

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



Patrol, Protect, Preserve

July 31, 2020 through August 6, 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

Officer Alsobrooks was patrolling St. Andrews State Park and observed a vessel returning to the park boat basin. He conducted a boating safety and resource inspection and found three out of season red snapper and one undersized gag grouper. The captain was cited and warned accordingly.

Officers Hellett and Gore were dispatched to a complaint of a subject harvesting an oversized redfish in Saint Andrews State Park. Upon their arrival they observed several fishermen with the subject and waited for him to leave the fishing area and returned to his vehicle. They conducted a resource inspection and found half of a very large redfish. The subject claimed the vehicle was his, but further investigation revealed another vehicle parked a short distance away was the suspects' vehicle. Inside this vehicle were more fish and saltwater products which included a whole stone crab possessed in closed season, egg bearing blue crab, and oversized red drum. 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 individual for the additional resource violations, interference with Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) Officers in the performance of their duties and arrested him for two felony warrants out of Texas.

ESCAMBIA COUNTY

Officer Cushing observed two fishermen returning to a vehicle near the Pensacola Pass. Officer Cushing contacted the fishermen and conducted a resource inspection which found two redfish in the cooler. One of the subjects admitted to catching both fish. The appropriate action was taken for the violations.

Officers Ramos and Bower were on vessel patrol near the Pensacola Pass and observed a boat kicking up a “rooster tail” as it departed the beach. A safety inspection was performed, and the operator showed multiple signs of impairment during the inspection. Standardized Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST) were administered and the operator was arrested for Boating Under the Influence (BUI) and booked into the county jail.

Officers Ramos and Bower were on patrol and observed a vessel violating an Idle speed zone at night. The operator failed to pay attention to directions and continuously adjusted steering and throttle controls on his boat even though the officers instructed him otherwise. During the safety inspection, the operator showed signs of impairment and was asked to complete Standardized Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST). The operator was arrested for BUI and booked into the county jail.

Officer Allgood and Lieutenant Lambert were on vessel patrol in the Ft. McRee area when they noticed a vessel that was leaving the area nearly collide with other vessels. The vessel was stopped for a safety inspection and the operator showed several signs of impairment. The operator agreed to complete Standard Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST), was arrested for boating under the influence and transported to the Escambia County Jail.

GULF COUNTY

Senior Officer M. Webb, Officer Specialist J. Lipford, and Lieutenant M. Guy responded to a dolphin in distress off Mexico Beach. The dolphin had sustained serious injury from shark attack and was too weak to swim on its own. The officers waited for Gulf World rehabbers 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. Upon inspection of the net, it was determined to be larger than 500 square feet. The officers seized the net and issued citations to the individuals.

SANTA ROSA COUNTY

Officer Lugg observed a small stationary vessel within East Bay during unfavorable sea conditions. Officer Lugg observed the vessel molest a marked commercial blue crab trap line and travel to a marked and clearly posted commercial oyster lease and molest

an oyster cage within the posted lease. After the vessel maneuvered out of sight, Officer Lugg attempted to locate the vessel and after canvassing several potential locations, a vehicle and trailer were located that matched the vessel. Officer Lugg contacted Officer Wilkenson to assist in the investigation. Information was received from multiple nearby sources that the individuals who launched from the boat ramp matched the suspects observed within the bay. Contact was made with the vessel upon its arrival and a marine fisheries inspection was performed. Twenty-one undersized red drum (19 over the bag limit, 13 over the allotted vessel limit, seven not whole condition), one undersized spotted seatrout (not whole condition), and one stone crab (whole body, out of season) was located. Both individuals were placed under arrest and transported to the Santa Rosa County Jail.

WAKULLA COUNTY

K-9 Officer Gore and K-9 Kane responded to a call from the Wakulla County Sheriff Office (WCSO). WCSO requested the K-9 team conduct an article search for a weapon that had been used in a violent crime and discarded in a wooded area five days earlier. Officer Gore deployed K-9 Kane in the area of the crime and within a short time, he located a short barrel rifle which had been used in the crime. The scene was turned over to WCSO for processing.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

CASES

ALACHUA COUNTY

Officer Specialist's Troiano and Reith were on water patrol on Orange Lake when they observed an individual fishing. While conducting a records check, they discovered the subject's fishing license had been revoked and the subject had an active warrant out of Alachua County. The subject was arrested and transported to Alachua County Jail.

Senior Officer Stanley received information regarding an individual shooting a hawk in north Alachua County. Officer Stanley arrived at the location and located feathers and a shotgun wadding. Officer Stanley was able to locate the individual who admitted killing a red-tailed hawk. Charges were filed with the State Attorney's Office.

COLUMBIA COUNTY

Senior Officer Johnston was on patrol working a targeted enforcement detail on Kirby Pit which is closed to the public. Officer Johnston was in a concealed location when he observed two persons in a vehicle driving through the property. Officer Johnston stopped the vehicle to address the trespassing violation and observed fishing equipment. Further investigation revealed seven largemouth black bass. One of the

occupants admitted to catching the fish and was issued notices to appear. Both subjects were issued written warnings for trespassing.

CITRUS COUNTY

Officers Hughes and Ulrich responded to a missing person who was in a canoe near Ozello. The missing person was on the phone with his son when a severe storm began to blow the canoe out toward the gulf. The son reported the incident to law enforcement, who launched a search and rescue operation. Citrus County Sheriff's Office Aviation unit located the missing individual and directed Officers Ulrich and Hughes to him by vessel. The man refused medical attention and was transported to a nearby ramp. Once at the ramp, he was found in possession of two undersized red drum and three undersize spotted seatrout. The individual was cited appropriately and received several written warnings.

Officer Reid organized a targeted enforcement detail to protect people participating in scallop season from reckless boat operators. Boaters are required to operate at idle speed within 100 yards of a dive flag as snorkelers/divers can be 100 yards from their posted dive flag. Officers Reid, Ulrich, VanNess, Pietroburgo, Crane, Hughes, Muina, Pilot Fields, Investigator Thomason, and Lieutenants Jones and Griffis participated. Officers collectively documented 76 written warnings, 21 uniform boating citations (infractions) and six misdemeanor reckless operation of a vessel cases.

DUVAL COUNTY

While on a federal fisheries patrol, Officers Geib, Read and Lieutenant Givens stopped a fishing vessel actively fishing approximately nine miles east of Jacksonville. Officer Geib boarded the fishing boat and upon inspection found the four occupants in possession of red snapper, undersize black sea bass and sea bass with heads and fins not intact that was being used for bait. The possession of red snapper in the federal waters of the South Atlantic is prohibited and black sea bass must be maintained with heads and fins intact through landing. A federal citation was issued for the three violations and the case will be forwarded to NOAA for prosecution.

LAFAYETTE COUNTY

Officer Luke Davenport was conducting a vessel safety inspection on the Suwannee River. During the inspection, the operator of the vessel displayed signs of being impaired or under the influence of alcoholic beverages. Officer Davenport, with assistance from Officer Ransom, conducted sobriety exercises and the operator was arrested and transported to the Lafayette County Jail for Boating Under the Influence.

Officer Davenport was on water patrol at the confluence of the Suwannee and Santa Fe Rivers when he stopped a vessel for a boating safety inspection. During the stop, Officer Davenport saw signs of impairment and conducted a BUI investigation. The subject was arrested for BUI and transported to the Lafayette County Jail.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

ST. JOHN'S COUNTY

Officer Lawshe observed an individual using a cast net on a water management pond. He conducted a resource inspection and found the fishermen in possession of two black bass. The subject was cited accordingly.

BREVARD COUNTY

Officer Rasey received information that four men were taking undersized fish along a shoreline. Officer Rasey arrived at the location and conducted surveillance of the individuals. After positively identifying the fishermen, Officer Rasey approached and conducted a resource inspection. The men were in possession of several undersized spotted seatrout and did not possess fishing licenses. A criminal citation was issued for the seatrout and warnings for no fishing license.

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

Officers Eller and Hayes were patrolling and conducting resource inspections on vessels during the Mini Lobster Season. Officers Eller and Hayes conducted a resource inspection of a harvester's lobster and found them in possession of undersized Florida spiny lobster. The harvesters were cited accordingly.

K-9 Officer Simpson and Officer Mock were on water patrol for Mini Lobster Season at Sebastian Inlet. They conducted a resource inspection utilizing K-9 Moose on a vessel and discovered an egg-bearing lobster on board. The fisherman was issued a notice to appear for the violation.

Officers Delano and Hayes were offshore of Wabasso Beach conducting fishery inspections. A vessel stop was conducted on a subject actively diving and found the harvester in possession of undersized spiny lobster. A notice to appear was issued to the subject for the violation.

Captain Bonds and Officer Beck observed a subject actively diving and targeting spiny lobster in Sebastian Inlet State Park. Officer Beck conducted an inspection and documented the criminal violation accordingly.

Officer Eller and Officer Hayes conducted a resource inspection on a vessel that had been participating in offshore fishing. The inspection revealed three large bags full of filleted fish. The captain admitted to illegally filleting regulated species of fish offshore and was cited accordingly.

Officers Eller and Hayes noticed a vessel operating carelessly and violating a manatee zone. They activated their emergency lights and attempted to conduct a vessel stop. As they got close to the vessel, they observed occupants throwing fish overboard. The officers were able to recover one of the fish before it sank. An inspection of the fish revealed it was an undersized triggerfish and cold to the touch. The captain and crew were cited accordingly.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

Officers Delano and Matthews were notified of a diver who was reportedly missing for over an hour. Multiple vessels converged to the scene as well as aviation assets. Officers Delano and Matthews located the missing diver floating approximately one mile from their vessel's location. The diver was recovered and returned to their vessel.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

LEE COUNTY

FWC officers in Lee and Charlotte counties received information about an overturned vessel in Bokeelia, with people in the water late at night. The officers were able to identify the subjects and determined they were recovered by a tow company. Both occupants were unharmed; however, the vessel was damaged and submerged upside-down. A boating accident investigation is being completed and follow-up will be done to ensure the vessel is recovered so it does not become derelict.

MANATEE COUNTY

Officer Hardgrove observed three subjects harvesting and possessing oysters from a prohibited area. An inspection revealed two fishermen had harvested and were in possession of oysters. The oysters were seized and two of the subjects were issued notices to appear. All three men were issued a written warning for no fishing license, possession of undersized oysters and failure to cull oysters.

Officer Hardgrove conducted a resource inspection that found a fisherman in possession of an undersized snook and black drum. The fisherman was issued a notice to appear and a written warning for possession of snook out-of-season, no fishing license and no snook stamp.

PINELLAS COUNTY

Lieutenant Bibeau observed eight individuals who appeared to be harvesting shellfish in a prohibited area. A fisheries inspection found the individuals in possession of hundreds of bay scallops. Lieutenant Bibeau cited the individuals accordingly and the scallops were returned to the water alive.

Officer Conrad observed two groups of individuals gathering items at a sandbar near the Skyway Rest Area Beach. A resource inspection on both groups found each to be in possession of bay scallops in a closed zone. Appropriate citations and warnings were issued.

Lieutenant Bibeau observed three individuals gathering shellfish while wading over a grass flat. A fisheries inspection found the individuals in possession of a large amount of bay scallops harvested from a closed area. Appropriate citations were issued, and the scallops were returned to the water alive.

POLK COUNTY

Officer Lebreton and Jackson were working a detail in Lake Marion Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) targeting illegal entry and operation of ATV's. Officer Lebreton observed a subject enter the WMA on a dirt bike through a cut in the fence. Officer Lebreton contacted the subject to address the violation. The subject was issued a notice to appear.

SARASOTA COUNTY

Officer Hardgrove and Officer Chesney observed a personal watercraft being operated by a female (with two young children onboard) on a plane in a manatee zone. At some point the operator of the PWC boarded a vessel that was following the PWC. A vessel stop was conducted which revealed the PWC was being operated by a person under fourteen years of age. The original operator of the PWC was issued a notice to appear for knowingly allowing her child under fourteen years of age to operate a PWC. One boating citation for the manatee zone violation and one boating citation for no boater safety ID card were also issued.

SOUTH REGION A

CASES

BROWARD COUNTY

Officers Harris and Seldomridge were on land patrol when they received a call from FWC Dispatch. A deputy with Broward Sheriff's Office was on the beach in Lauderdale-by-the-Sea with a subject in possession of spiny lobster out of season. The officers responded to the location of the deputy and determined that the subject had harvested the lobster a week before mini season opened. The subject received a criminal notice to

appear for harvesting spiny lobster out of season. The lobster was returned to the water alive.

Lieutenant Brock was on water patrol during lobster mini season conducting saltwater fisheries inspections. During his inspections he found harvested undersized and egg bearing spiny lobster. The subjects received a criminal notice to appear and the lobster were returned to the water alive.

MARTIN COUNTY

Officer Brevik was conducting vessel patrol, in the area of the Manatee Pocket, when he observed several vessels returning from harvesting lobster. Upon inspection of these vessels, Officer Brevik found undersize and egg bearing lobster. The subjects were cited accordingly.

Officer Hudson observed a vessel returning from diving at night on the opening of mini season. A fisheries inspection found the subject in possession of an egg bearing lobster. The subject was cited accordingly.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officers Partelow and Brodbeck were on marked vessel patrol during lobster mini season. They checked vessels engaged in harvesting lobster and came across several violations which included undersize/egg bearing lobster and wrung tails. They also encountered lobster hidden on vessels, illegally filleted fish, and live hard coral. During their patrols they also enforced dive flag violations. All violations were addressed accordingly.

Officer Brodbeck was on patrol late at night in Juno Beach when a vehicle was observed on northbound US 1 driving at approximately 10 miles per hour and failing to maintain a lane, frequently driving into the grass shoulder. Suspecting possible impairment, Officer Brodbeck activated the lights and sirens of the patrol vehicle. The subject vehicle refused to comply, continuing northbound. Officer Brodbeck called for assistance from Jupiter PD, who arrived and successfully boxed the vehicle in and forced it to stop. The driver was removed from the vehicle and appeared to be suffering from a medical issue. Palm Beach County Fire Rescue arrived and transported the driver to Jupiter Medical Center for evaluation.

MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Officer Schroer found many sea turtle hatchlings mixed with seaweed blown onto Juno Beach after Hurricane Isaiiah. With assistance from good Samaritans and the Loggerhead Marine Life Center, the hatchlings were returned to the ocean.

SOUTH REGION B

CASES

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Port Investigations learned that a shipment of Golden Wolf Fish (*Hoplerythrinus unitaeniatus*) were arriving in Miami to consignee, Route 45 Trading Inc. The shipment was cleared by US fish & Wildlife and Customs to enter Florida. The shipment was to be delivered by vehicle to Broward Ft. Lauderdale Airport. Wolf Fish are in the family Erythrinidae and are referred to as Trahiras and are prohibited to be imported into Florida without a permit issued by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation's Executive Director. Investigators conducted a search through the FWC license and permit database to determine if a permit had been issued to Route 45 Trading Inc. to import these fish. They were unable to locate any permit being issued. Further investigation revealed that the subject who was listed on the import documentation as the importer of the fish and company was warned prior to this shipment by the broker to not import the Wolf Fish into Florida. As a result, the fish were seized.

MONROE COUNTY

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

Officers Hoppe and Thompson were heading north near Snake Creek when they observed an unnumbered, unregistered, green jon boat heading in their direction. As they attempted to stop the vessel, the operator reversed nearly striking the patrol vessel. After observing multiple signs of impairment Officer Hoppe requested the operator to perform SFSTs. The operator was arrested for BUI and for possession of a concealed firearm without a license. The operator 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, assisted by Officer Swenson, arrived and discovered a North Carolina man in possession of the coral. Investigator Mattson contacted Lieutenant Peters of the Coral Trafficking Task Force (CTF) and submitted photographs of the specimens. The specimens were positively identified as *Acropora Cervicornis* (Staghorn Coral). This species is an Endangered Species Act (ESA) protected coral which is unlawful to possess. The subject was issued a notice to appear and the coral was seized for genetic testing which will reveal the location where it was harvested.

Officers Hoppe and Thompson received a call from USCG Station Islamorada reference a possible impaired boater. When the officers arrived, the vessel operator was showing

signs of impairment. After SFSTs were performed, the operator was arrested for BUI and transported to the Monroe County Jail.

Investigators Mattson and Mobley were on unmarked water patrol in the area of the Channel 2 Bridge, Oceanside. They observed a diver surface and contacted the subject to inspect his catch. The diver possessed 14 undersize spiny lobster and was also over the bag limit of six lobster per person per day. Appropriate citations were issued, 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. They observed two divers' surface at their boat and contacted them to inspect their catch. The divers possessed seven spiny lobster in one bag and 11 spiny lobster in another. This put both men over the bag limit of six spiny lobster per person per day. Both men were cited appropriately.

Officers Hoppe and Thompson conducted a resource inspection on a vessel with seven occupants and discovered five undersized lobster. Everyone on the vessel admitted to catching the lobster and were cited accordingly. One of the subjects 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 11 wrung tails. Officers Thompson and Hoppe arrived on scene and cited the subjects accordingly.

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 retrieved the diver onto the patrol vessel and transported him back to shore safely.