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

Patrol, Protect, Preserve

September 11, 2020 through September 17, 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

OKALOOSA COUNTY

Officers Hicks and Hahr were on patrol in Destin Harbor when they observed a vessel violating the idle speed/no wake zone. The officers conducted a boating safety check and noticed several indicators of impairment from the operator. The operator performed standardized field sobriety tasks (SFST) and was arrested for boating under the influence. He later refused to provide a breath sample and was transported to the Okaloosa County Jail.

Officer Hicks and Hahr were on patrol in Destin Harbor when they observed two personal watercraft (PWC) operating on plane as they returned to the harbor in the no wake zone. The officers performed a vessel stop and began issuing both individuals citations. One of the subjects gave the officers a false name twice. He was charged with obstructing an officer and cited for the wake zone violation.

SANTA ROSA COUNTY

Officer Ramos was on patrol in the Santa Rosa Sound when he observed a vessel violating an idle speed zone. A small 18’ vessel was found to have 16 people on board and only six personal flotation devices (PFD). During the boating safety inspection Officer Ramos detected signs of impairment from the operator and administered a series of standardized field sobriety tasks (SFST). The operator was arrested for Boating Under the Influence (BUI) and transported to the county jail.
Officer Ramos was on patrol in the Santa Rosa Sound and observed two personal watercraft (PWC) operating dangerously close to one another at high speeds. He stopped the two PWC’s to conduct a safety inspection and educate the two riders about careless operation and found that neither PWC had registration documentation. While speaking with the subjects, Officer Ramos detected signs of impairment. Standardized field sobriety tasks (SFST) were performed, and one operator was arrested for BUI and transported to the county jail where she refused to submit to a breath test. She was charged with operating a vessel while normal faculties impaired and booked into the Santa Rosa County Jail.

While on patrol on Escambia River, Officer Mullins and Lieutenant Berryman located numerous illegal bush hook lines. The lines were untagged and illegally baited with a bream, a game species. Officer Mullins and Lieutenant Berryman sat on these lines for most of the night, with Officer Roberson assisting in the morning. A subject was identified and observed checking these lines. Contact was made with the subject as he positioned to pull another illegal line which had caught a flathead catfish. The subject possessed three illegally caught fish which were seized. The subject was cited for the illegal use of a game species as bait, and for untagged bush hook lines.

WAKULLA COUNTY

Officer J. Carr was on patrol in the St. Marks River when he observed a vessel operating in a reckless manner. He stopped the vessel to conduct a safety inspection. The operator showed signs of impairment. Lieutenant Olson arrived to provide backup. Officer Carr administered Standardized Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST) and the operator was arrested for BUI. The operator refused to provide a breath sample and was booked into the Wakulla County Jail.

Lieutenant Olson was on patrol in the Wakulla River when he heard a vessel revving its motor. He then saw the vessel violating the posted slow speed zone. He stopped the vessel and the operator showed signs of impairment. Lieutenant Olson administered Standardized Field Sobriety Tasks (SFST) and the operator was arrested for BUI. The operator refused to provide a breath sample and was booked into the Wakulla County Jail.

WALTON COUNTY

Officers Brooks and Graves were on patrol and stopped to check some fisherman who were fishing with cast nets. A fishery inspection revealed they were over the daily bag limit of mullet, in possession of undersized spotted seatrout, and mangrove snapper. The bag limit violation was addressed with a citation and the subjects were issued warnings for possession of the undersized trout and snapper.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION
CASES

CITRUS COUNTY

Officer Pietroburgo and LieutenantJones were on water patrol in the Crystal River area near Salt River when they observed a vessel inbound that had several fishing poles on the boat. During a fisheries inspection the officers discovered two undersized red drum. The vessel owner was issued a citation for the violation. While checking another vessel, the officers located an undersized snook. The vessel owner was issued a citation for the violation.

Officer VanNess was patrolling an area near state lands when he observed a subject harvesting saw palmetto berries. Officer VanNess approached the person and observed bags of saw palmetto berries in the back of his truck and asked for his permits to harvest the berries. The person did not have the required permit to possess or harvest the berries in his possession and was issued a citation.

Officer Crane concluded a detail involving the illegal taking of artifacts from state lands. Officer Crane discovered where persons were going onto an area of state lands for the purposes of digging artifacts. A surveillance detail resulted in two people being arrested.

Officer Browning received information regarding a freshly discarded alligator carcass on the side of the road in Inverness. After locating the carcass, the officer began canvassing the neighborhood for any suspect vehicles or vessels. Officer Browning located a residence that had a boat hooked up to a truck with heavy duty fishing rods displayed in plain view from the boat. Officer Browning knocked on the door of the residence and contacted the owner of the truck and boat. Officer Browning observed fresh blood on the bow of the vessel, hooks attached to nylon cord and a loaded revolver with one spent round. Officer Browning conducted an interview and determined that the individual harvested the alligator outside his harvest period, utilized a baited hook, a firearm and failed to attach his assigned CITES tag into the tail of the gator. Four resource citations were issued.

SENTINEL

Officers Read, Tucker and Lieutenant Givens conducted federal fisheries patrol aboard the Offshore Patrol Vessel Sentinel, specifically patrolling the North Florida Marine Protected Area. The officers observed a vessel on radar in the area closed to fishing. While coming alongside the vessel the officers saw multiple rods and reels in rod holders, baited and rigged for bottom fishing. Officers boarded the vessel and found vermilion snapper. A federal citation was issued for the violations and the case will be forwarded to NOAA for prosecution.

TAYLOR COUNTY
Officer Waychoff and Lieutenant Loyed responded to a report of a plane that crashed into the Gulf of Mexico north of Steinhatchee. A search was conducted over several days with the assistance from the Taylor County Sheriff’s Office and Dixie County Sheriff’s dive team.

CLAY COUNTY

Lieutenant Haney was on patrol at a local boat ramp when he observed three men pull up in a boat. Noticing signs of impairment, Lieutenant Haney conducted field sobriety exercises and the operator was arrested for BUI and DUI and transported to the Clay County Jail.

Lieutenant Haney responded to a call from the park manager of Mike Roess Goldhead Branch State Park regarding vandalism that occurred in several bathrooms in the park. Subjects caused over $3000 worth of damage by breaking antique toilets and fixtures and intentionally flooding the bathrooms. They also stole and tampered with locks at the park. A witness provided a description of two juveniles who were seen walking away from the area and a local citizen provided a possible residence. Both juveniles were located and interviewed and confessed to the crimes. Charges are being direct filed with the State Attorney’s Office against both juveniles.

NORTHEAST REGION

CASES

FLAGLER COUNTY

Officer Specialist Thomas and Officer Lawrence responded to a boating accident with injuries in the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW). A 20-ft center console vessel with four people on board struck a dock piling on the east side of the channel. The passengers did not suffer any injuries; however, the operator sustained a laceration to his forehead. The boat sustained crushing fiberglass damage to its port bow and was floating next to the dock when the County Deputy arrived and secured the accident scene. Officer Specialist Thomas and Officer Lawrence arrived on scene and observed signs of impairment from the operator. Following completion of the accident investigation, Officer Lawrence administered Standardized Field Sobriety Tasks (SFSTs) and the operator was transported the Flagler County Jail on misdemeanor charges of Boating Under the Influence (BUI) and Boating Under the Influence (BUI) with property damage.

VOLUSIA COUNTY

Lieutenant Edson, Officer McDonough, and K-9 Officer North responded to a landowner complaint of subjects trespassing on horticulture property. With the use of K-9 Max, both subjects were located. Investigation revealed that the subjects had entered the property directly next to the posted “NO TRESPASSING” signs and they were
harvesting saw palmetto berries without landowner permission. The subjects were arrested and charged with trespass on posted horticulture property and harvest of commercially exploited plant without landowner permission.

Officers Vanas and Fletcher were investigating a suspicious vehicle. Inside the vehicle they observed tools commonly used during the harvest of saw palmetto berries. After a search of the wooded area near the vehicle, two subjects were found harvesting saw palmetto berries. The investigation revealed one of the subjects to be in possession of methamphetamine. Both subjects were charged with harvesting regulated plants without a permit and harvesting commercially exploited plants without landowner permission. One subject was released on their own recognizance while the other subject was also charged with possession of methamphetamine and transported to the Volusia County Jail.

Officers Demeter and McDonough observed two individuals walking off the south jetty to a vehicle parked on the beach south of the inlet. An inspection of their cooler revealed three redfish with one of them being over the 27 in total length slot. Citations were issued accordingly.

Officers Demeter, Pelzel, and McDonough identified several commercial fishermen targeting finger mullet during the fall mullet run. An inspection of the fishermen commercially harvesting mullet revealed that three individuals had no commercial Saltwater Products License (SPL) or Restricted Species (RS) endorsement. All three subjects were issued citations accordingly.

SOUTHWEST REGION

CASES

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

Officer Stasko checked a boat fishing in Lemon Bay. No violations were found on that day. The next day, he and Officer Zenoniani found the same boat anchored with its outboard engine broken off and hanging by its rigging in the water in a potentially derelict condition. They asked another officer to go to the owner’s house to check on his welfare and confirmed everyone was alright. The officers coordinated with a local marina owner to allow the boat owner to recover his boat from their ramp and assisted him with securing the engine with ropes so it could be towed there and not become derelict. A self-report boating accident form was also issued for the owner to fill out.

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

Officer Conrad conducted a resource inspection on three individuals fishing at the North Skyway Fishing Pier. The group stated they had not kept any fish, however, Officer
Conrad discovered a bucket of fish beneath a seat that contained eleven undersized lane snapper, and one undersized Spanish mackerel. Appropriate citations were issued.

LEE COUNTY

Officer Parker was on patrol working the hunting check station at Fred C. Babcock/Cecil M. Webb Wildlife Management Area during the archery hunt when a subject arrived to check his deer out of the management area. An on-site FWC biologist measured the length of the main beam of the deer’s antlers at seven and one-half inches. The requirement for a buck is ten inches or three spikes. The subject was issued a citation for the undersized buck and the deer was donated to the Octagon Wildlife Sanctuary.

Officer Parker was on patrol working the hunting check station at Fred C. Babcock/Cecil M. Webb Wildlife Management Area during the archery hunt when a subject arrived at the check-in station to log in his harvest. The subject had a male fawn with clearly visible spots on its hind quarter. The subject was issued a citation for the undersized deer and it was donated to the Octagon Wildlife Sanctuary.

PINELLAS COUNTY

While on water patrol in Upper Tampa Bay, Lieutenant Van Trees stopped a vessel as it was returning to the dock and conducted a resource inspection with the operator and other individuals onboard. Lieutenant Van Trees found an out of season and undersized snook amongst the mullet. Lieutenant Van Trees educated all the occupants about the regulations for snook and cited the individual responsible for cast netting the snook.

While on water patrol near the Skyway Bridge, Lieutenant Bibeau and Lieutenant Van Trees observed subjects cast netting underneath the Skyway Relief Bridge. Lieutenant Bibeau drove the patrol boat away as if they were leaving the area, then dropped Lieutenant Van Trees off on land where the subjects couldn’t see him. Lieutenant Van Trees hid underneath the bridge as the subjects emptied their cast net, put the fish in a bucket and went back to fishing. After the anglers were done fishing, a resource inspection was conducted, and Lieutenant Van Trees found the subjects had cast-netted an undersized gag grouper and a mangrove snapper. The subject responsible for cast netting the fish was cited and educated about the size regulations for grouper and that the fish should not be harvested with a cast net.

While on land patrol, Lieutenant Bibeau observed two individuals actively wade-fishing. Lieutenant Bibeau watched the individuals and waited for them to return to the shoreline. Lieutenant Bibeau contacted the individuals as they were returning to their vehicle and found one subject in possession of a stringer that contained two out of season redfish. Lieutenant Bibeau issued the individual a misdemeanor citation for the fisheries violations and the redfish were returned to the water alive.

Officer Specialist Alvis was doing research on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Catch Shares site as well as the NOAA Vessel Monitoring
System (VMS) site and identified a suspect vessel landing without sufficient allocation of Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) shares. He called NOAA Enforcement Officer Bibler and they teamed up and met with the vessel’s captain. Several federal violations were addressed (federal warnings) on the commercial fishing vessel. The officers then inspected another commercial fishing vessel. On that boat, Officer Specialist Alvis located two zip lock bags of red snapper fillets. Further investigation revealed that the captain of the vessel had a warrant out of Pasco County for failure to address boating safety violations. State charges were filed for the fish fillets and the captain was booked into the Pinellas County Jail for the warrant.

POLK COUNTY

Officer Adams was patrolling a private orange grove near Babson Park after receiving numerous complaints of trespassing activity in the area. He observed a side-by-side vehicle as it was being driven by a juvenile with an adult passenger. Officer Adams stopped the vehicle and advised the subjects that they were trespassing. A designee of the property owner was contacted and advised of the situation. Officer Adams will be charging the adult with trespassing on property other than structure or conveyance and direct filing the information with the Polk County State Attorney’s Office.

SOUTH REGION A

CASES

GLADES COUNTY

While on vessel patrol, Lieutenant Brown and Officer Madsen observed three subjects actively participating in the alligator hunt. Once the hunt party landed their alligator, the officers conducted a resource and boating safety inspection. Two of the three subjects did not have the required alligator trapping agents license required when hunting alligators. The subjects were advised that in order to actively participate in the hunt with the permit holder, they would need the required agents license. Each subject was issued the appropriate citation.

While on patrol during alligator season, Officer Madsen and Lieutenant Brown observed a vessel in a closed area shining a spotlight in a manner commonly used to locate alligators. Officer Madsen conducted a resource inspection and discovered rods and reels with tackle commonly used in taking alligators and the subjects advised they were alligator hunting. Three subjects were cited accordingly for hunting outside of their permits harvest area.

MARTIN COUNTY

Officer Brevik was conducting state vessel patrol near Indiantown when he observed three subjects trespassing on Star Farm property and fishing with a cast net. Officer
Brevik conducted an inspection and found the subjects to not have a valid freshwater fishing license. The subjects were issued appropriate citations for no license and trespass warnings from the Martin County Sheriff’s Office.

While conducting state park patrol in Martin County, Officer Schroer and Officer Boyd were dispatched to a report of a man picking saw palmetto berries within the state park. The officers contacted an individual matching the complainant’s description and found saw palmetto berries in his backpack. Officer Schroer conducted a pat down search and found methamphetamines and synthetic narcotic. A search of the man’s vehicle revealed an unlabeled pill bottle with prescription pills inside. The subject was arrested and charged accordingly.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

While conducting vessel patrol in the Jupiter Inlet area, Officer Partelow was contacted by the Jupiter Police Marine Units requesting assistance with serving a warrant on a subject living on a sailboat. Officer Partelow was able to provide backup while Jupiter Police Department served the warrant.

Officer Brodbeck was on vessel patrol near Singer Island when a charter fishing vessel was observed returning to Sailfish Marina with a paying charter on board. The vessel had been cited twice in the past five months for not having a valid charter fishing license on board, having expired in 2017. The captain of the vessel was cited again for no charter fishing license and is subject to enhanced penalties for the violation.

Officers Spirito and Riggs were conducting vessel patrol in the area of Boynton Beach when they were dispatched to a call about a subject keeping undersized mutton snapper at the Boynton Beach Inlet. The officers located the subject and vehicle matching the description of the call and conducted surveillance for a time while the subject fished. A resource inspection was conducted and Officer Spirito located an undersized mutton snapper in the subject’s cooler. Appropriate citations were issued.

ST. LUCIE COUNTY

Officer Bingham responded to a complaint of two subjects fishing a mosquito impoundment at Bear Point Preserve and possibly being in possession of undersized snook. He observed two subjects on board a canoe, with one paddling while the other was working a cast net. An inspection of their cooler revealed several undersized snook and snapper. No fishing poles or other harvest gear was observed. The illegal fish were seized as evidence and photographed. Several fish were still alive and were released back to the water. One subject was issued four misdemeanor citations for the violations of possession of undersize snook, over the bag limit of snook, harvest by illegal method, undersize snapper.

SOUTH REGION B
CASES

MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Officer Sample received a call from U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Interdiction Agents reporting they had stopped a 47-foot sportfish vessel returning to Florida state waters from the Bahamas with three people on board. They had escorted the vessel to USCG Station Miami Beach in order to do a thorough search for illegal narcotics. During the search they located what appeared to be spiny lobster tails in the freezer inside the cabin and requested FWC assistance to conduct a resource inspection. A resource inspection revealed 35 wrung spiny lobster tails inside the freezer. In addition, Officer Sample located six undersized hogfish, one grouper not in whole condition, several snapper fillets without the skin attached, and a gallon sized plastic bag containing queen conch meat. The captain of the vessel was cited accordingly for the violations.

MAJOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANCE

MONROE COUNTY

Officers Rafter, Swensson, Rhoda, Larios and Coger assisted FWC Biologist’s and the Dolphin Research Center, Dolphin’s Plus and Aquarium Encounters with an injured manatee rescue. The manatee teams worked together to rescue the large adult female from the waterway near Taylor Creek Village in Key Largo. The manatee had monofilament line embedded in both front flippers and needed medical treatment. The manatee was transported by FWC biologists to SeaWorld in Orlando for medical treatment.