for processing.

## **NORTHEAST REGION**

### CASES

## MARION COUNTY

Senior Officer Wear and Officer Chriest were working information they received regarding subjects illegally hunting feral hogs from a county roadway. Shortly after dark the officers observed a vehicle shining a flashlight from the roadway and firing two gunshots. After firing, the vehicle quickly sped away. Within minutes, the same vehicle returned and fired one additional shot. A traffic stop was initiated, and the subjects were found in possession of numerous firearms. In the bed of the pickup, the officers located a freshly harvested feral hog. Both subjects were criminally cited for discharging a firearm from a county roadway.

Officer Specialist Dias received information from a concerned citizen regarding an illegal campsite located in the woods near a private residence. Officer Dias made his way to the campsite to speak with the campers and two subjects began walking away. He stopped them and attempted to identify both subjects. One subject provided a false name and was found to have an outstanding arrest warrant. A search located six grams of cannabis and other drug paraphernalia. In addition to the active arrest warrant, the subject was arrested for giving a false name to law enforcement, possession of under 20 grams of cannabis, and possession of drug paraphernalia.

## **SOUTHWEST REGION**

### **CASES**

#### **HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

While on water patrol on the Alafia River, Officer Pettifer and Officer Brown observed a vessel operating after dark without navigation lights. During the vessel stop, the officers discovered the occupants had been fishing and were in possession of four spotted seatrout fillets. The occupant responsible for catching the fish was cited for failure to land spotted seatrout in whole condition and possession of spotted seatrout during a closed season.

While on water patrol near the Courtney Campbell Causeway, Officer Pettifer and Officer Caldwell observed an individual fishing from shore. Upon conducting a fisheries inspection, they discovered the individual to be in possession of a redfish during a closed season. The individual was cited for the violation.

While on patrol near the Little Manatee River, Officer Rorer and Officer Brown observed a vessel traveling on plane through a marked slow speed zone. During the vessel stop the officers discovered the occupants of the vessel had been fishing. A resource inspection revealed one of the occupants to be in possession of an undersized snook and a spotted seatrout during a closed season. The individual was cited and warned for the violations.

#### **LEE COUNTY**

Lieutenant Ruggiero responded to a call about a vessel explosion. When he arrived on scene, he found a thirty-six-foot Chris-Craft cruiser with the windows blown out. All the subjects on board the vessel were uninjured and a boating accident investigation was completed.

Officer Garcia responded to assist the Lee County Sheriff's Department with an alligator. Officer Garcia secured the alligator so it could be removed from the area.

## **PINELLAS COUNTY**

Senior Officer Bibeau observed individuals wading along the shoreline harvesting shellfish. He contacted the individuals and conducted a fisheries inspection. They were in possession of forty-four scallops which were harvested in a closed area. Two individuals admitted to collecting the scallops and were both cited accordingly.

Senior Officer Bibeau observed an individual loading fishing equipment into a vehicle and conducted a fisheries inspection. The individual possessed three seatrout and was cited accordingly for possession of seatrout in violation of the executive order closure.

Officer Specialist Ferguson and Officer Godfrey checked an angler at the John Chestnut Park Boat Ramp on Lake Tarpon. The subject had a total of ninety-two panfish (forty-two panfish over the limit). The appropriate citations and warnings were issued for various violations.

## **SOUTH REGION A**

### **CASES**

#### **PALM BEACH COUNTY**

Officers Langley and Matthews were on patrol when they were dispatched to a subject possibly spearfishing snook in the Boynton Beach Inlet. The officers observed a subject matching the description spearfishing along the south east side of the jetty. They conducted a fisheries inspection, but the subject did not have any fish. However, the officers observed the subject committing multiple violations which included no saltwater fishing license. The subject was cited for spearfishing too close to a public beach, spearfishing too close to the jetty, no dive flag, and no saltwater fishing license.

Officer Riggs observed six individuals on Munyon Island, which is part of Mac Arthur Beach State Park during the park closure for COVID-19. The individuals were all aboard one vessel and had a dog that was not leashed on the island. The operator of the vessel was cited accordingly and educated about the status of the park being closed.

Officers Brodbeck and Partelow worked to enforce saltwater fisheries throughout the week. They found illegal bonefish, numerous ornamental fish, and several snapper.

Their efforts also included several fishing license violations and a trespass. All subjects were cited accordingly.

Officer Brodbeck was on vessel patrol near Peanut Island when a PWC was observed operating in a reckless manner. A vessel stop was initiated, and the operator displayed signs of impairment. Seated field sobriety tasks were completed, and the operator was arrested for BUI. The operator was cited and warned appropriately.

Investigator Patterson and Officer Brodbeck were on patrol near Peanut Island when a vessel was observed with its navigation lights improperly displayed. A stop was initiated to address the violation and the operator as well as the two other occupants appeared to be heavily intoxicated. Seated field sobriety tasks were conducted, and the operator was arrested for BUI and transported to the Palm Beach County Jail.

## MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

### PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officers Schroer and Ames responded to a report of a large green sea turtle stuck in sea grape bushes. With assistance from the Loggerhead Marine Life Center, the Riviera Beach Police Department and Riviera Beach Fire Rescue the over 200-pound turtle was extricated from the bushes and released unharmed on the beach.

## **SOUTH REGION B**

### CASES

#### MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Port Investigations team conducted inspections at several cargo airlines and located multiple companies actively importing and selling seafood in Florida without a wholesale dealer licenses. Each company was contacted and notified, resulting in six new companies obtaining licenses.

#### MONROE COUNTY

Officer Tafoya was on water patrol in the area of White Marlin Beach when he noticed a vessel with what appeared to be stone crab traps on board. A vessel stop was conducted, and the captain said he was looking for ghost traps and that he was a commercial crabber. The traps on board the vessel did not belong to him, and a closer inspection revealed that one of the traps belonged to another commercial crabber in the Islamorada area. The other three traps were illegible. Officer Tafoya read him the Miranda warning and asked him several more questions. The captain was arrested and booked into Plantation Key Detention Center on a felony charge for trap molesting.

## COLLIER COUNTY

The offshore patrol crew were on board the CT RANDALL and patrolled for almost 240 nautical miles over a two-day period. Their efforts were focused on the shrimping fleet and Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) near the Dry Tortugas. The officers conducted inspections on seven shrimping vessels. During one of the stops, officers found Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDS) to have multiple violations, including improper measurements and improper angles. The violations were documented and will be forwarded to a NOAA Enforcement Officer for appropriate action.

Officers Polly and Arbogast were on water patrol when they observed a vessel violating an idle speed zone on the Marco River. A vessel stop was initiated to address the violation and to conduct a boating safety inspection. During the stop, the vessel operator displayed indicators of impairment. Officer Arbogast administered standardized seated field sobriety tasks and the operator was arrested for boating under the influence (BUI) and was booked into the Naples Jail Center.

Officers Knutson and Araujo conducted a fisheries inspection on a commercial stone crab vessel and located five stone crab traps that did not belong to the commercial captain. The officers also located stone crab tags, not issued to the captain. The captain was arrested and charged with five counts of trap molestation. During the vessel stop, the captain stated that he had many more traps at his residence. With assistance from Investigator Carroll and Lieutenant Shea, a search warrant was granted to search the captain's property for other stone crab fishermen's gear. With the help of FWC's Special Operations Group, the search warrant was served and found 45 additional traps which were seized as evidence. There were also 105 miscellaneous trap tags found on the property belonging to other stone crab fishermen. Further investigations established that the captain had 500-800 stone crab traps remaining in the water. Officer Knutson arranged for two search and recovery teams, along with contracted stone crab fishermen, to pull and inspect traps that remained in the water. The officers located 43 traps to either be owned by other fisherman or have other marking or tag violations. Of the 43 traps seized, four owners wanted to pursue charges for seven counts of trap molestation, with an additional 18 charges for traps with no tags, expired tags, no degradable panel or no permanent markings. The additional charges are being filed with the court system.

Officer Conroy was on land patrol when she observed three males fishing. As she exited her vehicle to conduct a resource inspection, one subject removed a fish from a cooler and threw it in his net. Officer Conroy directed him to stop as he ran toward the water. The inspection of the net revealed a tarpon. He had no tarpon tags and was cited accordingly.

FWC received a report from the Marco Island Police Beach Patrol units that they had encountered construction activity on Resident's Beach in Marco Island during turtle nesting season. Officer Plussa responded and determined three individuals were in violation of state law. All three individuals were criminally cited for take via harassment

of sea turtle species nests and engaging in coastal construction activities without a state permit.

## DIRECTED CONSERVATION PATROL

### COLLIER COUNTY

FWC received a report of a reckless Personal Watercraft (PWC) operating at high speeds and dangerously close to the swim zone at Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park. Officer Plussa was conducting a focused patrol in the area to address similar reported issues. The PWC was located and it was discovered that the operator did not possess a boating safety identification card required to operate the PWC. There were three registration violations also associated with the PWC. The operator was cited for the boating safety violation and warned for the registration matters.

## MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

### COLLIER COUNTY

FWC received a report of a sea turtle nesting on the beach with bystanders nearby. Officer Plussa along with a sea turtle biologist responded to the scene. The officer and biologist ensured the crowd they could observe the nesting behavior from a safe distance without disturbing the turtle.

Officer Rubenstein responded to a report about an alligator that had become stuck in an abandoned pool at a residence. The homeowner was afraid for her small children and pets. Officer Rubenstein captured and relocated the alligator.