

Alabama
LEC/LETC State Report – Fall 2022
Submitted by: Major Jason Downey

Agency Overview

From January 1, 2022, through September 30, 2022, AMRD enforcement officers conducted 1,085 commercial fishermen intercepts, 13,937 recreational fishermen intercepts, 1109 seafood dealer and processor inspections, 9,347 hours of patrol (combined vessel patrol and shore patrol) and boarded 4,689 vessels. These numbers reflect our state time efforts and not data from our JEA patrols.

Our state oyster season is currently underway, and officers are spending lots of time patrolling the oyster reef and working the oyster management station to ensure catch limits are abided by and all oyster sacks are tagged and accounted for.

Our state season for the recreational harvest of red snapper is still open from Friday through Monday of each week. We will remain open until our state quota is met. We utilize Snapper Check to monitor our landings. This has been a very successful program since implemented and we have recently started requiring that anglers report their landings of greater amberjack and gray triggerfish as well.

AMRD Enforcement continues to work with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) as part of a Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) enforcing fisheries regulations in Alabama and the federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. NMFS has set several priorities for enforcing and managing the various fisheries in these two zones. These priorities target patrols to the different types of fisheries management criteria in offshore and near-shore fisheries. The areas targeted by NMFS are Turtle Excluder Device (T.E.D.) gear enforcement; the recreational gulf reef fish fishery; the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) fishery that targets: red snapper, grouper, and tilefish; marine mammal protection patrols; and the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting Program (SFHIER). AMRD enforcement officers remain active during and after the charter fishing season, ensuring that the federally permitted vessels follow the SFHIER reporting requirements.

Grants/Projects

The Enforcement Section continues to work under a grant to monitor and protect marine mammals and turtles. One of the grant's objectives is to monitor turtle crawls and nesting areas to help prevent nest damage caused by the public. The funding also provides for materials that target the public and educate them on the potential harm they can unknowingly cause to turtle nests, and turtle hatching runs. Funding also provides educational material outlining the dangers caused by marine mammal interactions with people and how current laws related to these interactions are crucial to protecting marine mammals and marine turtles. The two portable camera units purchased with this grant have allowed AMRD to monitor turtle nesting areas 24 hours a day, with live video feeds. When deployed, the cameras can track turtle movements and human interactions and monitor known nesting sites.

We are currently working on a Port Security Grant that would allow us to purchase one or two new enforcement vessels. In the past we have used this grant to purchase remote monitoring equipment and have deployed them throughout our jurisdiction at remote sites such as boat ramps and high traffic boating areas. We currently have 21 sites up and running. These have been very helpful in monitoring boating/fishing activity as well as assisting in search and rescue operations.

Enforcement Issues

We are currently looking to hire two new enforcement officers that would get us to full staff. Over the last few years recruiting and retention has been an issue. I think this has been a struggle for law enforcement across the board.

JEA's

Our JEA contract runs from August 24 -August 23 each year. Our total funding is \$523,990.38. We use this money to purchase equipment that is utilized in federal fisheries enforcement as well as overtime for enforcement personnel.

JEA Patrols	316 total patrols
Vessel Hours Offshore	255
Vessel Hours Near shore	441
Dockside Hours	1,464
Commercial Fishermen Inspected	746
Recreational Fishermen Inspected	3,749
Public Outreach Hours	425
Dealers Inspected	88
Vessels Boarded	794
Commercial Vessels	304
Recreational Vessels	202
Charter Vessels	288
Total Violations	12

Regulatory Changes/Pending Legislation

Last year we added verbiage to our oyster regulation that would require any recreationally harvested oysters to be tagged. Recreational oyster catchers are required to utilize the oyster management station to purchase a tag. This has really been beneficial in obtaining an accurate count of how many oysters are being harvested from our public reefs.

Outreach/Community Education

As the Covid-19 precautions have all but been eliminated, AMRD Enforcement is once again attending and participating in many of the outreach events that take place in the region. The Enforcement Section's opportunities for outreach have continued to increase, thus creating more opportunities to interact with and educate the public.

IUU Concerns/Cases

N/A