2021 Boating Officer of the Year

Senior Officer Hal Webb is a nineteen-year veteran with the FWC Division of Law Enforcement. He has been assigned to Gulf County his entire career and is a graduate of FWC Academy Class 4. A native of Panama City, Webb graduated from Florida State University with a degree in exercise science and nutrition, and from there pursued his goal to become an FWC law enforcement officer. He lives in Port Saint Joe with his eleven-year-old daughter, Clara. Off duty, he enjoys outdoor activities with his daughter.

Webb is an active member of his church where he serves his community outside of his public safety duties as a law enforcement officer. Through relationships formed with his community and peers, he has gained the respect of his community and helps with mission outreach events and mentoring programs. Senior Officer Webb has received numerous awards throughout his career, including the Defensive Tactics Award, Team of the Year (twice), NOAA Federal Marine Fisheries Officer Nominee and is an Advanced Conservation Academy Graduate.

In 2021, Webb was involved in three major boating investigations. In one case, he responded to a capsized vessel in St. Joe Bay during high winds and rough seas. The occupants of the boat had been thrown overboard. When he arrived on scene, he quickly spotted the two occupants who had managed to crawl on top of the capsized hull. Webb pulled the two men aboard his patrol boat before the two vessels collided because of the chop, and they were safely transported to land.

Webb is a contributing, consistent and valuable member of the Panama City area BUI task force which received FWC Team of The Year honors for their boating safety enforcement efforts. He is a NASBLA-certified BUI instructor who is very influential in teaching other officers detection techniques, investigation methods and proper application of seated field sobriety tests during suspected impaired operator situations. He created the annual Bay Scallop Harvest Season Operational Plan coordinating resource protection and boating safety enforcement efforts that regulate an increasing number of visitors and boaters to St. Joe Bay each year. In 2021, Webb devoted 1,339 hours to boating safety, 1,368 hours to marine fisheries, 30 hours to freshwater fisheries and 92 hours to search and rescues. He contacted 2,930 users and inspected 1,212 vessels. As a result of his tremendous work ethic, 577 warnings and 33 citations were issued.

Senior Officer Webb participated in the numerous targeted enforcement details such as BUI Task Force Operational Plan 2021, Operation “Sea Grass” and Operation “Red Drum.” He organized the four targeted enforcement details focusing on one the water resource enforcement and boating safety including the annual Bay Scallop Harvest Season, Red Snapper Recreational for Hire, Memorial Day Weekend and Operation “Closed Point.” Webb is a highly motivated, productive and positive team player who has excelled in boating safety and marine fisheries enforcement throughout his career.

2021 Boating Educator of the Year

Dick Carson has worked tirelessly to serve the students who take an America’s Boating Club (US Power Squadrons) courses. He has been out front in making sure the virtual classroom option was available as soon as NASBLA offered the opportunity. In addition, Dick has also assisted in setting up a system that allows his instructors to seamlessly send their student information to FWC for the issuance of boating safety ID card.

Although Dick lives just across the state line in Alabama, he is involved in teaching boating safety courses in Florida (as well as Alabama). His efforts have resulted in a continual opportunity for boaters to be able to get educated and to be able to comply with Florida’s boating safety education requirement. Without Dick’s work, students who wanted to take a classroom boating safety class during the pandemic may not have had the opportunity.

Over the past year, the changes we have all experienced had changed the way we go about our everyday lives. In boating education, the changes made in-person education an impossibility. In Florida, this meant classroom courses from Key West to Pensacola were cancelled. For organizations like America’s Boating Club (US Power Squadrons), instructors were trying to figure out how to teach in the new “normal”. Fortunately, NASBLA offered the opportunity in 2020 for classroom courses to be taught virtually. This meant boaters still had a choice in how they could experience their boating education.

Florida is not a small state, and the amount of boating opportunities means boating safety education plays an important role in keeping our waterways safer.
INTRODUCTION

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), driven by science-based leadership, is committed to creating a sustainable and healthy future for Florida’s fish, wildlife, water and habitat resources. The FWC serves Floridians and visitors alike in a variety of ways, most of which revolve around the mission of managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people. The Division of Law Enforcement (DLE) makes up half the agency and is the most visible presence in the public eye acting on the goal of providing healthy resources for safe, satisfied customers.

THE DIVISION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

Roles and Mission

The FWC is the only state agency in Florida tasked with the management of the state’s fish and wildlife resources. As a primary responsibility, the FWC’s Division of Law Enforcement focuses on enforcing regulations aimed at protecting and sustaining these resources both for their long-term well-being and the benefit of Florida’s residents and visitors, all the while blending in its unique and specialized public safety role. The Division’s mission is clear: “Protecting Florida’s natural resources and people through proactive and responsive law enforcement services.”

Responsibilities

The FWC Division of Law Enforcement provides protection to people enjoying Florida’s natural resources and enforces resource protection and boating safety laws. Officers patrol where other law enforcement agencies do not routinely patrol such as rural, wilderness, inshore and offshore areas. FWC officers have authority to enforce all the laws of the state and are cross deputized to enforce federal fisheries and wildlife laws.

While carrying out their broad responsibilities, FWC officers seek opportunities to educate and introduce Floridians and visitors to the wonders of Florida’s fish, wildlife, and natural resources, as well as safe boat operation and safety equipment requirements.

The Division also provides general law enforcement services as part of Florida’s statewide emergency response network. Because of their unique jurisdiction and specialized training and equipment, FWC is charged with protecting the state’s waterways and critical infrastructure during times of heightened security threat levels. As seasoned first responders, FWC officers are trained to move fast and efficiently.

Moving forward, FWC will continue to pursue and apply advances in technology to improve response to both conservation and general law enforcement incidents. When duty calls, FWC will always be among the first to respond, providing aid as needed. Until then, FWC will continue to lead the way in natural resource protection, proactive boating safety law enforcement and education.

Uniquely prepared

On the water, in the woods and in the air, FWC law enforcement officers are uniquely situated, equipped, and trained to identify and respond to illegal activity and promote public safety, particularly in maritime and wilderness areas.
Intervention equals prevention on the water
FWC officers help to ensure Floridians and visitors are safe when they are on the water. The FWC accomplishes this through proactive law enforcement by initiating boating safety, fisheries, and hunting inspections and identifying and minimizing potential navigation or environmental hazards in the waterways.

FWC’s Boating and Waterways Section supports officers by coordinating statewide boating safety efforts. These include education campaigns, waterway marker compliance and maintenance checks, permitting and marking speed-regulated areas, coordinating initiatives aimed at enforcing at risk vessel laws, removing derelict vessels and improving public boating access.

With more than a million registered vessels, Florida is the undisputed “Boating Capital of the World.” However, high vessel numbers and a mild climate cause Florida to lead the nation in the number of boating fatalities each year. The vast size of Florida’s inland, coastal and offshore patrol areas, combined with a significant population of avid and diverse boaters, presents a unique and daunting challenge for the FWC and local and federal maritime enforcement partners.

Boating education is critical
The 2021 Boating Accidents Statistical Report indicates there were 751 reportable boating accidents and 60 boating-related fatalities in the calendar year. This total includes six missing persons who at the end of 2021 have not been located or accounted for and circumstances suggest that death or serious injury has occurred. Many of the deaths were due to victims falling overboard and drowning. Many fatalities may have been prevented if the victims had worn life jackets. FWC continues efforts to reduce the number of boating-related fatalities through education about the importance of wearing life jackets while boating.

Florida’s current boating safety education law only applies to boaters born on or after January 1, 1988, operating a motorized vessel of 10 horsepower or greater. The face-to-face contacts by FWC officers and our partner agencies are a critical part of our outreach efforts and education to the boating public. These statistics show us that the boat operator most likely to be involved in a boating accident is a middle-age or older male who has boating experience yet never learned the most important safety considerations by having taken a boating safety course. When officers observe boating violations or perform resource enforcement activities, they conduct boating safety inspections aimed at both identifying and preventing violations or accidents. FWC officers strive to make boating safer through education and enforcement with the goal of saving lives.

Safe boating is a choice
Florida is a leader in promoting boating accident prevention. The FWC, in association with the National Safe Boating Council, Bombardier Recreational Products Inc., West Marine, and the United States Coast Guard (USCG) has launched a statewide boating safety campaign as part of a national initiative. The “Wear It Florida” campaign encourages boaters to wear life jackets anytime they are on the water and educates boaters about the ease and convenience of inflatable life jackets. The campaign is designed to reach the public through media events, exhibits, personal contacts, social media, radio, and televised public service announcements.

--- Division of Law Enforcement Values ---

**Integrity**
We value candor, honesty and the highest standards of ethical behavior and are committed to upholding our positions of public trust.

**Professionalism**
We value the skillful performance which demonstrates a clear sense of commitment and direction in an environment that encourages teamwork and innovation.

**Dedication**
We value the motivation and dedication with which our members serve the visitors and residents of Florida.

**Adaptability**
We value our unique capability to adapt and respond appropriately to diverse circumstances in all environments.
ABOUT THIS REPORT

The 2021 Boating Accident Statistical Report is compiled by the Boating and Waterways Section of the FWC’s Division of Law Enforcement. Most of the data contained in this report is gathered from boating accident investigation reports submitted by FWC officers and marine law enforcement partners.

At the end of each calendar year, boating accident data is compiled and assembled into Florida’s annual report. The FWC’s Boating and Waterways Section analyzes this information and uses it to formulate proactive plans aimed at reducing the number of boating accidents and their related injuries, fatalities, and property damage. This information is also reported to the USCG’s Boating Safety Division in Washington, D.C., to be included in the national database consisting of data from all U.S. states and territories.

The statistics reflect reportable boating accidents that occurred in Florida. Boating accidents must meet at least one of five criteria to be classified as reportable:

- A person dies.
- A person disappears under circumstances that indicate possible death or injury.
- A person receives an injury requiring medical treatment beyond immediate first aid.
- There is at least $2,000 aggregate property damage to the vessel(s) or other property.
- There is a total loss of a vessel.

The number of registered vessels in Florida increased slightly in 2021. With 1,013,211 registered vessels, Florida leads the nation in registered vessels. Additionally, it is estimated that up to one million non-registered vessels actively use Florida’s waters, and this segment of the boating population appears to still be growing. Florida waterways show signs of congestion as each year brings more residents and visitors together to use abundant water resources and enjoy Florida’s boating lifestyle.

Officers investigating a boat crash in North Florida.
2021 SUMMARY

BOATING ACCIDENT REVIEW
• Florida leads the nation with a total number of 1,013,211 registered vessels in 2021.
• There were 751 reportable boating accidents in 2021.

REPORTABLE BOATING ACCIDENT
• Collision with vessel was the leading type of accident with a total of 250 (33%).
• Towed watersport activities were involved in 11 accidents, resulting in 1 fatality and 12 injuries.
• Paddle/Human powered craft (canoes, kayaks, rowboats, paddleboards) were involved in 13 accidents resulting in 10 fatalities. (9 kayaks, 2 canoes, 2 rowboats)
• May was the month with the highest number of accidents (102).
• Miami-Dade County reported the highest number of accidents and injuries (95 total accidents with 7 fatalities and 65 injuries).

REPORTABLE BOATING FATALITIES
• 59 fatal accidents resulting in 60 fatalities.
• 22% of the fatal accidents resulted from falls overboard (19 accidents). Boaters falling overboard remains the leading category of boating fatality.
• The leading cause of death in fatal boating accidents was drowning with 33 fatalities (55%).
• May was the month with the highest number of fatalities (10).
• Alcohol or drug-use is reported to have played a role in 23% of boating fatalities.
• 85% (51) of the victims of fatal boating accidents were males.
• 72% (47) of the 65 operators involved in fatal accidents were age 36 or older.
• 81% (55) of all vessels involved in fatal accidents in 2021 were 21 feet in length or less.

REPORTABLE BOATING INJURIES
• There were 324 accidents that resulted in 469 injured persons. The rate of injury was 47 injuries per 100,000 registered vessels.

REPORTABLE PERSONAL WATERCRAFT ACCIDENTS
• Personal watercraft (PWC) accounted for 16% of all registered vessels in Florida.
• PWC were involved in 26% (195) of reportable boating accidents.
• Rented PWC represented 56% (153) of PWC involved in accidents.
• 52% (101) of PWC accidents involved a collision with another vessel.
• 44% of PWC accidents occurred in Miami-Dade (37), Monroe (31) and Pinellas (18) counties.
• 17 fatalities resulted from the 195 PWC accidents.
• 162 people were injured in PWC accidents.

BOATING EDUCATION STATISTICS
• FWC issued 78,343 Boating Safety Education ID Cards in 2021.
• 65% of the cards were issued to persons born on or after January 1, 1988.
• Of the 78,343 cards issued, 57,337 were to males, 20,914 were to females. An additional 92 cards did not list gender. 16,495 cards were issued to out of state residents.
• 83% of operators involved in fatal accidents had no formal boater education.

Boating accident statistics for 2021 were compiled on March 1, 2022. Reports received after that date are not included in this report. In 2021, there were six missing persons reported. There has not been any updated information as to their status as of the date of this report compilation. The six missing persons have been included in the fatality data.