

# BOATING ACCIDENTS STATISTICAL REPORT

2011



**FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE  
CONSERVATION COMMISSION  
DIVISION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT**



# BOATING ACCIDENTS STATISTICAL REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), powered 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 our mission of managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people. The Division of Law Enforcement is perhaps the most visible tool within the FWC's "tool belt" used to meet its 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 with primary responsibility for the management of the state's fish and wildlife resources. The FWC's Division of Law Enforcement is tasked with 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 those who enjoy Florida's natural resources, while also enforcing resource protection and boating safety laws. Officers patrol rural, wilderness, inshore and offshore areas, and places where other law enforcement agencies do not routinely patrol. Our officers have the authority to enforce all laws of the state and are cross-deputized to enforce federal fisheries and wildlife laws.



### **Core Missions:**

The core missions of the Division of Law Enforcement are evident every day in everything we do. We meet critical needs within our state, each of which is identified within our core missions.

### **Core mission 1:**

**Resource protection**, including the protection of Florida's fish, wildlife and habitats to ensure their long-term well-being and continued viability for educational, recreational and commercial activities.

### **Core mission 2:**

**Boating and waterways**, which involves enhancing the boating safety and waterway experience through improved access, management, and enforcement.

### **Core mission 3:**

**Public Safety**, safeguarding and enriching the outdoor experience of our citizens and visitors, to include providing efficient emergency response to critical incidents and natural disasters through mutual aid efforts with our local, state, and federal partners.

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Yet, in the course of carrying out these broad responsibilities, FWC officers take every opportunity to introduce even the youngest Floridians to the wonders of our state's wildlife and natural resources and educate them on some very important boating safety topics.

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

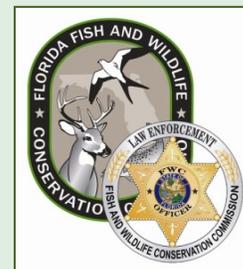
As we look to the future, we will continue to pursue and apply advances in technology to improve the way we respond to both conservation and general law enforcement incidents. When duty calls, we will always be among the first to respond, providing aid as needed. Until then, natural resource protection and proactive boating safety law enforcement and education are what we do best.

## **Uniquely prepared**

On the water, in the woods and in the air, FWC law enforcement officers are uniquely situated and equipped to identify and address illegal activity and promote public safety, particularly in the maritime and wilderness areas.

Our officers often encounter criminal activity, unrelated to natural resources, while on patrol. With statewide law enforcement authority, they are able to address violations immediately – serving as a force multiplier for local jurisdictions.

With our combined talent, tools and training, we bring a wide variety of capabilities and experience to any environment. Our aviation assets, equipped with specialized technology, are often used in search and rescue and recovery efforts. They are also used to provide immediate impact assessments, aerial observation and monitoring of events or incidents, and deliver critical, life-saving supplies and response personnel to disaster sites. Specially trained canine teams track lost or stranded victims and wanted persons. Our Special Operations Group (SOG) team members are trained to search for missing or wanted persons in the roughest and most remote areas of the state.



## **FWC Values**

### **Integrity**

We value candor, honesty and the highest standards of ethical behavior and are committed to maintaining a high degree 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 commitment 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.

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Every day, we work hard to ensure the FWC Division of Law Enforcement is synonymous with excellence. Working in such diverse environments can be tough and challenging, but FWC law enforcement officers are set apart by their can-do attitude and adaptable nature. When it comes to the woods and water, FWC officers are clearly Florida's experts.

## **Intervention equals prevention on the water**

FWC officers help to ensure Floridians and visitors are safe when they are on the water through proactive law enforcement, by initiating boating safety and fisheries inspections and by identifying and minimizing potential navigation and environmental hazards in the waterways.

Our Boating and Waterways and Field Services Sections support officer efforts by coordinating statewide boating safety efforts, education campaigns, ensuring waterway markers are accurate and maintained, permitting and marking speed-regulated areas, coordinating initiatives aimed at removing derelict vessels and providing more public boating access sites.

With close to a million vessels registered in the state, Florida leads the nation in the number of vessels, and, as a negative consequence of high vessel numbers and our mild climate, has the highest number of boating fatalities annually. The vast size of our inland, coastal and offshore patrol areas – combined with a significant population of avid boaters – presents a unique and daunting challenge for FWC and our local and federal maritime enforcement partners.

## **Boating education is critical**

As evidenced in this 2011 Boating Accidents Statistical Report, there were 742 reportable boating accidents and 67 boating related fatalities in 2011. Many of these deaths were due to victims falling overboard and drowning. A large number of these deaths could have been prevented if the victims had worn life jackets. We continue to increase our efforts to reduce the number of boating-related fatalities through enhanced enforcement and education about the importance of wearing life jackets on the water.



## **2010 Boating Educator of the Year**

In July 2011 the FWC selected Dr. Wilbur G. Hugli of Fort Walton Beach as Florida's 2010 Boating Educator of the Year.

The award recognizes those in the boating education field who go above and beyond to engage new and current boaters, raise awareness and make boating education initiatives relevant, thorough and exciting.

Dr. Hugli has been part of the Fort Walton Sail and Power Squadron, a unit of the U.S. Power Squadrons, for 21 years. Through his efforts with the Power Squadrons, Hugli has volunteered his time to author four widely acclaimed boating safety seminars as well as a benchmark student manual for educating new boaters.

Dr. Hugli has reached out to young boaters, prompting a high school and the University of West Florida to implement classroom and online boating safety courses.

Dr. Hugli is a valuable partner to the FWC. He is thoroughly involved with boating safety education and training at all levels. He truly understands the goal of educating the public – reducing risk and ultimately saving lives.

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With Florida's current boating safety education law only applying to boaters born on or after January 1, 1988, 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 aged or older male who has plenty of boating experience yet has never learned the most important safety considerations by having taken a boating safety course. When officers perform fresh and saltwater resource enforcement activities, they also routinely conduct boating safety inspections aimed at both identifying and preventing violations. They make boating safer and ultimately save 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, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and a growing list of other partners, 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 the relatively unknown inflatable life jackets. The campaign reaches the public through a variety of methods including media events, exhibits, personal contacts and televised public service announcements.

## About this report

This 2011 Boating Accidents 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 investigative reports submitted by FWC officers and our marine law enforcement partners working for local agencies.



## 2011 FWC Boating Officer of the Year

Officer Donnie McKee was named the 2011 FWC Boating Officer of the Year. Officer McKee began his career with FWC in 2007 and is assigned to the south St. Johns River.

Since starting with the agency, Officer McKee's BUI initiatives have been one of his major priorities. In 2011, he led his region with seven BUI arrests.

Officer McKee also initiated the 2011 operational campaign, "Don't Rock the Boat" that targeted vessels traveling at excessive speeds. Officer McKee continually stresses safety in his patrol zone.

Officer McKee actively participates in annual Manatee Days where he takes the opportunity to educate the public about the importance of boating safety.

Congratulations, Donnie! Keep up the good work!



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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 these statistics and uses the information 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 Boating Safety Division of the U.S. Coast Guard in Washington, D.C. to be included in the national database consisting of data from all U.S. states and territories.

These statistics reflect data from "reportable boating accidents" that occurred in our state. Boating accidents must meet at least one of the six criteria below 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, or
- There is a total loss of a vessel.

Although, the number of recreational vessels registered in the State of Florida fell slightly in 2011 with 922,491 registered vessels, Florida is poised to once again lead the nation in registered vessels. Additionally, it is estimated that up to 1 million non-registered vessels actively use Florida's waters, and this segment of the boating population appears to still be growing. Our waterways increasingly show the strains of congestion as each year brings more residents and visitors together to utilize our abundant water resources and enjoy Florida's boating lifestyle.

Anyone having questions concerning this report should visit [www.MyFWC.com](http://www.MyFWC.com).

## Report Submissions

2011 was a transition year for the FWC when it came to reporting boating accidents. In 2011, officers began using the Boating Accident Report Form on their computers and transmitting them electronically. By the end of the year, 68% of the accidents investigated by the FWC were being submitted electronically. The majority of the officers who used the electronic submission process found it to be quicker, easier and readily embraced the new technology. Use of the electronic Boating Accident Form has sped up the reporting process.



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## SUMMARY

### BOATING ACCIDENT REVIEW

- Total number of **registered vessels** in Florida continues to lead the nation with 922,491 registered in 2011.
- There was a total of 742 reportable boating accidents in 2011.

### 2011 REPORTABLE BOATING ACCIDENTS

- 51% of the **Operators** involved in reportable boating accidents had no formal boater education.
- Monroe County reported the **highest number of accidents and injuries** (93 total accidents with 6 fatalities and 66 injuries).

### 2011 REPORTABLE BOATING FATALITIES.

- 39% of the fatal accidents were falls overboard (24 accidents). In 2011, boaters falling overboard remained the main cause of boating fatalities.
- The leading cause of death in fatal boating accidents was drowning (63%).
- Deadliest months in 2011 were August and November with 9 fatalities each.
- Alcohol or drug-use played a role in 15% of boating fatalities.
- 93% of the victims of fatal boating accidents were males (62).
- The total fatality count for 2011 is reported at 67.
- 68% (45) of the 62 fatal accidents involved operators over the age of 35.
- 94% of all fatal accidents in 2011 involved vessels 21 feet and under.

### 2011 REPORTABLE BOATING INJURIES

- There were 742 accidents resulting in 431 injuries. The rate of injury was 47 injuries per 100,000 vessels.

### 2011 REPORTABLE PERSONAL WATERCRAFT ACCIDENTS

- Personal watercrafts (PWC) accounted for 13% of all registered vessels in Florida.
- PWC were involved in 22% (162) of reported boating accidents.
- 41% of PWC accidents involved a collision with another vessel.
- 31% of PWC accidents occurred in Monroe, Miami-Dade and Pinellas Counties, with Monroe County ranked #1 (with 24 accidents).
- 7 fatalities resulted from the 162 PWC accidents.

### 2011 BOATING EDUCATION STATISTICS

- FWC issued 27,062 Boating Safety Education ID cards in 2011.
- 48% of the cards were issued to persons 21 years of age or younger.
- Of the 27,062 cards issued, 19,315 were issued to males, 6,204 were issued to females, and 1,543 cards did not specify the person's gender.