

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



Patrol, Protect, Preserve

July 24, 2020 through July 30, 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 Hellett and Gore were dispatched to a complaint of a subject harvesting an oversize redfish in Saint Andrews State Park. Upon their arrival they observed several subjects fishing with the suspect. The officers waited till the suspect left the fishing area and returned to his vehicle. They conducted an inspection and found half of a very large redfish. The suspect claimed this vehicle was his. However, further investigation revealed a vehicle parked a short distance away was his vehicle. Inside were more fish and saltwater products. The officers found whole stone crab possessed in closed season and egg bearing blue crabs and over size red drum measuring approximately 40 inches. While citing the individual for these violations, the two other subjects returned to the vehicle. When they saw the officers one subject fled a short distance and attempted to hide a bucket. The officers located the subject and bucket containing the remaining portion of the redfish. The officers cited this subject for the additional resource violations, interference with FWC officers in the performance of their duties and arrested him for two felony warrants out of Texas.

ESCAMBIA COUNTY

Officers in Escambia County created a detail focused on keeping the waterways safe by taking impaired operators off the water. Five individuals were arrested for boating under the influence of drugs or alcohol over a two-day period.

GULF COUNTY

Senior Officer Webb, Officer Specialist Lipford, and Lieutenant Guy responded to a dolphin in distress off Mexico Beach. The dolphin had sustained serious injury from a shark attack and was too weak to swim on its own. The officers waited for Gulf World rehabilitators to arrive and then safely carried the animal up to the designated vehicle for transport.

Officer Gerber and Officer Specialist Lipford received information about two individuals in the water pulling a large net off the beach. They arrived on scene and found the two individuals actively fishing a seine net. An inspection of the net found it to be larger than 500 sq. ft. The officers seized the net and the individuals were cited accordingly.

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Officers McVaney and Brown were on water patrol when they observed a vessel on plane in the Destin Harbor. A vessel stop was conducted, and a resource inspection revealed an undersized red snapper. One of the other occupants admitted to catching and keeping the undersized red snapper. The operator was issued a citation for no saltwater fishing license and the occupant was issued a citation for possession of undersize red snapper.

Officers Hahr and Brown were on water patrol conducting resource inspections in the Pitts River. An inspection was conducted on a vessel that was actively putting out bush hooks. They discovered a bream being used as bait on one of the hooks that had been set. The individual was issued a notice to appear citation.

Officers Corbin and Hahr were patrolling in Destin Harbor when they observed a vessel make an abrupt maneuver in the no-wake zone. Upon conducting a vessel stop and talking with the operator of the vessel, several signs of impairment were observed. Field sobriety tasks were utilized, and the operator was arrested for boating under the influence.

WALTON COUNTY

Officers Tison and Parrish were on water patrol on the Choctawhatchee River when they observed a vessel operating without navigational lights. A vessel stop was conducted to address the violation and revealed the occupants were setting bush hooks and had live gamefish (bream) in a live well that were being used for bait. An inspection of some of the baited bush hooks confirmed they were using gamefish as bait and the bush hooks were not marked as required. One of the subjects was cited for using gamefish as bait on bush hooks, issued a warning for not having the bush hooks marked, and for boating safety violations.

WAKULLA COUNTY

Officer C. Mallow and Lieutenant Olson responded to an accident with injuries at the St. Marks Fort Boat Ramp. Both officers arrived and identified the vessels and operators. The injured party was turned over to Wakulla EMS. The operator at fault had looked down to pick up an object. When he looked up a vessel was at full stop in front of him. He hit the vessel on the starboard rear side and knocked both occupants to the deck of the vessel causing injury to one. The operator did not maintain a proper lookout and was cited for careless operation.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

ST. JOHN'S COUNTY

Officer Specialist Thomas set up surveillance on a local fisherman who had been violating the red snapper laws. He located the fisherman's vehicle and trailer at a local boat ramp two days after the last day of the federal season and waited for him to return along with K-9 Officer Specialist North, and Officer Dodd. When the fisherman and three fishing companions returned to the boat ramp, the officers conducted a marine resource inspection. The inspection found four red snapper, each under 20 inches in length. Each fisherman claimed a fish and was issued a notice to appear citation.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

Officer Lejarzar received information about a man who had an illegally taken alligator in his refrigerator. When Officer Lejarzar arrived at the subject's house, he told Officer Lejarzar that he did not lawfully harvest the alligator and had found it on a roadway. Officer Lejarzar retrieved several alligator parts from the subject's freezer and issued the appropriate citation.

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

Officer Rorer was on patrol in Hillsborough County when she observed several individuals cast netting in a freshwater canal. Officer Rorer contacted Officers Pettifer and Caldwell, who were also patrolling in the area, to help watch from concealed locations. While walking back to the parking area, one of the subjects noticed the officers and attempted to ditch the bucket he was carrying. Upon inspection of the bucket, the subjects were in possession three largemouth bass and ten panfish. The subjects were cited accordingly.

Officer McCormack observed two males packing up their cooler after fishing from the rocks at the base of the Courtney Campbell Causeway Bridge in Tampa Bay. A resource inspection found a twenty-inch snook and two undersized mangrove snapper. The appropriate warnings and citations were issued.

LEE COUNTY

Officers Price and Johnson were on water patrol when they saw a vessel running on a plane in a slow-speed manatee zone. The officers stopped the vessel to address the violation and the operator was exhibiting signs of impairment. The officers conducted sobriety exercises and arrested the man for boating under the influence and transported him to the Lee County Jail. The appropriate citations were issued.

MANATEE COUNTY

Officers Dalton and Johnston were conducting resource inspections and encountered a subject in possession of three undersized mangrove snapper. The mangrove snapper was seized, and the fisherman was issued a notice to appear.

Officers Dalton and Johnston were conducting resource inspections and encountered a subject in possession of stone crab claws and a whole stone crab. The whole stone crab and claws were seized, and the fisherman was issued a notice to appear.

Officer Hardgrove was patrolling the Skyway Fishing Pier when he observed a fisherman and his young son fishing from the pier. The fisherman informed the officer they had caught and kept three mangrove snapper, but a resource inspection revealed nine mangrove snapper – six of which were undersized. The undersized mangrove snapper were seized, and the fisherman was issued a notice to appear.

Officers Gonzales and Johnston stopped a vessel for violation of a slow speed zone. During the stop, the officers conducted a boating safety inspection and observed numerous empty alcoholic beverage containers and their cardboard cases. The operator exhibited signs of impairment and Seated Field Sobriety Tasks were utilized. The operator was arrested, transported to and booked into the Manatee County Jail for boating under the influence.

PASCO COUNTY

Senior Officer Pulaski was patrolling the waters of the Pithlachascotee River/Gulf of Mexico, conducting fishery/boating safety inspections in support of the last day of the scallop season. He observed a person operating a personal watercraft violate the idle speed zone and stopped the vessel to address the violation and conduct a boating safety inspection. The operator showed signs of impairment and was asked to perform Seated Field Sobriety Tasks. The operator was arrested for boating under the influence.

PINELLAS COUNTY

Officer Burks was patrolling Honeymoon Island State Park when he was approached by a concerned citizen who informed him of two dogs locked in a car for approximately thirty minutes. Officer Burks responded to the vehicle, which was not running and found the two dogs locked in with the windows cracked. Officer Burks was able to gain access to the vehicle with the help of a good Samaritan and checked on the dogs. Both were hot to the touch, panting heavily and actively trying to exit the vehicle. Officer Burks removed the dogs from the vehicle, gave them water to drink and cooled them with a water hose at the wash down station. The dogs were kept in the air conditioning of Officer Burks' patrol truck to keep them cool. The vehicle owners didn't return for approximately an hour after they left their car which could have been proven fatal for the dogs if action had not been taken to intervene. Officer Burks kept possession of the dogs until Pinellas County Sheriff Office (PCSO) arrived on-scene. County ordinance animal cruelty charges were referred to PCSO.

Lieutenant Bibeau observed two individuals wading over a grass flat collecting shellfish. Lieutenant Bibeau conducted a fisheries inspection and found one of the individuals in possession of sixty-two bay scallops while the other individual possessed fifty-nine bay scallops. Lieutenant Bibeau wrote the individuals a misdemeanor citation for harvesting bay scallops in a closed area.

Lieutenant Bibeau observed two individuals collecting shellfish. An inspection revealed the individuals in possession of 230 bay scallops. Lieutenant Bibeau wrote the individuals a misdemeanor citation for harvesting bay scallops in a closed area.

Officer Conrad observed an individual gathering items near a sandbar at the Skyway Rest Area Beach. A resource inspection found the subject in possession of ninety-one bay scallops. Pinellas county is closed to the harvest of scallops. The individual was cited accordingly.

SARASOTA COUNTY

Officer Chesney was fueling his patrol vessel when he observed a PWC being operated recklessly in a manatee zone near Snake Island. Officer Chesney stopped the PWC to address the violation and observed several signs indicating possible impairment. Seated Field Sobriety Tasks were utilized, and the operator was arrested and booked into the Sarasota County Jail for boating under the influence.

Officer Hardgrove observed a subject surface with a speared undersized red grouper and conducted a resource inspection of two fishermen. The officer found the two subjects in possession of nineteen undersized mangrove snapper, one undersized lane snapper, one whole stone crab bearing eggs and one undersized red grouper. The fish and stone crab were seized, and the two subjects were issued a notice to appear for the violations.

SOUTH REGION A

CASES

MARTIN COUNTY

Officer Hudson was patrolling at Sandspruit Boat Ramp when he observed a subject run their boat onto the concrete at the ramp and was unable to dock correctly. The officer initiated a vessel stop and the operator appeared impaired. Field sobriety tasks were utilized, and the operator was arrested and booked into the Martin County Jail for boating under the influence.

Officer Brevik was conducting state water patrol in the area of the St. Lucie River and Ten Cent Bridge when he observed a vessel go on plane within the slow speed zone. Officer Brevik and Investigator Carroll performed a stop on the vessel and the operator appeared impaired. The operator was arrested for boating under the influence while having occupants under the age of 18 on board and booked into the Martin County Jail.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Lieutenant Hankinson was patrolling on US-1 in Jupiter when he observed a construction vehicle with an unsecured load of waste materials. Construction debris from the trailer was falling onto the road creating a traffic hazard. Lieutenant Hankinson conducted a vehicle stop and discovered the operator was a classified habitual traffic violator with a revoked driver license. The operator was taken into custody and booked into Palm Beach County Jail.

Officers Rea and Brodbeck were on marked vessel patrol near Palm Beach Inlet when two people were observed actively fishing from shore on the north end of Palm Beach Island. The officers approached and initiated a license and resource inspection. The inspection revealed a large snook cut into three pieces and four undersize snapper. Officer Brodbeck located a large snatch hook used to harvest the snook. One fisherman claimed responsibility and was issued citations and warnings accordingly. The fish were photographed and seized for evidence.

Officers Stoker and Brodbeck observed a PWC violating the slow speed zone surrounding Peanut Island. The operator was observed with no personal floatation device, which is required of all occupants on a PWC. The vessel also did not have registration numbers displayed on both sides of the hull. A vessel stop was initiated to address the violations and the operator displayed numerous indicators of impairment. Officer Brodbeck conducted seated field sobriety tasks and the operator was arrested for boating under the influence and booked into the Palm Beach County Jail.

SOUTH REGION B

CASES

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Officers T. Stanton and Bruder were on patrol in the area of Virginia Key when they observed a swimmer diving offshore over a sunken barge without a dive flag. Upon conducting an inspection, officers discovered seven lobsters with punctures on the underside of the tail. The harvester did not have a pair of gloves, a tickle stick, a net or any type of measuring device. When asked how the lobsters were harvested, he said that he used an antenna. A diver located an antenna with a hook attached to it in the same area that the subject was diving. The subject did not have a saltwater fishing license or a lobster permit and was cited accordingly.

COLLIER COUNTY

Officer Conroy observed a vessel violating a manatee slow speed zone and conducted a stop to address the violation. The operator exhibited signs of impairment and Seated Field Sobriety Tests were utilized. The operator was arrested for boating under the influence and Officer Specialist Kleis transported the subject to the Collier County Jail.

Officers Curbelo, Kleis, and Lieutenant Balfour were conducting traffic and speed enforcement in the Panther Zone at the entrance to Seminole State Park. Officer Curbelo stopped a vehicle for a traffic violation and the operator appeared impaired. Field sobriety tests were conducted, and a search of the vehicle revealed a bag of marijuana. The operator was arrested for driving under the influence and possession of marijuana, less than 20 grams. The subject was booked into the Collier County Jail and the marijuana was seized as evidence.

While on water patrol in Wiggins Pass near Delnor Wiggins Pass State Park, Officer Plussa observed two PWCs on full plane in an idle speed, no wake manatee zone. The officer stopped both operators for the speed violation. They were cited for not having a boating safety card and the wake zone violation.

While conducting overnight water patrol at Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park, Officer Plussa observed an unlit vessel docking at the park boat ramp after park closing time. Officer Plussa stopped the vessel to address the navigation lights violation. The operator was cited for unlit vessel operation and for children aboard the vessel not wearing life jackets.

During a vessel inspection at the CR-951 boat ramp, Officer Specialist Plussa observed a PWC operator driving carelessly in proximity of other vessels while violating the idle speed zone. The subject was stopped and cited for careless operation, a personal flotation device violation, and violating a no wake zone. Warnings were issued for registration, safety equipment, and navigation rule violations.

Officer Neal and Officer Specialist Plussa were on water patrol at Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park when they observed a vessel with an expired registration. A subsequent inspection revealed multiple safety and registration violations. There were juveniles aboard the vessel in possession of alcohol. The operator and the juveniles were cited accordingly.

While on water patrol in the area of Delnor Wiggins Pass State Park, Officer Plussa observed two PWCs on full plane in an idle speed, no wake manatee zone. The officer stopped both operators to address the violation. Both were cited for not having boating safety cards and the wake zone speed violations.

MONROE COUNTY

Officers Dube and Pestka were patrolling Bayside of Islamorada when they stopped a vessel. A resource inspection revealed 11 undersized lobster in the live-well. Officer Dube cited the operator accordingly and returned the live lobsters back to the water.

Officers Hoppe and Thompson were heading north bound near Snake Creek when they observed an unnumbered, unregistered, green john boat. As they attempted to stop the vessel the operator put it in reverse nearly striking the patrol vessel. After observing multiple signs of impairment, seated field sobriety tests were utilized. The operator was arrested for BUI, possession of a concealed firearm without a license, and was booked into the Monroe County Jail.

Investigator Mattson received information that renters of Landings of Largo in the Upper Keys had large specimens of staghorn coral drying on their balcony. Investigator Mattson responded to the location and Officer Swenson arrived to assist. A subject from North Carolina was in possession of the coral. Lieutenant Peters of the Coral Trafficking Task Force (CTF) was contacted. The task force is a partnership between FWC and the Florida International University (FIU). Photographs of the specimens were submitted to the CTF and positively identified as *Acropora Cervicornis* (staghorn coral). This species is a protected coral which is unlawful to possess. The subject was issued a notice to appear and the coral was seized for genetic testing.

Officers Hoppe and Thompson received a call from USCG Station Islamorada reference a possible impaired boater. They arrived on scene and noticed the vessel operator showing signs of impairment. After seated field sobriety tests were performed, the operator was arrested for BUI and transported to the Monroe County Jail.

Investigators Mattson and Mobley were on unmarked water patrol on in the area of the Channel 2 Bridge, Oceanside. They observed a diver surface and conducted a resource inspection which revealed fourteen undersize spiny lobster. The subject was also over the bag limit of six lobster per person per day. The diver did not measure any of the lobster in the water and did not have a measuring gauge in the water while diving. The subject was cited accordingly. Photos were taken and the lobster were returned to the water.

Investigators Mattson and Mobley were patrolling the area of Long Key bridge on the Bayside and observed two divers' surface at their boat. A fisheries inspection revealed seven spiny lobster in one bag and eleven in another. This was over the bag limit of six spiny lobster per person per day. Both men were cited accordingly.

Officers Hoppe and Thompson conducted a resource inspection on a vessel with seven occupants. The officers discovered five undersized lobster and everyone on the vessel admitted to catching the lobster. All occupants were cited accordingly. One of the suspects had a history of failing to appear to criminal court and was placed under arrest.

Officers Hoppe and Thompson received a call from USCG Islamorada stating they had stopped a vessel with eleven wrung lobster tails. Officers Thompson and Hoppe arrived on scene and all five occupants of the vessel admitted to catching lobster and were cited accordingly.

WILDLIFE RESPONSE

COLLIER COUNTY

FWC received a report of a bear disturbing multiple trash cans in a neighborhood in North Naples. Officer Plussa responded to the scene and applied aversion techniques that directed the bear back into the woods behind the homes. The officer provided the caller and her neighbors bear information pamphlets.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

MONROE COUNTY

Officers Piekenbrock and Rubenstein were patrolling the area of Ohio Channel Bridge. While looking for divers harvesting lobster in the area, they observed a diver in distress. They were able to get the diver onto their patrol vessel and back to shore safely.