FLORIDA

Curtis Brown, Colonel

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Division of Law Enforcement's 853 sworn personnel operate in six regions throughout the state. FWC officers are responsible for uniformed patrol and investigative law enforcement services on more than 8,400 miles of coastline, 13,200 square miles of offshore waters, and over 34 million acres of land encompassing a variety of habitats including wildlife management areas, state parks and forests. FWC officers stand as sentinels for the protection of Florida's precious resources and the public who utilize these resources. FWC officers are highly trained, versatile law enforcement officers with full police powers and statewide jurisdiction. Cooperative agreements with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service cross-deputize FWC officers to enforce federal marine fisheries and wildlife laws, thus ensuring state and federal consistency in resource protection. FWC officers are an effective model of modern law enforcement multi-tasking – providing law enforcement services for: the protection and enforcement of laws relating to all wild animal and aquatic resources; public safety in Florida's state parks; boating safety enforcement; the protection of the public in rural, semi-wilderness, wilderness and offshore areas where no other law enforcement agencies routinely patrol; regulating commercial wildlife activities and inspecting personal and commercial native/exotic wildlife facilities; natural disaster and civil disturbance response; search and rescue missions; the prevention of illegal shipping of protected and regulated wildlife into Florida's ports; environmental crimes/protection; dignitary protection; mutual aid requests; and domestic security initiatives.

TRAINING

FWC Training Center

The FWC Advanced and In-service Training Section completed multiple advanced and in-service trainings to increase officer safety while on patrol. Regional training lieutenants attended advanced pistol and rifle training and gained valuable knowledge and tactics that were used to revamp biannual firearms, non-lethal weapons and scenario-based training curricula. Division recruiters continued to employ significant changes to recruiting tactics and increase the division's diversity. Recruiters attended a diversity and leadership conference to network and learn best practices. The Advanced and In-service Section continues to preserve institutional knowledge and mentor officers through the Advanced Conservation Academy (ACA). The ACA involves selected officers traveling to each region within Florida for a week to train with subject matter experts and participate in targeted enforcement details. The FWC Advanced and In-service Training Section also conducted and supervised Officer Specialist testing and curriculum development for nine essential topics related to FWC's Workforce Development Program. The FWC Law Enforcement Academy staff trained 101 recruits in three separate academies over the past year. Each academy training includes basic recruit training, certifying recruits as sworn law enforcement officers in Florida, and an eight-week FWC-specific training session focusing on the unique aspects of conservation law enforcement. Additionally, law enforcement recruits complete extensive hours of functional fitness based physical training. This prepares them not only for the physical demands of recruit training, but

promotes a “Fit for Duty, Fit for Life,” mindset. The FWC Training Academy continually adapts training to better protect the natural resources and people of Florida.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Boating and Waterways

The Boating and Waterways Section consists of three operational units: Boating Safety, Boat Access, and Waterway Management.

The Boating Safety Unit (BSU) coordinates and administers Florida’s Boating Safety Grant. The BSU manages Florida’s boating accident report process which includes reviewing and approving all reportable boating accident reports before they are submitted to the USCG. These reports are compiled annually to create Florida’s Boating Accident Statistical Report. The unit uses statistical data to create radio, television and print media outreach promoting boating safety and education. This data is also used to improve educational materials. The unit reviews and approves boating safety education courses, issues Boating Safety Education ID cards to students that have passed the approved courses and manages Florida’s boater safety education temporary certificate program. This program allows boaters to more quickly comply with Florida’s boater education requirement.

The BSU participated in the Florida State Fair, the Miami Boat Show, the Outdoor Expo Boat Show, the Florida Sportsman Outdoor and Boat Show, the International Boating & Water Safety Summit, as well as the International Convention of Allied Sport Fishing Trades. In addition, the BSU coordinated National

Safe Boating Week press conferences across the state. Collectively, these events allowed FWC to reach millions of boaters with vital safety messaging.

The FWC's annual Operation Dry Water efforts in 2018 were a tremendous success. Statewide, FWC officers made 54 BUI cases, removing dangerous operators from the water, and logged 7,534 boating safety hours.

The BSU was directly involved in training new and current officers through boating accident investigation and reporting courses. The unit also conducted training for FWC and local partner officers on personal watercraft and livery enforcement around the state. More than 48,000 boating safety identification cards were issued to individuals and over 200,000 temporary certificate exams were sent to program vendors during 2017.

The Boat Access Unit (BAU) coordinates and administers Florida's Boat Access Program, which maintains 248 boat ramps statewide. The unit created the Florida Public Boat Ramp Finder, which is available to the public to improve their awareness of nearby boat ramps. The BAU coordinates and administers the Florida Boating Improvement Program (FBIP) and Florida's Boating Infrastructure Grant Program (BIGP). The FBIP provides grants to local governments for building facilities for boat access. Last year, 10 projects totaling $1,507,856 were awarded through FBIP. The BIGP funds are used for projects with public and private entities for the construction of facilities for transient (15-day stay or less) vessels 26' or longer.

The Waterway Management Unit (WMU) oversees and coordinates statewide regulatory waterway markers to ensure compliance with the uniform marker system and to improve compliance of state boating and resource protection zones. The unit also manages the promulgation of Boating Safety Restricted Areas on the waters of the state for any purpose deemed necessary to ensure the safety of the public. The WMU is responsible for properly marking the boating restricted areas and manatee

protection zones implemented under its authority. Statewide, the WMU is responsible for more than 10,000 regulatory markers and buoys. This can be a challenging task - especially in the aftermath of natural disasters, such as hurricanes. Most recently, Hurricane Irma directly hit Florida affecting 10 counties, resulting in $129,447 in damages to 52 state-maintained waterway markers, while also damaging numerous locally maintained waterway markers. The resulting assessment and repair of affected markers challenged the unit's response plan and required extensive coordination with state and local government entities.

The Derelict Vessel Removal Program is also managed by the WMU. Derelict and abandoned vessels littering the state pose an environmental hazard, as well as a hazard to navigation. These vessels cause the destruction of valuable seagrass resources and the marine life which exist within that habitat. Derelict vessels also threaten human life, safety and property as they drift beneath the surface of the water or block navigable waterways, posing a navigation hazard to the boating public. Last year, the WMU implemented a $1,488,550 Derelict Vessel Removal Grant program offered to all 67 Florida Counties. Due to Hurricane Irma, $1,000,000 was diverted to a statewide Hurricane Irma displaced vessel emergency response program. This left $488,550 for the regular Derelict Vessel Program removal efforts which are currently underway. This program currently has 10 contracts for the removal of 26 vessels from public waters, at a cost of $288,052. As we are currently in the third round of applications for derelict vessel removal grants with a total of $200,498 remaining in the DV budget for 2017/2018, it is possible that even more vessels will be removed under this remaining budget. It is expected the 2018/2019 removal budget will have a higher demand and many more derelict vessels will be removed. Currently $1,000,000 has been allocated for 2018/2019. Thanks to the Florida Legislature, this continuing program has been able to help state, county and local governments with the costs related to the removal of derelict vessels, therefore stimulating removal activity throughout the state.

In response to Hurricane Irma, the FWC partnered with the US Coast Guard, EPA, state, county and municipal partners for a collaborative storm related derelict vessel response. In total, 2,680 vessels were assessed, 948 vessels were removed from state waters by US Coast Guard contractors and processed and disposed of or returned to owners by the FWC. The total estimated cost of $51,000,000 was spent on this operation, of which the FWC paid $12,750,000. The FWC managed more than 20 sites to transition these vessels from the water to land, transfer to storage or awaiting owners to recover or process for ultimate disposal. The FWC will spend an additional $3,000,000 with the assistance of a NOAA Federal grant, to remove 225 more vessels from Hurricane Irma that did not meet the US Coast Guard's ESF-10 removal protocols. During this process, the vessels will be removed and disposed of in authorized disposal facilities throughout the state.

CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT

Offshore Patrol

The Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) fleet of fourteen specialized boats is strategically dispersed across Florida's extensive coastline. Of the agency's two Heavy Endurance vessels, the Gulf Sentry operates out of St. Petersburg while the CT Randall is at Marco Island. Heavy Endurance vessels conduct one to four-day patrols offshore in the Gulf of Mexico covering hundreds of miles. The crews perform resource and boating safety inspections on commercial fishing vessels as well as recreational vessels. Missions also include providing a reliable operations platform for FWC's expanding dive team program. Many of the OPV vessels provide the space, range and stability for dive related search, recovery and training missions that occur in open waters. The OPV crews' primary enforcement efforts consist of Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) patrols of Federal Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) waters and safely conducting commercial shrimp boat inspections to ensure compliance with Turtle Excluder Device (TED) regulations.

FWC's law enforcement offshore platforms serve multiple functions for the State of Florida. OPV members have utilized interdisciplinary collaborative communication between law enforcement and research personnel of the Fish & Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI). Joint missions have been made to the Madison-Swanson Marine Reserve and other locations within the Gulf of Mexico. During these missions, marine biologists from FWRI have been onboard to conduct Acoustic Telemetry research within the Madison-Swanson boundaries. Division of Law Enforcement and FWRI teams have successfully retrieved and redeployed the twenty-six data collecting devices that spend approximately a year on the floor of the Gulf of Mexico. OPV along with the assistance of FWC dive teams have also aided with retrieving lost research gear. Through this continued collaboration, both groups gain a better understanding of each's knowledge and long-term conservation objectives.

Through the 2017-18 JEA, OPV teams have completed over 2,700 hours of dedicated Federal offshore patrol. These efforts have resulted in over 470 Federal fisheries violations being documented and provided to NOAA Office of Law Enforcement.

STATEWIDE INVESTIGATIONS/INTELLIGENCE

This section works to uncover criminal conspiracies, identify investigative actions and criminal networks, prepare reports and other intelligence products in support of FWC staff, law enforcement partners, and stakeholders. This information is used for crime prevention and decision-making purposes while also protecting stakeholders and legal businesses from unfair competition by unlicensed, illegal entities. The primary role of the Investigations Section is to conduct, coordinate and support investigative operations statewide. The section provides specialized training, administrative and technical support for regional investigations and uniform patrol in each of the six regions around the state. The section works closely with other local, state and federal partners as well as stakeholders, with a primary focus on the illegal commercialization of Florida's natural and historical resources. The Investigations Section also supervises Class 1 Operations which focus on large scale resource violators who illegally commercialize Florida's natural resources for personal financial gain and those habitual wildlife offenders that have not been brought to justice via more overt means.

The Investigations/Intelligence Section provides six unique services statewide:

- Resource Investigations Unit
- Digital Forensics and Electronic Surveillance Support
- Internet Crimes Unit Coordinator
- Fish and Wildlife Forensics
- Intelligence Support
- Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Support

<u>Statewide Resource Investigations</u>

A long-term investigation was closed in early 2018 which stemmed from a complaint received of two individuals illegally harvesting and selling wildlife in central Florida. This multi-year investigation, Operation "Northbound," revealed a loosely connected black market network involving the illegal harvest, purchase and sale of multiple species such as alligator, deer, sandhill crane, eel, porcupine and

red snapper for commercial and recreational use. During the operation, 25 different species were requested, sold, harvested or purchased. This two-year investigation resulted in more than 600 documented misdemeanors and 35 felony counts involving over 24 suspects in 5 counties. This was a great example of teamwork throughout the state, within the agency, as well as with local and federal law enforcement partners.

Internet Crime Unit

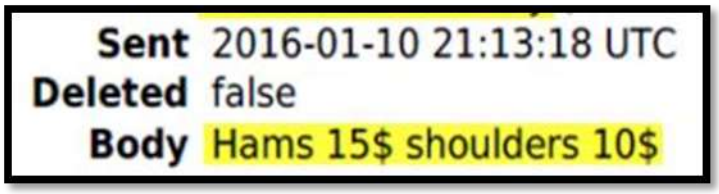
FWC's Internet Crime Unit (ICU) is staffed by twelve regional investigators and coordinated by one statewide resource investigations lieutenant. For the regional investigators, ICU is a collateral responsibility conducted in addition to their normal investigative duties. Investigators are trained to leverage intelligence generated from internet-based social media and advertising sites such as Facebook, Craigslist and eBay. Over the past year, ICU investigators received 176 tips generated from online activity. Of the 176 tips generated, 40 investigations were initiated. Some notable cases for the year involved the illegal sale of blue crabs, snook and freshwater game fish; the unlawful harvest and possession of alligators and the unlawful possession and attempted sale of captive wildlife. One internet related case involved a video posted on a social media site of a shark dragged behind a vessel at a high rate of speed by several subjects who were ultimately charged with aggravated animal cruelty and other charges.

Digital Forensics/Electronic Surveillance Unit

FWC's Digital Forensics and Technical Surveillance Unit is staffed with two statewide investigators and one lieutenant. The unit's responsibility is to support law enforcement investigations and uniform patrol with forensic evidence recovery, forensic and data analysis and technical investigative assistance. The unit supports operations in technical surveillance equipment deployment and evidence captures utilizing specialized equipment including GPS tracking technology and covert camera deployments. One member has obtained certifications in computer forensic analysis and forensic cellphone extractions. Members are now pursuing certification in the National Technical Investigators Association's Certified Technical Investigator program.

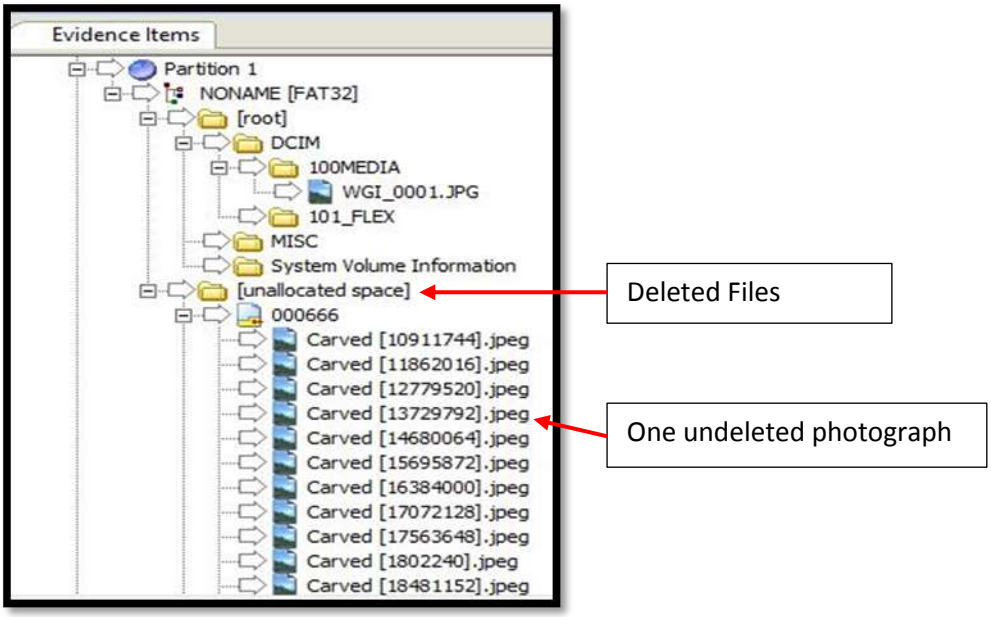
Case Spotlight: Digital Forensics

Investigator Todd Hoyle from the NC Region received information from Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks concerning Florida suspects traveling to multiple states falsifying license applications and illegally harvesting large numbers of trophy animals. The suspects frequently used social media to communicate and share evidence of illegal kills. Investigator Hoyle began serving search warrants on social media sites to obtain enough probable cause to secure additional search warrants on the local residences. Cell phones and other digital devices were seized and forensically analyzed. The accumulation and analyses of all evidence showed dates and locations of illegal kills, unlawful methods, participating suspects and falsified hunting license applications over multiple years. All the trophies were killed at night or with rifles during archery seasons. Criminal charges were filed in both Kansas and Florida. Additionally, a black-market operation involving the sale of deer in the North Florida area was also uncovered. The suspects were charged with those crimes as well.



Twelve illegal trophy deer mounts were seized and removed from the suspects.

In January of 2018, the Digital Forensics Unit received a FedEx package containing two items for analysis. The package contained two SD card storage devices recovered from two wildlife trail cameras stolen from private property. While conducting analysis of the evidence it quickly became clear that there were many deleted files on the SD card.



After further review, thousands of deleted images were recovered from both SD cards ranging from 2014 to late 2017. There were also many new photographs that were not deleted from the cards. Investigators determined that the images taken the day the camera was stolen from the victim's property showed a suspect with a firearm and a second photograph showing the camera being moved. Evidence indicated these photographs were then deleted.

The images that were not deleted were those of people in a driveway starting in late 2017.

The undeleted photographs were identified as the suspect's driveway. The successful recovery of deleted evidence in this case by FWC's digital forensics unit is only one of many examples of how forensics capabilities are growing in demand with today's use of technology in the outdoors.

Fish and Wildlife Forensics

This section houses a forensic laboratory with capabilities that include species identification, identification of animal remains, cause-of-death determinations, marine forensics, and other conventional forensic capabilities. The laboratory uses taxonomical and morphological analysis, biochemical systematics and forensic DNA techniques to make identifications from whole animals to sources of DNA such as blood and other body fluids. The laboratory maintains evidence management procedures as per agency accreditation standards. It uses the division's unique capabilities to further the agency's mission and assists with coordination of mutual-aid efforts with local, state and federal partners.

Case Spotlight: Wildlife Forensics

Investigators Cris Douglas and Richard Doricchi from South Region A requested forensic support for an investigation involving the illegal trespass shooting of a deer in St. Lucie County. Investigators recovered trace and biological evidence from the crime scene the night of the kill. A month later, a suspect was developed. Service of a search warrant produced trace and biological evidence from the suspect's vehicle and soil samples from shoes and tools inside the truck. DNA analysis conclusively confirmed the evidence recovered from the suspect matched the deer evidence at the scene. Soil samples obtained from the scene were also consistent with the soil samples recovered from the suspect's shoes and tools.

Port Investigations

FWC has developed a dedicated Port Investigations Unit comprised of one statewide coordinator, six full time investigators and five full time K-9 officers. Their mission is to detect the unlawful commercial trade and trafficking of fish and wildlife species. This unit was developed to enhance the FWC's capabilities and effectiveness for preventing the illegal importation, exportation and potential release of invasive species within the State of Florida.

The FWC port investigators, K-9 officers and their K-9s are on the front lines of enforcement of these laws. The Port Investigations Unit's primary responsibilities include monitoring and interrupting the illegal import and export of invasive species, marine life, illegal saltwater products and the illegal commercialization of Florida's native fish and wildlife. The unit conducts inspections of imports, exports and domestic shipping at U.S. international airports, seaports, as well as international and domestic mail facilities. The Port Investigations Unit also monitors the pet trade for legal, ethical and health standards associated with the shipment of live animals. The unit assists the US Fish and Wildlife Service with inspecting packages for federal Lacey Act compliance, CITES and Migratory Bird Treaty Act violations. Other federal partners include US Customs and Border Patrol, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement and United States Postal Inspectors.

Case Spotlight: Port Investigations

Sharing of information within the division as well as with USFWS resulted in the seizure of a shipment of hundreds of illegally imported/possessed exotics species. The shipment included 400 Nile monitors, 150 centipedes and other frogs, geckos, and snakes. The suspect did not have valid licenses or permits to import wildlife into Florida and was charged with more than 550 counts of unlawful importation/possession of wildlife.

Intelligence

Intelligence Section analysts are Interagency Fusion Liaisons within the Florida Fusion Center located at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Working directly with the Fusion Center provides the Intelligence Unit the ability to receive classified and unclassified information from federal partners and disseminate threat information from other state, local, tribal, territorial and private sector entities.

Intelligence Liaison Officers around the state coordinate with municipal, state and federal law enforcement agencies regarding law enforcement intelligence and domestic security. The officers work jointly with federal partners such as the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force, United States Coast Guard (USCG) Intelligence, Department of Homeland Security, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

During fiscal year 2017-2018, FWC analysts responded to 1,559 requests for information to include work-ups on individuals and companies; completed more than 200 work-up requests on one case alone out of the Miami office; completed over 45 photo lineups for our agency and the DEA; prepared and disseminated 97 FWC bulletins; forwarded more than 50 officer safety bulletins from other agencies to our Regional Intelligence Officers (RIO) for dissemination; and assisted with 703 tips received via social media and the tip line. During this fiscal year in Florida, 1,625 vessels and motors were reported as stolen. The Intelligence Section prepared quarterly reports that were disseminated to law enforcement agencies around the state to facilitate awareness of these thefts and assist in recovery. Additionally, they conducted 223 background investigations for FWC employment (sworn and non-sworn).

This section has access to vast amounts of information through multiple databases and the Florida Fusion Center. Some of the services the unit provides include:

- Suspicious activity reporting
- Suspect information
- Disseminating officer safety information
- Disseminating information related to illegal activity
- Tracking vessel theft trends
- GIS mapping capabilities
- Publishing projects that assist with enforcement (specific to a season, species or activity)
- Maintain databases for officer use in investigations

Wildlife Violator Compact

The Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact (Compact) is an agreement that recognizes suspension of hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses in all Compact member states. This means any person whose license privileges or rights are suspended in a Compact state may also be suspended in all other Compact states if the conviction is a basis for suspension in that state.

The Compact prevents poachers who are under revocation in one state from hunting, fishing, or trapping in other states. This cooperative interstate effort enhances the FWC's ability to protect and manage our wildlife resources.

If a person plans to hunt, fish or trap in another state, and has a license suspension in Florida, it is their responsibility to contact the other state to verify they can legally hunt, fish or trap there.

Wildlife Alert

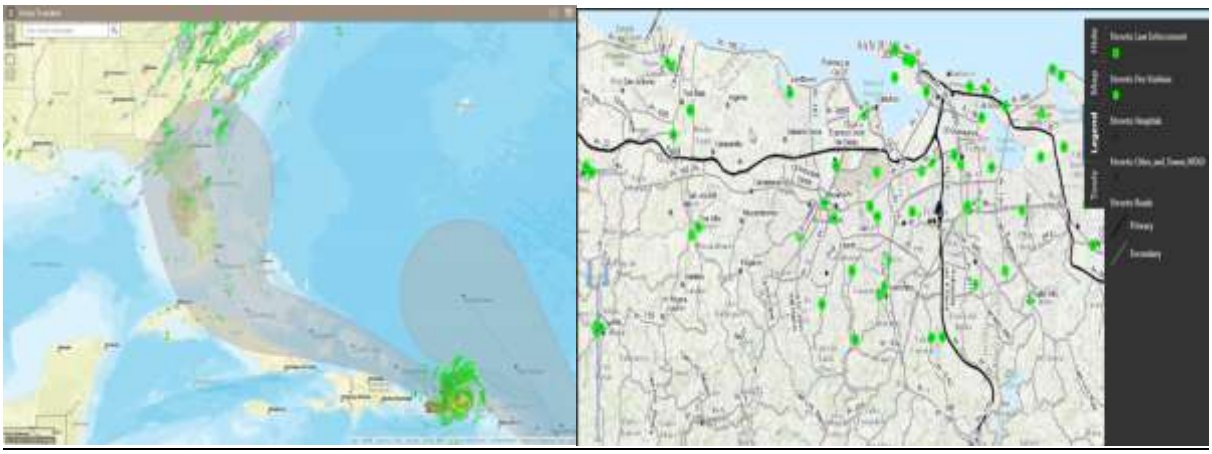
The Investigations Section also coordinates the Wildlife Alert Program. In 2017, the program received 2,338 wildlife alert submissions statewide. A total of 64 rewards requests were distributed. Total reward distribution of $16,700 in Wildlife Alert funds were sent out for the calendar year of 2017. The Wildlife Alert board of directors approved a fundraising event to be held at the OK Corral Gun Club in Okeechobee in October 5, 2019 in South Central Florida.

GIS Team

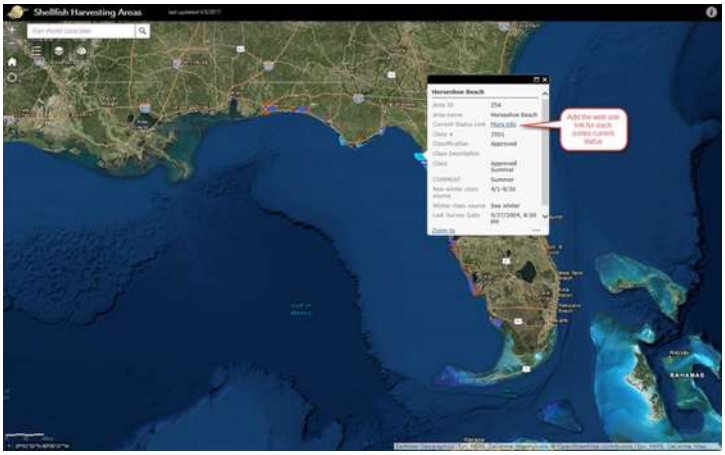
GIS software is designed to capture, manage, analyze and display all forms of geographically referenced information. 95% of all DLE data can be presented in GIS. This tool provides users with the technology to reference complex spatial data to understand and find solutions for a variety of questions or problems.

Major projects the GIS Team has worked on include: DLE 5-year Statistical Reports, Boating and Waterways, DLE region's growing trends for CAD Calls (general and managed areas), citations, boating accidents, population change, sworn officers, freshwater and hunting licenses and registered vessels.

The team also developed a mapping application for the Hurricane Irma event (real time hurricane tracking, radar, weather watches, river gauge information, evacuation zones and routes). When Florida has a hurricane make landfall, the site will show all EOC data streams (county status, road closures, etc.) as well as a map of Puerto Rico integrated with our Smart Cop system in preparation for potential deployment.



More than 35 maps were requested including critical wildlife areas, region report for alligator and bear incidents, aviation assets, hunting case investigation, field services - marine and electronic staff locations, Sanibel boating accident, Weeki Wachee CAD activity, citations and warnings, evidence facilities, county circuit courts, multiple regional and operational maps, and residency maps.



The GIS team worked with DACS (Division of Aquaculture and Consumer Services) to develop real-time status of shellfish harvesting area application available for law enforcement use as well as the public on computer and smartphone. The GIS team also provided mapping applications for boating and waterways, port inspections, Southwest Region asset management, landowner contact web mapping service for Southwest Region, operations for Hurricane Irma, and captive wildlife facilities.

Captive Wildlife Update

The FWC promotes responsible ownership of captive wildlife and it is the goal of the FWC to develop the best regulations possible that provide for public safety, animal welfare, and the legitimate use of wildlife for educational, exhibition, or personal purposes. Florida's captive wildlife regulations are among the most stringent in the nation. Individuals who possess wildlife in Florida must be licensed and meet all safe housing and humane treatment standards. FWC investigators routinely conduct inspections of captive wildlife facilities to ensure humane treatment and sanitary conditions are in place for the animals. FWC investigators also inspect to ensure that cage and security requirements are followed to ensure public safety. Florida Statutes and our captive wildlife regulations provide the tools our investigators need to address issues when violations occur. During Fiscal Year 2016-17, FWC's Captive Wildlife Program conducted 6,187 captive wildlife inspections, responded to 995 complaints, seized 175 animals and issued 839 citations/warnings. There were 6,500 captive wildlife applications possessed during 2017.

Case Spotlight: Captive Wildlife Law Enforcement

A captive wildlife investigator received a call that two chimpanzees had escaped from a wildlife facility. Upon arrival, the investigator coordinated a multi-agency response to the situation, including setting up a perimeter of the area. After several attempts, he was able to successfully use his chemical immobilization equipment to return the two chimpanzees to their enclosure.

The subsequent investigation of the escapes revealed that a care taker accidently left the gates to the enclosure open. He then released the chimpanzees from their night house into the unsecured enclosure, leading to the escapes. Two misdemeanor citations were issued for failure to prevent the escape. Both chimpanzees made full recoveries after being returned to their enclosures.

After the first dart hit the male chimp, he used a steal storm shutter as a shield to avoid getting darted a second time.

In August of 2017, a search warrant was executed on an alligator farm that was suspected of illegal activity. The search warrant required the drawdown of the farmer's ponds so that all alligators could be DNA tested. During the two-day draw down, large pumps were used to drain all the ponds on the property. Approximately 150 alligators were captured, secured and brought to agency biologists who took DNA samples and then released them back into the ponds. The DNA samples were then sent to the University of Florida for testing. Testing continues, but so far, at least seven hatchlings have been found not to have come from any captive alligator on the farm. Based on this information, an arrest warrant was signed in May of 2018 and it included:

- 7 felony counts of illegal possession of alligators
- 1 felony count of grand theft
- 1 felony count of cheating
- 1 felony count of uttering a forged instrument
- 2 misdemeanor counts of inaccurate records pertaining to alligator farms

A captive wildlife investigator inspected a bird breeder and charged the owner with 36 counts of animal neglect and unsanitary conditions. The floor in the aviary had fecal waste that was 3 feet deep on the entire floor. One cage had roaches in it along with a dead bird. Multiple carcasses were found in the cages and on the floor and the live birds were in poor condition.

Roaches in nest box of a cage on south side of aviary. The cage also had a dead bird in it.
Bottom of the cage is buried in waste and two carcasses are visible, one in cage and out outside of cage.

Bird cages in unsanitary conditions.
Macaw in too small of cage (Cage 1/Row 4), partially buried in waste, with too low of perch and no water.

A captive wildlife investigator received a complaint about a licensed alligator farmer who killed a large wild alligator. Through interviews and pictures online, the investigator determined which processor the alligator was taken to and seized it. He also determined that the alligator farmer had taken several other alligators from the wild and put them into his farming inventory. The alligators held under the alligator farming license were also determined to be on exhibit which was a violation due to the alligator farmer not having a license to exhibit. Subsequently, multiple felony charges of illegal take of an alligator were filed as well as misdemeanor charges for various alligator farming rule violations and exhibiting without the proper license.

Environmental Law Enforcement

Environmental Investigations includes educating the public and enforcing state and federal environmental laws; protecting and preserving cultural and natural resources; protecting state lands and water quality; investigating environmental crimes; and participation in education and outreach programs about environmental protection and enjoying state resources.

Case Spotlight: Environmental Investigations

A combined team of patrol officers and an environmental investigator began electronic surveillance at a dump site. Officers and investigators determined that approximately 20 tons of roofing debris had been transported to a WMA, dumped and burned over a six-month period by employees of an Alabama roofing company. The seven-month investigation culminated in multiple FWC charges against the company's owner and three employees. These charges included:

- 58 felony counts relating to commercial dumping, criminal mischief more than $1000, tampering with evidence and theft
- 25 misdemeanor counts related to the burning of prohibited materials, damages to the wildlife management area, and violation of Florida Department of Environmental Protection rules.

Environmental investigator works with patrol officers on a roof shingle dumping case in a wildlife management area.

An environmental investigator received a request from a local sheriff's office to assist with a search warrant being served on a property for drug related charges. It was believed there were numerous environmental violations occurring as well. After the SWAT team had cleared the property and secured more than 30 people, the investigators began searching the property for environmental violations. Numerous violations were observed including commercial dumping of tree debris, open burning of tree debris, dumping household garbage and maintaining a nuisance injurious to health due to sewage being dumped onto the ground. Five individuals were charged for environmental violations including four with felony commercial dumping and one for the nuisance injurious to health.

A patrol officer located a large dump site in the Ocala National Forest and notified an environmental investigator who responded. They located several receipts in the pile, one of which included a name. Also in the pile were receipts from various pharmacies for Sudafed and other items used to make methamphetamine as well as a large number of hypodermic needles and plastic bottles consistent with methamphetamine cooking operations. The investigators were able to get surveillance photos and video of the suspect who they confirmed was the suspect named on the receipt. They also obtained video of the suspect's truck. A short time later, they saw the suspect driving the truck. They knew he had a suspended driver's license and conducted a stop for the violation. During the stop they determined that he cleaned out foreclosed houses, which was consistent with the trash dumped. He eventually admitted to the dumping. He was arrested on the suspended license charge and also found to be in possession of heroin and drug paraphernalia. Charges for felony commercial littering, felony dumping of hazardous waste and nuisance injurious to health were later filed. The site was cleaned up during a national forest cleanup event and the total garbage weighed over 5,000 pounds.

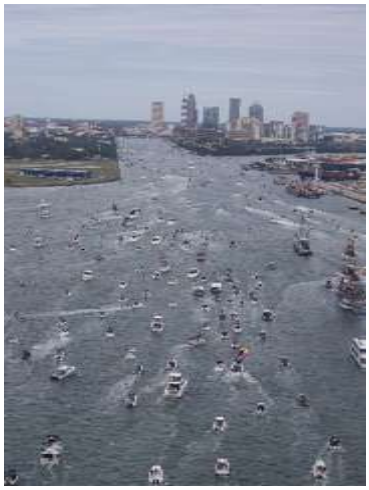
UNIQUE CROSS BOUNDARY OR COOPERATIVE ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

Aviation

Aviation plays a vital role in the agency's efforts to enforce conservation and boating laws. It is also a unique tool that is essential for the protection of endangered and threatened species, environmental resources and safeguarding the public. The aviation section is instrumental in many of the approximately 1,000 rescues the FWC Division of Law Enforcement performs each year.

FWC Aviation Unit personnel participated in a multi-agency Change of Command ceremony at United States Coast Guard, Air Station Miami at Opa Locka Airport.

Aviation Unit personnel participated in several multi-agency training initiatives which included: the Airborne Law Enforcement Association, national aviation safety training conference in Reno, Nevada, along with other airborne law enforcement partners from around the world. This training provides opportunities to learn about the latest in technology and aviation safety; training for law enforcement patrols; training for air and ground crews for aerial cannabis detection with Florida Domestic Marijuana Eradication Program; and Air Deployable Search and Rescue (ADSAR) teams attached to Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams. Pilots were involved in providing aviation boating safety support for holiday boating weekend activities and specialized events such as Billy Bowlegs in Ft. Walton, spiny lobster mini-season, and the Gasparilla event in Tampa.



Aviation unit personnel worked with the FWC Special Operation Group (SOG) to provide classroom and aircraft familiarization training for new team members and to exercise team movement during a statewide SOG training in Immokalee.

Aviation unit personnel and assets provided support for the State of Florida, Emergency Operation Center response to Hurricane Irma. This included air coordination as Air Operations Branch Director (AOBD) working with other federal, state, county and local partners; aviation support to provide geo-tagged photographs for emergency response to areas affected by Hurricane Irma; and aviation support for Unified Command in Miami by providing geo-tagged photographs for emergency response for vessels displaced by the hurricane.

In preparation for the upcoming 2018 hurricane season, aviation unit personnel participated in planning meetings with the Florida Department of Emergency Management (FDEM) and the State of Florida Emergency Operation Center (SEOC). They also provided aviation support for development of a statewide search and rescue plan with Emergency Support Function (ESF) partners.

INNOVATIONS IN CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT

K-9

The FWC K-9 program has 18 teams statewide and provides services such as search and rescue, fugitive apprehension, evidence recovery, illegal fish and wildlife detection and enforcement of import/export laws pertaining to exotic and protected species. The four newest teams to the FWC K-9 program are pictured here during the 12-week K-9 training academy hosted and instructed by FWC K-9 Training Officers. Each team received training in K-9 obedience, man tracking, area search, article search and wildlife detection. Pictured from left to right are Officer Jason Hutchinson / K-9 Zara, Officer Brandon Hadwin, Officer Anthony Delatorre and Officer Peter Gaudion / K-9 Rita. Upon graduation, these K-9 teams joined the largest K-9 program in the country dedicated to conservation law enforcement.

Fleet and Technical Services

FWC's Fleet and Technical Services Section is comprised the Fleet Services Unit and Technical Services Unit. Section personnel consist of skilled sworn and civilian members that consistently solve some of our unique conservation law enforcement equipment issues. The section's primary responsibility is to support and provide division members with the best available equipment, technology and data-related services that keep our members safely focused on mission responsibilities. Section staff serve as a force multiplier that keeps the division of law enforcement mission ready. One great example of their ability to innovate is the development of a long gun anti-theft mechanism that has prevented thefts of long guns from patrol vehicles. The box is placed with the opening closest to the vehicle door. The box's end door design allows the vehicle's door to act as a complete lockout of the box and maximizes rear compartment storage. The vehicle door lock and lock motor is completely isolated from the factory manual and electronic controls, which eliminates some of the risk of tampering and operator error that would involve existing factory controls. The door lock switch is discretely placed, somewhere easily accessible. The control system for the door lock is a simple automotive relay.

The complete electrical system consists of the switch, the relay, the timer and the factory door lock motor. The system powers from the +12v distribution for the rest of the police equipment. On FWC vehicles, this circuit is protected by a main circuit breaker and an 8-hour timer. After 8 hours or when the breaker is tripped, the door will not open at all. This leaves an automatic level of security for off-duty storage. With +12v applied to one side of the installed door lock switch, contact is momentarily made. This simultaneously operates the unlock function through the automotive relay and begins the delay timer. After the delay expires (variable delay from 100 ms-1,000 minutes - FWC vehicles use a delay close to 15 seconds) it inverts the +12v pulse and locks the door.

OTHER SPECIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ISSUES

Officer of the Year: Michael Bibeau, Southwest Region

Officer Michael Bibeau graduated from FWC Academy Class 14 in 2010 and began his service in Collier County. He now serves in Pinellas, where he transferred in 2013. A graduate of the University of South Florida with a criminal justice degree, Bibeau enjoys the outdoors and loves to golf, fish and spend time at the beach with his wife Kara. He was recently selected to be a member of the inaugural Advanced Conservation Academy (ACA) where he traveled and trained in every region of the state. This past year, Officer Bibeau rescued four occupants of an overturned jet-ski who had fallen off and were being swept out to sea by strong currents, conducted 27 search and rescue hours, made two BUIs, more than 75 resource misdemeanors, three major resource violations and issued 254 warnings. He conducted more than 1,300 water patrol hours, more than 133 shellfish patrol days and maintains a strong working relationship with other local agencies. He was also awarded the North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association (NAWEOA) 2017 Lifesaving Award for receiving FWC's Lifesaving Award in which he saved the life of a drowning man who jumped off the Tierra Verde Bridge. Officer Bibeau works extremely hard, day-in and day-out, serving the Pinellas County community and surrounding areas he cares so much about.

Investigator of the Year: Jarrod Molnar, Northwest Region

Investigator Jarrod Molnar is an Investigator 1 assigned to the Northwest Region Investigations Team and currently resides in Navarre with his wife Marisela. Molnar is assigned to Santa Rosa County, but his investigations have ranged from Escambia County to Walton County and even into Alabama. He fully embraces the teamwork mentality and regularly assists other investigators and officers with their caseload. He initiated the now formalized NW Region Investigator Mentor Program and is currently serving as a formal mentor to further the advancement of future investigators. His work involving serious boating accidents has been exemplary. The knowledge he has gained regarding GPS data evidence retrieval and reconstruction during boating accident investigations has helped to elevate the boating accident investigative work being done region-wide. His resource cases have also been noteworthy – one of which resulted in charges for a habitual turkey poacher that had previously avoided apprehension. Molnar has handled two high-profile bear conflict incidents with professionalism and has coordinated with FWC biologists to make sure that the appropriate animals involved in the incidents were identified. He continues to serve as an intoxilyzer inspector for the Norwest Region and has conducted intoxilyzer training at multiple captains' area meetings. Molnar has also recently become a vessel theft instructor and has taught classes around the state for indicators of stolen vessels.

Boating Officer of the Year: Juan Blanco, South Region Bravo

Officer Juan Blanco was born in Hato Rey, Puerto Rico and his love for nature and the outdoors started at a very young age from listening to his father's stories. He has been married to his wife Evelyn Blanco for 9 years. Blanco began doing volunteer work for FWC in 2010 and he received a career diploma in 2011 for wildlife and forestry conservation. In 2015, Blanco completed FWC Academy Class 28, and returned to Miami-Dade as an officer. He has taken a leadership role in BUI enforcement within his assigned patrol area, is a Breath Test Operator, finished Standardized Field Sobriety Task Proficiency training and completed Seated Battery Proficiency training. He participated in all the BUI saturation details in Miami-Dade County this year and he has personally made more than 25 arrests for BUI. He also issued 124 UBCs and numerous resource and boating safety citations and warnings. He is a highly self-motivated officer who embraces any chance he gets to teach others something new and his exemplary social skills have not only been demonstrated to his fellow officers but also in his daily dealings with the public.

Reserve Officer of the Year: Mike Fischer, Northeast Region
Reserve Captain Mike Fischer was born in Wisconsin but moved to Florida in 1968. His career began with GFC in 1981 and culminated with his retirement from the FWC in 2016. Mike is married to his wife Kim, and they have two sons; Jacob and Dillan. While reservists are required to work a minimum of 96 hours each year, he has logged more than 500. Captain Fischer is well respected throughout the region, maintaining a positive reputation for his level of dedication and knowledge of the job. For many years as an investigator, Fischer's vast experience allowed him to provide the expert support needed on some of the most important incidents and investigations. This has not changed in his role as the Northeast Region Reserve Captain. He consistently works with supervisors, identifying gaps in service where the reserve program can help. He attends all Northeast Region command staff meetings and can often be found working at the regional office. He is a valuable member of the NE Region training team and regularly assists training staff in delivering quality in-service training to both full time and reserve members. Fischer worked closely with Reserve Officer David Stermen over the past two years on a project where they gathered surplus uniforms to send to our conservation law enforcement partners in Africa. It is due in no small part to Reserve Captain Mike Fischer's work that the relevance of the FWC reserve program has greatly increased.

Team of the Year: Reynaud Patrol Squad, South Region Bravo (Lt. George Reynaud, Officers Adrian Perez, Gabriel Fernandez, Ronald Washington, and Juan Blanco)

The Miami Dade Patrol Squad consists of Lt. George Reynaud, Officers Gabriel Fernandez, Adrian Perez, Ronald Washington and Juan Blanco. Each of the members of this squad are exceptional and together they form a team that is worthy of recognition. This team has made 49 BUI arrests, issued 487 UBCs, 93 misdemeanor resource citations, conducted 20 boating accident investigations, issued 40 UTCs and made several felony arrests over the past year. All the team members are Breath Test Operators and experienced in advanced field sobriety training. Four of the team members are Field Training Officers, two are Critical Incident Stress Management team members, one is a Drug Recognition Expert, and four have attended Waterborne Response team training. This year they have had great success working collaboratively with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on migratory bird cases and have recorded more than a dozen misdemeanor citations related to the illegal capture of migratory birds. They have made an outstanding effort in resource protection, boating safety, BUI enforcement, livery inspections, and even Homeland Security. This squad has also participated in several career days at local public and private schools, educating youth of all ages on the importance of conservation and boating safety. They participated at the Christopher Columbus Anglers Club 1st Annual Bass Fishing Tournament, assisted in a python handling and hunting event for Senator Book and are involved in local mentoring organizations for inner-city youth. They have pioneered a new partnership with Big Brothers/Big Sisters and have inspired a total of sixteen of our sworn personnel to participate and commit to one-on-one mentorship with these local youths. This

team exemplifies servant leadership. They demonstrate a consistent willingness to value the mission and recognize the big picture.

Duty Officer of the Year: Michael McDaniel, Northeast Region

Duty Officer Mike McDaniel grew up in Central Florida and completed the Hunter Safety Education Course at the age of 13, which started his passion for the outdoors. He was a camp counselor at the Ocala Youth Camp and became an FWC Hunter Safety Instructor and Range Safety Officer at 18. In February 2015, he began his career with FWC as a Duty Officer in the Orlando Regional Communication Center (ORCC). McDaniel is a true team player and selflessly volunteered to work multiple shifts while the ORCC was critically understaffed. He worked alongside FWC and U.S. Forestry Officers promoting hunting and sportsmanship during the Wounded Warriors Outreach and Operation Outdoor Freedom and furthered his FWC and Northeast Regional knowledge by completing multiple ride-a-longs with FWC and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) officers. He took the initiative to upgrade the old FWC ORCC manual flip chart by creating a new digital flip chart, which contains critical contact information and resources, not only for Northeast, but for North Central and Northwest Regions as well. In addition to all his contributions within the Northeast Region, Mike received a commendation from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) for devising a method of monitoring out of state USFWS officers while they operated a weeks-long fire detail in the Northeast Region. Duty Officer McDaniel is committed to the mission of the FWC, evidenced by his dedication to improving processes, volunteer efforts to better his team and his participation in outreach events.

Employee of the Year: Peter Begin, Northeast Region

Peter Begin is a Call Center Specialist in the Northeast Regional Office Service Center. He started with the FWC in 2013. Originally from Vermont, he relocated to Florida many years ago to be with his wife, Stefanie. Peter and Stefanie have two sons, Sam and Gus. He is an avid outdoorsman and shares this passion with his entire family. Peter always maintains a professional attitude when handling all customers, whether they are on the phone or in person. He is very knowledgeable about a myriad of subjects and is eager to share his knowledge with customers and coworkers. His kind and educational approach to his work promotes the agency's mission by providing a positive environment for citizens and employees to learn. In his work, Peter does everything he can to gain as much information as possible so he doesn't have to transfer callers. Not only does this help other employees, it provides exceptional customer service. He is eager to learn about all aspects of the FWC, and by doing this he promotes teamwork among divisions, while also portraying a consistent FWC message. Peter was an instrumental asset during the Northeast Region DLE inventory, the recent office expansion at his location and process improvement. His reliability and positive attitude make him an asset to the FWC family. He continues to provide excellent support to Northeast Region Division of Law Enforcement members, as well as other divisions, and our customers.

Prosecutor of the Year: Ryan Butler, South Region Alpha
Ryan Butler is an Assistant State Attorney for the 19th Judicial Circuit covering Martin, St. Lucie, Okeechobee and Indian River Counties. He is also a Special Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, which enables him to prosecute at a federal level. ASA Butler has a long history of working FWC high-profile cases involving boating homicides and the illegal commercialization

of Florida's natural resources. He works with FWC officers from start to finish and is always available to them, regardless of what time they call him. He involves himself in many of the cases by going on patrol with officers and recognizes the importance of observing crime scenes. His reputation in the law enforcement community is outstanding and his dedication to working collaboratively with law enforcement is evident by his commitment to always being available to serve. In May 2017, after a report of possible turtle egg poaching, a known violator who lives in Palm Beach County (in the 15th Judicial Circuit) was identified as actively poaching marine turtle eggs on St Lucie County beaches (in the19th Judicial Circuit). Throughout the case, ASA Butler provided invaluable assistance, guidance and advice. He arranged to prosecute the case in federal court and secured two guilty pleas in federal court for two felony violations of the Lacey Act. Because of his knowledge of state and federal resource laws, ASA Butler could recognize the importance of prosecuting this case federally. He continues to serve the people of Florida in a commendable way, just as he has done as a prosecutor for the past two decades.

Biologist of the Year: Jason Waller, Northeast Region

Jason Waller has been with the agency for 15 years. He began his career on Lake Okeechobee working on lake restoration projects and for the past 10 years, he has been part of the alligator management program. He is currently the lead for alligator egg and hatchling collection for alligator farms, private and public waters, and is the alligator bite coordinator. Jason has demonstrated exceptional teamwork by crossing division lines to assist law enforcement with numerous alligator incidents and investigations. During alligator/human conflict incidents, Jason always ensures that law enforcement officers have assistance from the Alligator Management Program and often offers proactive guidance to officers and investigators. During two commercial alligator farm investigations, Jason provided assistance and resources to gather invaluable information and evidence during the investigations. He kept his team focused and helped overcome obstacles during long hours of monotonous, yet dangerous work. Several cases would not have been successful without Jason's vast knowledge and innovative ideas. He has become a critical part of the Northeast Region's law enforcement operation's and effectiveness. We are extremely fortunate to have such a great working relationship with Jason and look forward to more creative and collaborative work in the future.

The FWC Division of Law Enforcement prides itself on professionalism in all aspects. It is an accredited law enforcement agency, achieving its initial accreditation from the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation (CFA) in 2009 and awarded reaccreditation (the division's third) in 2017.

Florida encompasses an incredible variety of habitats and is unique in the variety and productivity of its natural resources, hence FWC officers have a unique mission. Specially trained and equipped, FWC officers provide complete service response and protection services to the resources and public anywhere in Florida.

The three vital words of our motto guide everything we do:

PATROL, PROTECT, PRESERVE