



# 2023 Bulletin

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# ALABAMA

*Michael M. Weathers, Colonel*



## AGENCY OVERVIEW

The Law Enforcement Section of the Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division aids in the protection and management of Alabama’s wildlife resources and the safety of the public through a fair and balanced enforcement program.

## TRAINING

With the 2022 purchase of Trijicon RMR red dot sighted Glock Model 45 9mm handguns, the Law Enforcement Section was able to begin the process of transitioning away from the previously issued Glock Model 19 which were equipped with standard sights. The Law Enforcement Section’s training cadre spent well over a year developing the transition course to the new red dot sighted handguns. In addition to the new sights, each handgun issued was equipped with a Streamlight weapon mounted light. The new weapons were universally well received, and qualification scores went up approximately 8% with the new weapons. Supervisors and specialty unit personnel were issued the more compact Glock Model 43X 9mm handgun also equipped with Trijicon RMR red dot sights. The Law Enforcement Section replaces handguns on a five-year rotation and has issued Glock handguns for the last 15 years. Though Aimpoint red dot sights have been issued on every patrol rifle for the last six years, the new handguns represent the first red dot sighted handgun issued to our personnel.

The utilization of Alabama’s Public Shooting Range System continues to increase with no signs of slowing. This system is owned by the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division and is under the control and management of the Law Enforcement Section. To address the increased traffic on our ranges, Conservation Enforcement Officers have been tasked with



providing a greater presence on each range. This presence includes active firearms instruction to the public who visit those ranges. To better prepare our officers for this new task, a Range Safety Officer course specific to our facilities was developed and continues to be taught to all new officers of each enforcement district. Though our Section has more than 30 FBI Certified Firearms Instructors, much of their previous training in range operation was specific to Law Enforcement qualifications. With the safe operation of a public range being much different than what they have traditionally experienced on law enforcement ranges, this training successfully bridges the gap. The public response to the increased presence of our officers on the ranges has been exceptionally positive.

## **FUNDING AND STAFFING**

The Law Enforcement Section brought 9 new officers onboard this year. With the latest round of hiring, our Section is nearing its full staffing goal of 145 officers. Retirements and the previous year's promotions necessitated the largest promotion of Sergeants in 20 years. 10 Conservation Enforcement Officers were promoted to the rank of Sergeant in May. Every District in the state and both Special Task Units received new Sergeants. Additionally, three Captains and two Lieutenants were promoted this year. Lieutenant Bryan Fisher was promoted to the rank of Captain in the Montgomery administrative office. Captain Fisher will aid the daily operations of the command staff and will be instrumental in the accreditation process of the Law Enforcement Section.

The Nighttime Feral Swine and Coyote License set forth by the legislature which went into effect on July 1, 2021, continues to be very popular and has given a new source of funding that has assisted with previous budget issues.

Over the last two years, cost of living adjustments totaling 8% have been enacted for all state employees by the state legislature. State employee salaries in all job classifications have failed to keep up with inflation and private sector pay increases. The latest round of cost-of-living adjustments is hoped to have a positive effect on recruitment. Though courting qualified officer applicants continues to be a struggle currently.

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT TRENDS**

In October of 2020 the Division's Hunter Education Unit transitioned from the supervision of the Wildlife Section where it has resided since its inception in 1973 to the Law Enforcement Section. This transition paved the way for a much more aggressive range purchase and development program. In May of 2022, the Law Enforcement Section closed on the purchase of a 200-acre parcel of property located in Shelby County, Alabama's central most county. This property will be developed into an all-inclusive state shooting range that offers rifle, pistol, shotgun, and archery ranges as well as fishing opportunities on one facility. With approximately 75% of all Pittman Robertson Act funds generated by target shooters at present time, the development of state-owned shooting ranges has become a priority. At the time of this report, two more parcels of land adjoining the Shelby Range are being purchased that will increase the footprint of that facility to nearly 1,000 acres.

## **OTHER SPECIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES**

In its first full year, the Hunter Education Unit's "Handgun 101" course has been wildly successful. Hosted at our State Shooting Ranges, this program takes first-time firearms owners and teaches them the fundamentals of safety, marksmanship, and public range etiquette. This 4-hour course has the goal of reaching new constituents in the ever-growing pool of first-time firearms owners, more than 13 million new gun owners were created in 2021 alone. Each course ends with a short talk explaining the Pittman-Robertson Act and how the funds





generated by target shooters conserve the natural resource wealth of our nation. On the heels of the success of the Handgun 101 course, three additional courses were developed: Handgun 102, Rifle 101, and Shotgun 101. Our Handgun 102 course is designed to take students that have successfully completed the 101 course and expand on that base of knowledge. It covers safe storage, cleaning, and a host of additional subjects that students of the 101-course requested. The Rifle 101 and Shotgun 101 courses follow the exact 4-hour format that the Handgun 101 course follows. Both are “first step” courses designed to impart the same level of knowledge and familiarity with rifle and shotguns. Each of the additional courses have been very successful. In addition to the Handgun, Rifle and Shotgun 101 courses hosted this year on State Shooting Ranges, the Law Enforcement Section continues to host “Nighttime Thermal/Night Vision Open Range Nights.” The event, staffed by L.E. Section firearms instructors, are an opportunity for shooters to bring out their firearms equipped with night vision and thermal sights for a night of safe shooting. These nighttime events continue to be very popular.



In the late summer of 2022, Conservation Enforcement Officers had the rare privilege of working the 2022 World Games. Following the model of the Olympics, the World Games takes place in a new city every 4 years and Birmingham was chosen as the host city for 2022. Officers of the Law Enforcement Section worked all outdoor water events hosted at Oak Mountain State Park. The officers universally enjoyed working the event and drew praise from the events sponsors and fellow law enforcement agencies for their efforts.

In January of 2023, Conservation Enforcement officers and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (D.C.N.R.) Honor Guard assisted with the second inauguration of Governor Kay Ivey. Formed approximately 15 years ago, the D.C.N.R. Honor Guard has become the premier Honor Guard in the state of Alabama. In addition to the great benefit they provide the families of our employees in their time of need, they perform activities like the inauguration and represent our department in the best possible way.

## **EQUIPMENT**

Throughout 2023, the Law Enforcement Section undertook the process of selecting and purchasing approximately 26 new patrol boats for issuance across the state. Multiple models of Vexus and SeaArk boats were selected. A committee was formed in 2022 that was tasked with selecting the exact style and size of vessel that would be most appropriate for the many waterways across the state. For the first time,



field officers had a great deal of input into the specific vessels that were purchased and how each vessel would be equipped. Historically the patrol boats operated by the Law Enforcement Section have had very few markings and often were not equipped with emergency lighting. All vessels purchased during 2023 have uniform markings and emergency lights. This is the largest single purchase of boats for our Section in over 20 years.

The availability of patrol trucks continues to be a consistent problem. In speaking with other L.E. agencies this problem seems to be widespread. Our Section replaces approximately 20% of its fleet annually. In early 2023 we were able to purchase 22 trucks and 2 S.U.V.'s. and saw delivery in mid-2023.



## AWARDS

Conservation Enforcement Officers of the Law Enforcement Section were chosen in 2023 for several awards. C.E.O. Senior Luke Lemley was chosen as the Mississippi Flyway Council Officer of the Year. Sergeant Bill Freeman was chosen as the Alabama Wildlife Federation Officer of the Year and C.E.O. Senior Jason Perkins was chosen as Alabama's SEAFWA Officer of the Year.

## ARKANSAS

*Brad Young, Colonel*

### AGENCY OVERVIEW

The Arkansas Game & Fish Commission continues to work towards the realignment of internal positions to better serve the recreating public of Arkansas. Two new Deputy Directors were appointed this year, making up the command hierarchy of Director Austin Booth, Chief of Staff Chris Racey, Deputy Director Spencer Griffith, Deputy Director Ben Batten, and Deputy Director Brad Carner. Two new divisions were also created that consist of the Private Lands Division, and the Shooting Sports Division. This addition led to two new division chief positions and a whole plethora of additional positions in each new division. The Enforcement Division also added a Lieutenant Colonel position for the first time in agency history. This led to the addition of Michael "Steve" Paul (Major) to the Enforcement Command Staff, which now consists of Colonel Brad Young, Lt. Col. Jake Dunn, Major Brian Aston (Spec. Ops.), Major Nakia Crims (West Region), and Major Steve Paul (East Region).



Through a legislative bill, we were able to rename our "officers" in the State of Arkansas from Wildlife Officers to Game Wardens. Although across the nation many different wildlife agencies have many different names they call their officers, almost all sportsmen and women correlate wildlife law enforcement with the term "Game Warden." We felt it important to get back to our roots and to call ourselves what we originally started out being called. The renaming of our



officers also served as a morale booster for most of them, as an internal pole showed a 97% desire for the change.

## **TRAINING**

On May 7, 2023, Class E-1-23 started 836 hours of the most diverse law enforcement training in the State of Arkansas at the AGFC Enforcement Division’s Training Academy. The school started with 14 Game Warden Cadets. Throughout the first two weeks of school, the grueling curriculum and tough physical standards took their toll on some, leaving the class with 12 Wardens Cadets remaining. Graduation will take place on September 8 in Conway, Arkansas. The 12 graduating Game Wardens will then report to their assigned districts to complete an eight-week field training program before being permanently assigned to a duty station.



*Cadets in “sandy” learning to come together.*



*Cadets learning to march and sing cadence.*

We have continued to advance our officer’s training throughout the year by providing in-service courses such as ALERRT’s E.R.A.S.E, SFST refreshers, OCT refreshers, Handcuffing refreshers, TASER recertification, Racial Profiling, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, Anti-Bias for Law Enforcement, Firearms and other online courses offered through the Arkansas Criminal Justice Institute. We continually encourage our officers to further their professional education by seeking out and attending new training opportunities.

Our supervisors continue to further their education and training through courses such as School for Law Enforcement Supervision, a four-week course that is both intense and mentally challenging, Arkansas LEADER, and advanced supervision course for upper administrators, the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Virginia, and a host of other courses offered by Arkansas and nationally.

## **OTHER SPECIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ISSUES**

Game wardens have continued to focus efforts on “major violations” targeting the most egregious violators that are having a negative impact on the natural resources of Arkansas. Numerous major cases were made throughout the year utilizing “out of the box” thinking and techniques not typically used by our Game Wardens. Some of these techniques used were NEST doorbell

cameras, License Plate Readers, DNA sampling, Shotgun Tool-marking comparison, and many methods utilizing programs, networks and social media.



*Officers with a night hunting case.*



*Picture of evidence used in a turkey baiting case.*

### **FUNDING AND STAFFING ISSUES**

Arkansas, like most other states, continues to struggle with the recruitment on new talent to the field of Wildlife Law Enforcement. Some initiatives that have occurred over the past year to help draw quality people to apply for open positions was the raising of the starting pay for our Game Wardens to 50K. The Arkansas State Legislature also committed a 2K, 3.5K, or 5K stipend for law enforcement in Arkansas.

Major Aston worked with staff from Enforcement and Communications to start up a “ride-along” initiative. This initiative is designed to give people with an interest in becoming a Game Warden a brief inside look into what we do. This program will provide a four-hour job, and a four-hour question, answer, and instructional block on the hiring/training process. The intent of this program is to give those individuals a more hands on and up close and personal view of what to expect upon employment. The first inaugural ride-along will consist of more than 40 people spread across the state riding with our Game Wardens on August 5.

We continue to seek funding from both the agency and grants to move our “21<sup>st</sup> century” initiative forward. So far, we have been able to purchase and start the implementation of body cameras, new Tasers, virtual reality training, report management system, standards system, evidence system, and a new computer aided dispatch. We are also working towards the purchase, installation, and implementation of mobile routers and mobile data terminals. These products consist of the AXON Echo System, Craddle-Point 1700 dual routers, and Panasonic Toughbook. We have coupled these with the Gamber-Johnson console, mongoose 9” arm and Gamber-Johnson docking station. So far, we are very pleased with these products.



## FLORIDA

### **Brian G. Smith, Colonel**

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Division of Law Enforcement consists of 878 sworn personnel who 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 more than 34 million acres of land. They are highly trained, versatile law enforcement officers with full police powers and statewide jurisdiction. Additionally, FWC's cooperative agreements with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service cross-deputize officers allowing them to enforce federal marine fisheries and wildlife laws, ensuring state and federal consistency in resource protection.



### **DIVISION LEADERSHIP**

The FWC recently announced Brian Smith as the new director for the agency's Division of Law Enforcement. Colonel Smith will oversee more than a thousand employees who protect Florida's natural resources and provide public safety on state lands and waters.

Col. Smith was born and raised in Tampa, Florida. After graduating high school, he joined the army and was assigned to the 3rd Ranger Battalion of the 75th Ranger Regiment. In 1995, he fulfilled his commitment to his country and returned to Tampa where he began his law enforcement career with the Game and Freshwater Fish Commission. As an officer, he worked in Collier, Manatee and Sarasota counties before promoting to the FWC training center in 2004.



During his 28 years of service, Smith has served as captain over professional standards and policy; major over captive wildlife; and lieutenant colonel over conservation initiatives, rule development, south operations, training, captive wildlife, and boating and waterways. He is a graduate of the National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Academy, FDLE Chief Executive Seminar and FDLE Future Studies Group.

"Growing up hunting and fishing with my father and childhood friends, I developed a love for the outdoors and the fish and wildlife resources of Florida. My career with the FWC has been incredibly fulfilling and I am truly honored to be the next colonel for the FWC, serving the men and women of the Division of Law Enforcement and people of this great state," said Col. Brian Smith, director of the FWC Division of Law Enforcement. "I love this agency and the work we do, and I know we will continue to set the standard for conservation law enforcement."

## TRAINING

### FWC Training Center

In 2023, the FWC Law Enforcement Academy graduated two classes (Class 44 and 45), resulting in 52 new conservation law enforcement officers. Conducting back-to-back training academies, sometimes with a several-month overlap, creates an extremely demanding pace for training staff. Additionally, the FWC Law Enforcement Academy partnered with the College of the Florida Keys, Monroe County Sheriff's Office, and Key West Police Department to conduct a standalone Keys-only academy with recruits from all three agencies. During this academy, which was the first of its type, the FWC recruits formed bonds with recruits from the other agencies they will be working with in the field.



### In-Service Training

In-service training continued throughout the state to ensure FWC officers were prepared to protect themselves and others as well as the state's natural resources. In-service training focused on firearm qualifications and proficiency drills, replacement of all Tasers due to a warranty issue, non-lethal weapons, legal aspects regarding the use of force, training scenarios, and CPR/first aid training. Additional in-service training highlighted the process of transitioning FWC officers from the Taser X2 to the new and improved Taser 7. The training for this transition consists of online,

classroom and practical exercises that are thorough and realistic, and when complete, will produce better prepared and equipped officers representing the FWC. The Training Section also assisted 12 lieutenants who were selected to participate in the Lieutenant to Captain Leadership Development Program. These 12 lieutenants were mentored by 12 captains for six months to prepare them to take the next step in their careers.



### Recruiting

Division of Law Enforcement recruiters continued to focus on the mission of finding the most qualified applicants to fill vacancies, enhance diversity and increase retention. Recruiters have



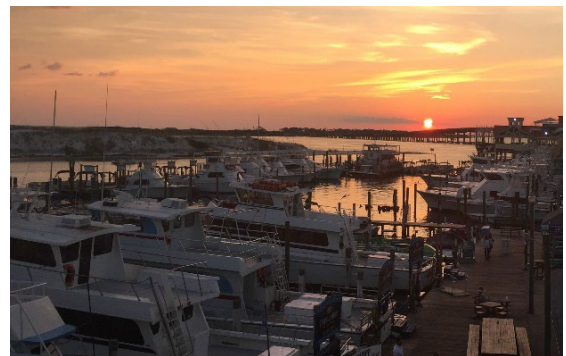
been involved in numerous job fairs across the state, with a focus on finding the best applicants to wear our uniform.



## **BOATING AND WATERWAYS**

### Boating Safety and Education

The Boating Safety Unit coordinates and administers Florida's Recreational Boating Safety Grant, manages Florida's boating accident reporting process, and creates Florida's annual Boating Accident Statistical Report. The FWC is committed to safe boating and developed and distributed radio, television, digital and print media promoting boating safety and education to millions of boaters. The unit supported outreach and participation in the Miami International Boat Show, the International Convention of Allied Sports Trades (ICAST), helped coordinate Operation Dry Water, the Florida State Fair, and National Safe Boating Week activities.



The FWC's Boating Under the Influence enforcement efforts in 2022 were tremendous. Statewide, FWC officers made 508 BUI cases, removing impaired operators from the waters of the state. Continuing the importance of boating safety education, FWC issued more than 73,000 boating safety identification cards to individuals.

### Case Spotlight

On July 2, 2022, a 32-foot center console vessel with five people onboard was traveling south along the Intracoastal Waterway in St. Johns County after spending the afternoon at Matanzas Sandbar. The operator crossed the wake of another vessel and lost control. The vessel, which was traveling at 64 miles per hour according to the onboard GPS, then turned hard to port and exited the marked channel traveling into shallow water and mud along the shoreline.

Upon impact with the shore, one of the occupants was ejected from the vessel. The vessel then traveled about 106 yards and collided with some mangrove trees. After the vessel impacted the

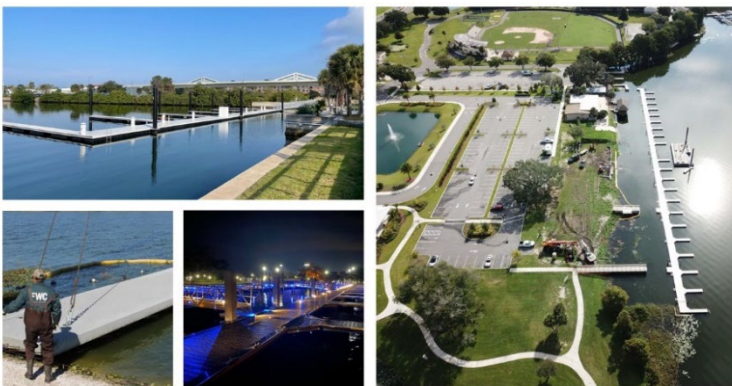
mangrove trees, another occupant onboard was ejected and collided with the trees resulting in a fatal injury. The vessel continued through the mangroves before coming to rest on an island where the operator was ejected.

In addition to the fatality, four other people were injured because of this accident. During the investigation, numerous empty alcoholic containers were located throughout the vessel. The investigation also determined the vessel operator was under the influence of alcohol at the time of the accident. Charges were filed relating to careless operation of a vessel, violation of navigational rule 6 – safe speed, and boating under the influence of alcohol.

### Boating Access

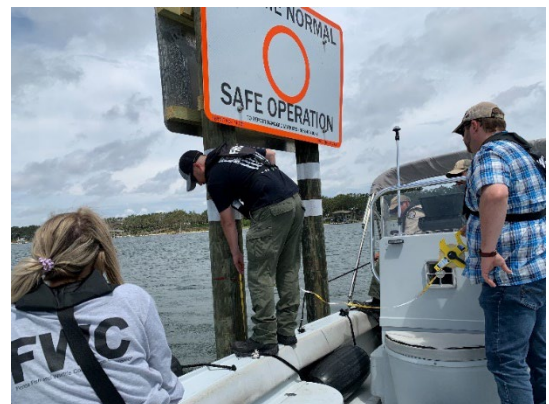
The Boating Access Unit is responsible for coordinating and administering Florida’s Boat Access Program, which identifies, develops, maintains and expands boating access in Florida. In 2022-23, 14 grant applicants were awarded more than \$8.6 million in state or federal funds for boating access projects. In addition to administering grants, the FWC staffs a full-time crew to handle construction and repair of nearly 300 ramps statewide owned and operated by the FWC or maintained by the FWC with cooperator agreements. This unit also aids with waterway marker inventory, which includes inventories and assessments; installations; inspections of contractor installations; and flipping waterway marker signs during manatee seasons. The FWC is developing a second crew to increase capacity for inspection, maintenance, and repair statewide. One of the most valuable tools for people boating in Florida is the Florida Public Boat Ramp Finder, which

provides information, maps, and photographs for more than 1,500 public trailer boat launches and 700 public hand launch access points across the state. In 2022-23, the FWC renovated the Boat Ramp Finder to optimize it for mobile users and to modernize the technology supporting the site. This update went live in fall of 2022.



### Waterway Management

The Waterway Management Unit oversees and coordinates statewide regulatory waterway markers and manages the promulgation of boating restricted areas on Florida’s waterways. Statewide, the WMU is responsible for more than 10,000 regulatory signs and buoys. This can be a challenging task, especially in the aftermath of natural disasters such as hurricanes. The WMU maintains an On-Call Response Program for identifying and correcting discrepant waterway markers throughout





Florida that may pose a threat to public safety. During 2022, the WMU responded to 268 incidents, statewide, 93 percent higher than the yearly average.

### Derelict Vessel Prevention and Removal

Derelict and abandoned vessels that litter the state pose environmental and navigational hazards. FWC law enforcement officers and partners are taking appropriate actions to reduce the risk these vessels present. Last year, 226 derelict vessels were removed with \$3.7 million in funding. We are currently on pace to remove over 350 vessels with \$6 million this year.



Thanks to the Florida Legislature, this ongoing program has helped state, county and local government agencies with the costs related to removing derelict vessels, which has stimulated removal activity throughout the state. Additional funding from the American Rescue Plan Act will assist the FWC in removing a backlog of hundreds of derelict vessels as well as operating the new Vessel Turn-In Program, which is focused on preventing derelict vessels. So far, the VTIP has removed 12 at-risk vessels with 19 currently in the removal process.

### Marine Debris Program

The Marine Debris Program oversees and coordinates statewide response; removal; research; and



prevention projects, programs, and partnerships to reduce the presence of debris and associated impacts to Florida's resources. The program provides a mechanism for intra- and inter-agency coordination of marine debris management efforts in Florida thereby furthering FWC's capacity to lead, serve as a resource, and partner in statewide and regional marine debris management. Program staff are the principal investigators for multiple large-scale collaborative

marine debris efforts and serve on or lead multiple work groups, advisory panels and task forces. They also coordinate with partner agencies and organizations to manage marine debris in sensitive habitats, provide timely and comprehensive coverage during and after severe weather, and communicate with partners and stakeholders.

Initial program funding has been secured through 2030 with the program currently managing approximately \$10 million in grants and awards. This funding supports building program capacity, hurricane response, debris removal, and hot spot mapping. It also aids Florida and regionwide restoration and recovery plans for sea turtles and birds impacted by the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill through removing entanglement and entrapment risks along the Gulf Coast. Current projects

include aerial survey mapping (including derelict vessels); removing in-water, shoreline, and mangrove marine debris; preventing aquaculture debris in partnership with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; creating a new derelict vessel database; creating FWC marine debris website, permit and resource protection workshops and trainings (including best management practices training for emergency response contractors); and developing infrastructure for sustainable fishing gear disposal, wildlife and habitat impacts research, and entanglement prevention initiatives.



### Case Spotlight

Over the past decade, the FWC has become increasingly involved in marine debris research, removal, and prevention efforts throughout the state and Gulf Region. Up to 150 million metric tons of plastic debris are estimated to exist in the marine environment with an additional 4 to 12 million metric tons destined to end up in the ocean each year. In addition to being an aesthetic eyesore, marine debris can be a navigational hazard, harm or kill marine life (via entanglement, ingestion, ghost fishing), bind and transfer chemical pollutants, transport non-native and potentially invasive species, and leach harmful plastic chemicals into the environment.

This spring, the FWC Division of Law Enforcement has been involved in multiple debris removal efforts as well as conducted several multi-agency targeted enforcement actions (TEAs), focusing on marine debris cleanup. These TEAs were designed to improve public safety for residents and visitors, protect Florida's natural resources, and serve as a training opportunity for FWC dive teams. Following are several examples of what TEAs have accomplished.

### By the Numbers

- **Cedar Key** (February) - 4 state agencies, 11 participants (5 agency staff, 6 FWC DLE), 5 airboats, and over a ton of debris removed (derelict aquaculture gear).
- **Hillsborough River** (March) - Over 20 state and city LE divers, 20 support crew, and 6 agencies/organizations represented and over a ton of debris removed (44 traffic cones, over 30 E-scooters, several bicycles, derelict traps, tires, and chairs and miscellaneous personal and consumer debris).
- **Hickory Mound WMA** (April/Earth Day event) - Over 25 volunteers and 6 support crew, and over 1,000 pounds of debris removed (cans, bottles, and food wrappers, crabbing string, tires, large metal poles).

- **Sebastian Inlet** (April/3-day event) - Over 42 state and federal divers, 25 support crew, 20 volunteers, 10 agencies/organizations, and over 900 pounds of debris removed (300 pounds of fishing weights and lures, 100 pounds of metal debris, 300 pounds of nets and line, 200 pounds of aluminum walkway grates).

## **CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT**

### Offshore Patrol Vessels

The FWC's offshore patrol vessel fleet consists of 14 specialized boats strategically stationed across Florida's extensive coastline. OPV vessels are operated and crewed by a group of 35 specially qualified and experienced FWC law enforcement officers. Heavy endurance and endurance-class vessels regularly 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 and recreational fishing vessels in state and federal waters. Primary enforcement efforts consist of joint enforcement agreement (JEA) patrols of U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone waters and safely conducting commercial shrimp boat inspections to ensure compliance with turtle excluder device regulations.



Through the current 2022-23 JEA contract year, OPV teams completed more than 2,000 vessel hours of dedicated federal JEA offshore patrol. These efforts resulted in 200 federal fisheries violations being documented and referred to NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement. An additional 370 marine fisheries violations were documented through state citations and warnings.

### Investigations

The Investigations Section works to uncover criminal conspiracies and networks. Reports are prepared along with other intelligence information 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 this section is to conduct, coordinate and support investigative operations statewide. The section provides specialized training, administrative, and technical support for regional investigations as well as 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 section also supervises long-term covert operations. These operations focus on large scale resource violators who illegally commercialize natural resources over multiple jurisdictions for personal financial gain and habitual wildlife offenders who have not been brought to justice via more overt means.

The Investigations Section provides five unique services statewide:



- Covert Resource Investigations
- Technical Operations Unit
- Internet Crimes Unit Coordinator
- Intelligence Unit
- Fish and Wildlife Forensics

### Case Spotlight

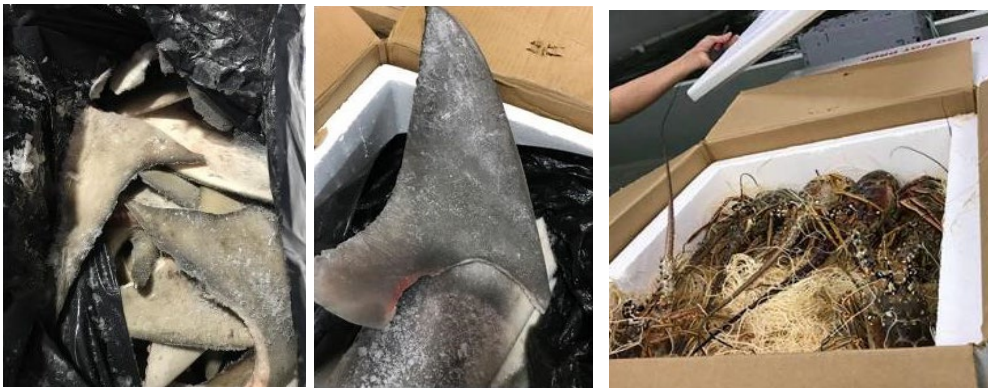
January 2023, statewide investigations filed charges against eight individuals for illegal trafficking of dangerous venomous and prohibited snakes. Investigators received verified complaints from the public indicating a black market exists for the sale and purchase of these animals. In 2020, the FWC initiated an investigation to determine the extent of this illegal activity and hold violators accountable. Over the course of the investigation, nearly 200 snakes consisting of 24 species from seven different regions of the globe were purchased or sold by FWC undercover investigators to or from wildlife traffickers. The traffickers willingly engaged in the transactions with undercover officers with full knowledge they were unpermitted and could not purchase these snakes legally. These species included the inland taipan, commonly agreed to be the most dangerous snake in the world, rhinoceros vipers, bushmasters, puff adders and tree vipers. Some of these individuals included wholesale dealers who imported large shipments of nonnative venomous snakes from multiple countries around the world, many wild caught from their native habitat. These violations pose a significant public safety threat, undermine legitimate captive wildlife dealers operating legally and threaten native wildlife populations. This operation resulted in over 600 charges and multiple high-profile arrests.



### Case Spotlight

A joint undercover investigation by the FWC and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration resulted in a federal judge in Key West sentencing two south Florida companies to a \$250,000 fine and five years of probation for exporting falsely labelled spiny lobster and shark fins from Florida to China. This investigation lasted for more than a year and uncovered a scheme by both companies, which were engaged in purchasing seafood products for export to China. To meet the high demand for spiny lobster, both companies imported product from Haiti then re-exported approximately 5,900 pounds of lobster and falsely labelled product shipping documents as "Live Florida Spiny Lobsters, Product of U.S.A." The Marathon based company also knowingly mislabeled shark fins being exported to China. They shipped approximately 5,666 pounds of shark fins falsely labeled as "Live Florida Spiny Lobster" or "Frozen Fish."





## Intelligence

Intelligence analysts provide multiple services to officers and investigators in the field as well as to other state and federal agencies. Analysts also serve as interagency liaisons within the Florida Fusion Center located at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Working directly with the Florida 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.



Regional 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 Intelligence, Department of Homeland Security, and U.S. Customs and Border

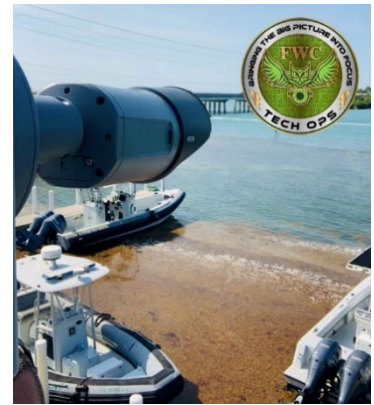


Protection. In 2022, FWC analysts responded to 1,724 requests for information to include workups on individuals and companies. They also processed 372 Field Intelligence Reports submitted by officers in the regions. FWC analysts completed over 50 photo lineups for our agency as well as other agencies and over 20 photo/video enhancements. They prepared and disseminated 39 FWC bulletins, assisted with 447 tips received from the public through social media and the

tip line, and assisted with 97 background investigations for FWC employment (sworn and nonsworn). The Intelligence Unit added a derelict vessel analyst who completed over 50 derelict vessel requests. The Intelligence Unit also has a GIS and mapping component to assist in various mapping requests that include completing maps for court presentations, cell phone mapping, dashboards, and producing monthly, quarterly, and annual statistical reports for regions. This unit has access to vast amounts of information through multiple databases and the Florida Fusion Center.

### Technical Operations

FWC's Technical Operations Unit is a statewide investigative support team comprised of two lieutenants and three investigators. The unit's mission is to empower FWC officers with the best technology, training, and techniques to produce sound evidence in their mission to protect Florida's natural resources. Although the team is small, they have more than 60 years of combined law enforcement experience and a wide range of certifications from digital forensics to electronic surveillance to cell phone record analysis. TechOps supports law enforcement operations throughout the state with forensic evidence recovery, data analysis, electronic surveillance, internet crimes investigations, and financial crime assistance. The unit specializes in remote access covert camera deployments, electronic tracking devices, cellphone record analysis, and forensic extractions of cell phones, computers, and GPS devices. Often in resource investigations the full extent of illegal operations is not discovered because digital evidence is not collected, requested or analyzed. TechOps aims to bridge this gap and deliver on their motto "bringing the big picture into focus."



### Internet Crimes Unit

The FWC's Internet Crimes Unit is staffed by 24 regional investigators and coordinated by a statewide investigations lieutenant. Investigators are trained to collect evidence generated from internet-based social media and advertising sites such as Facebook, Craigslist, Instagram, and eBay. Investigators document criminal evidence and conduct undercover operations of illegal wildlife sales over the internet. In addition, the FWC coordinates the Wildlife Cybercrimes Enforcement Group, a national collaboration of wildlife conservation internet crime investigators.

### Fish and Wildlife Forensics

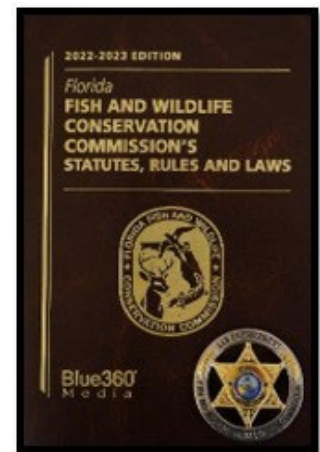
The FWC Forensic Sciences Laboratory at the University of Florida is a collaborative partnership between the FWC's Division of Law Enforcement and the University of Florida Maples Center for Forensic Medicine. Through this partnership, the FWC Forensic Sciences Laboratory has become a premier wildlife forensics resource in the Southeast. The laboratory provides a unique breadth of services to our officers with access to a broad spectrum of analytical capabilities in the areas of DNA and molecular biology, entomology, botany, pathology, osteology, toxicology, and on-scene crime scene support. DNA capabilities include species identification of most encountered terrestrial species and many marine species; gender identification in mammals and most species of birds; and DNA fingerprinting for a variety of species such as white-tailed deer, black bear, wild turkeys, canids, and felids. Most cases have



involved the genetic profiling and gender determination of poached deer, genetic profiling of wild turkey, photogrammetry, and species identification and morphological analyses of fish remains.

### Marine Law Administrator

The Marine Law Administrator serves as the Division of Law Enforcement liaison for all fishery related issues, assisting statewide law enforcement operations on conveying consistent FWC philosophy and enforcement practices. The MLA coordinates with the Division of Marine Fisheries Management and the Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management on stakeholder issues including rule development and guidelines. This liaison position facilitates open communication and messaging of law enforcement roles, priorities, limitations, and expectations with other divisions. The MLA reviews applications for special activity licenses and permits being considered by the Divisions of Marine and Freshwater Fisheries Management and provides law enforcement consultation. This position also works with the Food and Drug Administration with regards to shellfish patrol policy documents and shellfish patrol concerns.



The MLA also serves as the agency representative for law enforcement issues related to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Law Enforcement Committee, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Law Enforcement Advisory Panel, and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Law Enforcement Technical Committee. Additionally, this position serves as the agency representative for the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference and federal fisheries issues. Membership in these organizations provides an opportunity to sit on various advisory and technical groups, as well as act as chair or co-chair as experience dictates.

### Wildlife Law Administrator

The Wildlife Law Administrator serves as the Division of Law Enforcement liaison to the FWC's Division of Hunting and Game Management and Division of Habitat and Species Conservation. The WLA provides input during rule making and revision processes. This law enforcement input helps ensure rules and regulations are consistent and enforceable. This position serves as an internal bridge across disciplines to facilitate open communication and understanding of roles, priorities, limitations, and expectations. This interaction assists with managing the expectations of those partners with regards to law enforcement capabilities and historic enforcement philosophy on certain rules and statutes. It also allows the division the opportunity to create a clear message standardizing operation through consistent enforcement practices as well as establishing priority focused patrols. The WLA provides statewide coordination of the Wildlife Alert and the Wildlife Violator Compact. Through the Wildlife Alert Reward Association, the FWC received 3,986 reported violations in 2022 with 85% being email/web based. There were 95 incidents resulting in citations and/or arrests from information provided by the public. One case resulted in felony charges for three individuals illegally selling deer meat. Other cases included a variety of resource violations related to deer, wild turkey, bears, ducks, marine and freshwater fish, wildlife management areas



and trespassing crimes. Rewards provided to members of the public increased 19%, totaling \$24,300. Donations totaling \$77,836 were received primarily through court orders from cases made by FWC officers. Wildlife Alert and the FWC enhanced their reporting and tracking abilities by establishing a relationship with Tip411 and creating a new Wildlife Alert app.

### Port Investigations

Florida has over 8,400 miles of coastline, 15 public seaports, and 20 primary airports as well as more than 22 million residents and 137 million visitors per year. Thus, the FWC must take a proactive approach to protecting the state's natural resources. Currently, there are 24 designated ports of entry in Florida where individuals may lawfully enter from another country. The ease of accessibility for international travel and commercial imports and exports combined with Florida's subtropical climate has made the state an epicenter for the legal and illegal trade of fish and wildlife.

Created in 2011, the FWC's Port Investigations Team was established as a specialized task force to regulate Florida's major airports and seaports, commercial shipping facilities, highway agricultural inspection stations, and cold storage facilities while targeting the illegal wildlife trade. Initially comprised of only one investigator on a part-time basis, the program was not designed at the outset to handle the sheer volume of fish and wildlife shipments coming into and out of the state. The FWC's Port Investigations Team has since grown to include 11 full-time law enforcement officers, consisting of six investigators and five K-9 officers, strategically placed in high traffic areas of Florida. This team works tirelessly to stay up to date with everchanging shipping and transportation industry standards and maintain valuable relationships with external entities while handling full caseloads.

### Captive Wildlife

The FWC promotes responsible ownership of captive wildlife, and it is our goal to develop the best regulations possible to 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. Investigators perform inspections to ensure humane treatment and sanitary conditions are in place for the animals, verify compliance with caging and security requirements to maintain public safety, and to confirm proper records of sale and licensure are maintained.



Investigators also conduct overt and covert investigations into the illicit trade of captive wildlife.

During the 2022 calendar year, FWC's Captive Wildlife Section conducted 4,938 inspections of facilities possessing wildlife. These inspections generated 1,162 citations and warnings. Additionally, investigators responded to 169 wildlife alert complaints, 61 escaped exotic wildlife complaints and seized 553 specimens of wildlife. In 2022, there were 7,552 active captive wildlife

licenses, most of which must be renewed annually. The Captive Wildlife Section fully transitioned to an online permitting system in March of 2023. This allows a more efficient and transparent permitting process. The system also provides more accurate inventory tracking and inspection data.

### Case Highlight

Captive wildlife investigators responded to and inspected a wildlife facility and documented a myriad of violations. The facility has a history of documented violations that date back several years. A team of captive wildlife investigators, special operation group officers, and local officers removed more than 200 animals from the property. The animals included alligators, prohibited reptiles, venomous snakes, and an assortment of mammals. Due to caging requirements not being met, poor sanitation and animal welfare issues, 146 misdemeanor citations were issued.



## **INNOVATIVE ENFORCEMENT PROGRAMS**

### Aviation

The Aviation Unit plays a vital role in the agency's efforts to enforce conservation and boating laws. It is also a valuable tool for protecting endangered and threatened species, environmental resources, and safeguarding the public. It is instrumental in many of the search and rescues the FWC Division of Law Enforcement performs each year. Pilots also provide boating safety support for holiday boating weekend activities and specialized events such as spiny lobster recreational mini season.



### Case Spotlight

Pilot Grabus and his observer responded via air to a search and rescue in the Florida Straits. A 14-foot migrant vessel was overloaded and at risk of capsizing in heavy winds and high seas. Pilot Grabus assisted a shipping tanker trying to keep the vessel in its lee side to shelter it from the waves and wind. During the rescue, the vessel went underwater twice. Pilot Grabus used the aircraft FLIR to maintain visual contact with the sunken vessel and provided information and direction to a U.S. Coast Guard small boat. The USCG small boat was able to transfer the migrants to their boat and safely take them to shore.

### Case Spotlight



Lieutenant Chris Simons responded to calls regarding right whales off the beach on Hutchinson Island. FWC officers had attempted to respond by water, however, their efforts were called off due to strong southeast winds. Lieutenant Simons flew the beach line and confirmed one adult and one juvenile whale were together and appeared to be the only whales in the region. The information from this sighting allowed FWC officers, the offshore patrol vessel Atlantic Defender, and Martin County Beach Safety to monitor the whales' progress.

### Case Spotlight

Pilot II Tolbert and Lieutenant Cain assisted FWC's Division of Habitat and Species Conservation with conducting delayed aerial ignition device training at Camp Blanding. Camp Blanding and FWC personnel were trained on machine operation, aerial

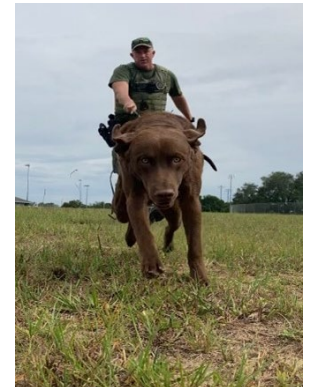


orientation and safety, and procedures for coordinating and conducting live burns. The joint coordination and training enables future aerial burn operations throughout many of Florida's wildlife management areas, which will reduce the risk of wildfires and enhance wildlife habitat for many species.



### K-9 Program

The dedicated members of the FWC K-9 Program make up the country's largest K-9 organization committed to conservation law enforcement. The program consists of 21 teams strategically placed throughout the state. Of those teams, 16 provide traditional services such as search and rescue, fugitive apprehension, evidence recovery, and illegal fish and wildlife detection. Five teams are part of the Port Investigations Unit and provide services enforcing import/export laws pertaining to exotic and protected species. Initial training for the traditional teams consists of a 400-hour K-9 academy instructed by the FWC K-9 training officers.





### Technical and Communication Services

The Technical and Communications Services Unit worked closely with L3Harris and state partner agencies in testing and approving the radio code for the statewide P25 phase 2 radio system. To prepare for the new system, the FWC began issuing new portable radios to users.

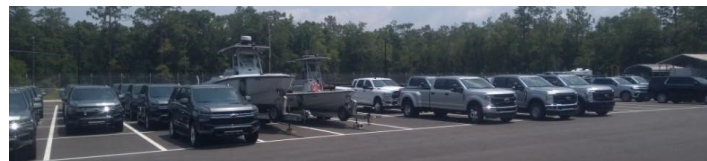


In addition, new web-based scheduling software for the four Regional Communications Centers was implemented. The new software helps automate the scheduling process and allows duty officers to access the schedule on their smartphones. The new software will also ensure that shifts and days off are done in a more consistent and fair manner.

Work is underway to implement a new equipment use log. The new log streamlines the process for tracking, allows for close to real time reporting of equipment use, and allows supervisors to monitor and evaluate equipment use.

### Fleet Services

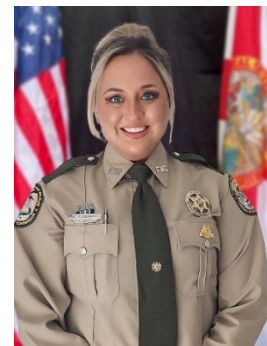
The Division of Law Enforcement Fleet Services has one main shop facility in Tallahassee. This facility supports the division's fleet and maintenance needs. All new equipment is sent to the North Florida Shop facility for rigging. Also, all major repairs are sent there. During 2022-2023, this section purchased and rigged 83 vehicles, primarily patrol F-150s and a few Tahoes, 10 UTVs, and 16 vessel packages. Among these were 29' Safe Boats, Diamondback Airboats, and 24' and 28' Metal Shark vessels. Along with the new equipment rigging, FWC technicians supported the Division of Law Enforcement with Hurricane Ian disaster response as well as Operation Vigilant Sentry and deploying to assist our law enforcement partners in Texas.



## **OTHER SPECIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATES**

### **Officer of the Year - Officer Elisha Cernuto, South Region Alpha**

Officer Elisha Cernuto joined FWC in 2016 following a career path that included being a manager at a telecommunications company, U.S. Coast Guard service and police dispatch for Palm Beach Gardens. Officer Cernuto volunteered as the region's BUI Task Force Team Leader and established a vision for the team to engage more support from officers and the community and educate the public on the importance of responsibility and safety on the water. She has collaborated with MADD representatives, drug recognition experts, and the regional boating



accident investigator and coordinated multiple BUI trainings and wet labs for local prosecutors and partner agencies. In 2022, Officer Cernuto played a critical role in establishing and facilitating communications during the initial response in Lee County to Hurricane Ian and was involved in several major cases including charging subjects with taking deer at night with a gun and light, hunting from a roadway, and BUIs. In 2022, she organized six TEAs and issued 23 UBC citations, 29 FWC citations and wrote 130 warnings. Officer Cernuto has received numerous awards throughout her career and volunteers with different organizations in the Port St. Lucie area where she resides with her husband and 10-year-old son.

### **Investigator of the Year - Investigator Mia Ruggiero, Southwest Region**

Investigator Mia Ruggiero started her career with the FWC in Charlotte County after graduating from the Academy in 2013. She was promoted to Investigator I in 2016 serving the Southwest Region by conducting investigations on major boating incidents, background investigations, and predatory animal attacks. She was promoted to the Captive Wildlife section in 2021 where her education and passion for conservation are demonstrated by thorough investigations that uncovered animal cruelty charges resulting in the seizure and safe placement of more than 200 animals. During this evaluation period, Investigator Ruggiero Mia conducted 83 wildlife inspections. Investigator Ruggiero regularly goes above and beyond her normal duties by assisting with hurricane responses, transporting abandoned animals across the state for adoption, and conducting accreditation assessments for outside agencies. She regularly returns to the Academy to help teach new recruits CPR and First Aid. Having an AA in Zoology and AS in Zoo Animal Technology, Mia continues to advance her education working towards her BA in Biology at Florida Gulf Coast University as well as completing required items in the FWC principles of Supervision and Leadership tier.



### **Boating Officer of the Year - Officer Bennett Rodriguez, Southwest Region**

Officer Bennett Rodriguez, a graduate of class 40 from the FWC Academy, is assigned to Pinellas County where he demonstrates a deep commitment to conservation law enforcement. During a derelict vessel investigation, Officer Rodriguez located and arrested an individual who was assaulting women on his sailboat. He also arrested an individual who was stealing power tools from hardware stores around the state. While investigating a half-submerged vessel, he located a teenage victim of sex trafficking, which resulted in the arrests of six individuals by Homeland Security Investigations. In addition to his role as liaison for U.S. Coast Guard Criminal Investigative Services, Officer Rodriguez has helped train their officers on how to detect and enforce BUIs. He also has conducted several BUI investigations with multiple assistant state attorney's onboard his vessel during the stops. In 2022, Officer Rodriguez made 31 BUI arrests, issued 48 UBC citations, 19 misdemeanor citations, participated in 23 search and rescues and devoted 885 hours to water patrol. He continues to demonstrate his leadership and work ethic.



## **Trainer of the Year – Lieutenant David Jernigan, Academy/Northwest Region**

Lieutenant Jernigan began his career with the FWC in 2002 and was promoted to Academy Training Lieutenant in 2018 where he has served as recruit class coordinator for multiple FWC classes and assisted with statewide and in-service trainings. He has impacted the Division of Law Enforcement through his leadership and commitment to improving training results through the many initiatives he has started and/or fostered. Most recently, Lieutenant Jernigan coordinated the basic recruit curriculum class as a multi-agency academy in Key West with the College of the Florida Keys, Monroe County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) and Key West Police Department (KYPD) and the FWC. The academy was the first of this type and Lieutenant Jernigan's duties and responsibilities as the FWC class coordinator shifted from the 10 FWC recruits to assisting with the entire Keys Academy class of 30. He volunteered countless hours in the Keys to ensure all recruits were properly trained and prepared to successfully complete the BRC Academy and pass the state law enforcement exam. Lieutenant Jernigan always demonstrates a can-do attitude and takes on many of the Academy's operational issues ranging from inventorying gear, repairing equipment, and even using his training and experience to conduct general site prep work for the Academy's new storage building.



## **Team of the Year - North Central Region – Levy Squad**

Ranging from one to 18 years of service with the FWC, this group of leaders prides themselves on seeing the big picture and implementing the concept of leadership through service. Squad members Officer Specialist James Fox, Officer Hailey Carroll, Officer Specialist Morgan Willis, Officer Corrie Bell, Officer Landon Smith, and Lt. B.J. Johnston patrol Levy County. They had a productive year and together coordinated and conducted multiple targeted enforcement actions ranging from “Save the Shellfish” to “Night Rider.” They issued 176 resource citations and wrote 201 UBCs and 1,228 warnings. Levy Squad collectively had 9 BUI arrests with every member having at least one BUI arrest, which is a record for rural Levy County. In addition, Levy Squad teamwork resulted in the removal of 13 derelict vessels, the first time a DV has been removed from Levy waters by a government agency. The squad participated in numerous public outreach events including career days, a Wounded Warrior hunt, Cedar Key clean-up efforts, and the Chiefland Rotary Club Fishing Tournament to raise money for local charities. The Levy Squad is grounded in teamwork, hard work, and positivity.





### **Duty Officer of the Year - Jalichea Evans, Sanford Regional Communications Center**

Duty Officer Evans began her career with the FWC in 2021 and during this time, she has answered over 11,500 incoming phone calls, averaging a 98% answer rate. She has responded to call topics ranging from alligators, marine mammals, vessel stops, boating accidents, human-wildlife conflict, trespassing and more. Duty Officer Evans' peers have described her as proactive in handling critical information, confident, friendly, prompt, and responsible in the performance of her duties. She also took on a leadership role by volunteering to train incoming duty officers and initiating vendor notifications when there are equipment issues, all while handling a high call volume and a high level of radio traffic. When not working, Duty Officer Evans enjoys spending time with her family, baking, traveling, and giving back to her community through involvement in her local church.



### **Employee of the Year - Kelli Johnson, Operational Support/Northeast Region**

Kelli Johnson started with the FWC in 2018, serving as a staff assistant at the Northeast Regional Office since 2020. Kelli is a self-starter who has completed numerous training courses, including the Principles of Supervision & Leadership tier of the FWC Leadership Development Process. Another way in which Kelli has contributed is during the Hurricane Ian recovery efforts as a member of the Cook Team on three different deployments. She played an essential role in establishing and demobilizing the Cook Team basecamp. Kelli also made a positive difference serving as the acting government operations consultant II for several weeks while her supervisor was on leave. Plus, Kelli often assists FWC members from different divisions in the Northeast Region with administrative tasks and has become a go-to person for operating our fleet management system, FleetWave.



### **Prosecutor of the Year - Assistant State Attorney Josh James, Northwest Region**

Assistant State Attorney Josh James has collaborated with FWC officers to successfully prosecute many cases within the 14th Judicial Circuit, which covers Bay, Calhoun, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, and Washington counties. Because of his willingness to go above and beyond, James has worked with the FWC officers to make cases regarding over the bag limit for deer, migratory bird violations, failure to comply with harvest reporting requirements and boating under the influence. He has helped review search warrants and arrest warrants, guided officers on the legal aspects of cases and been instrumental in bringing cases to trial. As part of developing a strong working partnership between the FWC and State Attorney's Office, James has attended FWC events to learn about derelict vessel enforcement, BUI enforcement and hunting regulations changes. James is willing to work around officers' schedules and shifts, even taking calls when he's not on duty. His willingness to take part in ride alongs and learn how cases are made gives him an important perspective and helps in the prosecution of boating and resource cases.

## Biologist of the Year - Amber Howell, South Region Alpha

Amber Howell is a University of Hawaii Hilo graduate with a bachelor's degree in marine science. She started her career with the FWC in 2009 as an OPS biologist at the Marine Mammal Pathobiology Laboratory in St. Petersburg. In 2014, she was promoted to research associate and moved to be the Southeast field station lead in Tequesta. As the Marine Mammal Rescue Lead, Amber and her team play an integral part in the Manatee UME response from Indian River County to Key West. She understands FWC's law enforcement mission and makes herself available to answer questions and provide training, which allows officers to be more effective and provide informed responses when members of the public have questions. In addition, Amber is a relationship builder and by using her internal and external partnership network, she can coordinate logistics for marine mammal rescues and other needs while allowing officers to focus on their priority enforcement duties. Amber also regularly participates at FWC law enforcement memorial workouts, motivating the officers with her upbeat attitude.



## NEVER FORGOTTEN

In May 2023, Governor Ron DeSantis signed HB21, which included designating a portion of S.R. 70/Okeechobee Road between Ideal Holding Road and C.R. 613/Carlton Road in St. Lucie County as "Kyle Lee Patterson Memorial Way."

"We want to thank Governor DeSantis and the Florida Legislature for acknowledging the sacrifice Senior Investigator Patterson made for his state," said Col. Brian Smith, Law Enforcement Division Director. "This honor is greatly appreciated by all who knew and loved Kyle and will serve as a remembrance of the great person he was and the difference he made in his community."

On June 9, 2022, Senior Investigator Kyle Lee Patterson succumbed to injuries sustained in an on-duty collision in which a vehicle traveling in the wrong direction crashed into Investigator Patterson's patrol truck. Investigator Patterson served with the FWC for 15 years. During his career he received numerous awards, including a Lifesaving Award in 2010, an Exceptional Performance Award in 2015, a Letter of Commendation in 2017, the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation Award in 2018, and recognition for his performance during FWC's responses to Hurricanes Irma and Michael. He was 35 at the time of his death and is survived by his wife and two young children.



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

**PATROL, PROTECT, PRESERVE**

## GEORGIA

*Thomas Barnard, Colonel*



# GEORGIA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES



### AGENCY OVERVIEW

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Law Enforcement Division, currently has 194 POST-certified Game Wardens with statewide authority and full arrest powers and 25 non-sworn staff members. The primary duties of these Game Wardens are enforcement of all laws and regulations pertaining to hunting, fishing, commercial fishing, environmental violations, and recreational boating, as well as to provide public safety on all our DNR-controlled properties.

The Law Enforcement Division operates with a straight-line chain of command. It consists of the Colonel, Lt. Colonel, two Majors, eight Captains (6 Region Supervisors, 1 Training Director, 1 Pilot), six Lieutenants (database management, special permits/captive wildlife and wild animals, boating law administrator and administrative support, professional standards, investigations, 1 pilot), and 176 field Game Wardens (Sergeants, Corporals, Game Wardens First Class, and Game Wardens).

### TRAINING

#### Game Warden Academy

The 37th Game Warden Academy began on Sunday, January 8<sup>th</sup> at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center in Forsyth, Georgia. Eighteen cadets, who recently completed the 11-week Georgia POST Mandate course, began training with 1 of the 18 cadets voluntarily withdrawing during the 15-week DNR course. The remaining seventeen cadets successfully completed the training and graduated from the academy on April 21<sup>st</sup>. The recent graduates are currently in the field working on completing their field training requirements.



#### In-Service Training

During late Summer of 2022, 9 Game Wardens were certified as Gas Mask instructors and over a two-day period qualified an additional 62 Game Wardens in the use of gas masks in response to CS gas exposure. The Fall brought Game Wardens from across the state together to participate in the Division's annual fall firearms in-service training at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center (GPSTC). The two-day training consisted of scenario-based exercises in the Use of Force Lab, patrol rifle training, and handgun skills. The



Special Operations Group (SOG) was also busy during the season attending ATV training in October and rifle optics training with firearms instructors in February. The Spring of 2023 was active as officers attended in-service training both at GPSTC and their respective regions. Annual firearms re-qualification training, Use of Force and De-escalation training, BUI/CPR/Narcan refresher training, side scan sonar training, and ALERRT were conducted throughout the state. Game Warden's also completed the mandated Governor's Initiative Community Oriented Policing training. Between May and June, Taser instructors and every officer from the rank of Field Sergeant and below completed the Taser 7 transition course. Also in June, two new K9 handlers and their dogs graduated from the 3-month long K9 academy and are now in the field in their respective regions.

## **CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITY**

### Investigative Unit

The Investigative Unit (IU) is comprised of three full-time investigators, one detached investigator and one Intelligence Analyst. The IU is responsible for covert and overt investigations, the Intelligence Unit, the Critical Incident Reconstruction Team (CIRT), the SONAR Unit, the Marine Theft Unit (MTU), the Drone Unit, as well as investigation assistance to the Special Permit Unit (SPU). The primary function of the Investigative Unit is to provide field game wardens with investigative support. The IU also serves the field as a central point of contact for information sharing on a statewide level. The Unit regularly utilizes cell phone mapping (ZetX), social media search warrants (PENLINK), Cell phone downloads (CELBRITE) and Google Geo-fence search warrants. This technology is requested and used daily not only by Georgia Game Wardens but also by state and Federal prosecutors, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and countless police and sheriff's departments. Through this assistance, the Investigative Unit and the Department have strengthened working relationships with other law enforcement agencies throughout the Nation - benefiting Georgia law enforcement and more importantly, the citizens we serve.

### Covert Investigations

The Investigative Unit is responsible for undercover investigations which are used when traditional enforcement methods would be problematic or unsuccessful. Last year, the Investigative Unit conducted and managed 562 investigations and calls for assistance from the field and from other agencies (both in and out-of-state). These investigations were comprised of intelligence gathering, buy/bust and both short and long-term investigations. The focus of many of these investigations included the sale or possession of wildlife and wild animals. These violations are difficult to address without the aid of undercover officers.

### Critical Incident Reconstruction Team (CIRT)

Georgia has 14 CIRT investigators assigned throughout the state. CIRT investigates fatality and serious injury boating, hunting, and state-owned land incidents. Each investigator receives specialized training on investigating and presenting these cases. Last year, CIRT was activated to investigate nine fatality boating and hunting incidents.

### SONAR Unit

The SONAR unit consist of 32 Game Wardens that are responsible for finding/recovering victims of fatality boating incidents and drowning victims, as well as evidence recovery. SONAR operators are trained in the use of side scan, down scan, sector scan sonars as well as remote operated vessels (ROV). The SONAR unit averages 35 deployments a year.

### Marine Theft Unit (MTU)

The primary function of the MTU is to assist law enforcement officers in the field. The MTU conducts computer database and offline searches, hidden hull identification number location assistance and assists with locating and recovering stolen vessels. The MTU also serves as the point of contact for customers, local law enforcement and court systems related to the stolen vessels. Last year the MTU received 193 abandoned vessel/stolen boat requests from the public and field. MTU recovered seven stolen vessels in 2022.

### DRONE Unit

Georgia has three certified DRONE operators and two DRONES. The Drone Unit assist CIRT in the reconstruction of vessel incidents, SONAR in the recovery of drowning victims and field game wardens with search and rescues missions.

### Aviation

The LED Aviation Support Unit provides service to all DNR Divisions and other state agencies utilizing three Bell 407GX/GXi helicopters. The Aviation Unit flew approximately 500 hours in support of the Division's Game Wardens as they conducted their core mission of protecting the states waterways and woodland areas. This consisted of flying support throughout the hunting season from early fall through early spring. Game Wardens were flown on county surveys looking for baited food plots, duck ponds and illegal shrimping along the Georgia coast. Flight support was also provided for Operation Dry Water, night deer poaching/spotlighting patrols, and searches for missing persons and drowning victims across the state.

The Wildlife Resource Division (WRD) was provided aviation support during surveys of Bald Eagles, Kestrel, Sandhill Cranes, Red Knots, and waterfowl. Capt. Jaye Bridwell flew these same flights along the Georgia coast in addition to surveys for sea turtles, dolphins, and the tagging of manatee. Night missions for illegal shrimping activity were also conducted along the coastline. In addition to the WRD surveys, LT Buller flew multiple missions assisting the Game Management Section and the Wildlife Conservation Section with prescribed burns on the State WMA's during the late winter months of January through March 2023. Additionally, the Aviation Unit was actively involved with responding to multiple disaster areas as a



result of tornados and inclement weather which caused widespread damage across the state. This year, the Aviation Unit Received Professional Rescue Training in Short Haul, Longline, Rappel and Rescue Techniques and also participated in joint training efforts with the United States Coast Guard. The Unit acquired FLIR technology which is in the process of being added to the fleet as an additional upgrade in capabilities. Economic development flights continued in several areas throughout the state in support of the Governor's Office and the Georgia Department of Economic Development. The Aviation Unit also assisted other State and Federal law enforcement agencies utilizing the three Bell 407 Helicopters in support of various missions throughout the state.

### **Special Permits**

The Georgia DNR Law Enforcement Division, Special Permits Unit issued and maintained 2,645 permits and collected approximately \$70,805.00 in generated fees, for the following:

- Anchoring Permits – Long Term
- Aquaculture Registration
- Alligator Farm License
- Commercial Fox Hunting Preserve License (Fox Pen)
- Commercial Turtle Farm Permit
- Dog Deer Permit
- Falconry
- Fee Exempt Wild Animal License
- Fee Exempt Wildlife Exhibition License
- Film Production Wildlife Permit
- Import /Exports Permit
- Nuisance Wildlife Control Government Agency Permit
- Nuisance Wildlife Control Operator Permit
- Scientific Collecting Permit
- Wild Animal Regulated Fish License
- Wild Animal License
- Wild Animal Reptile Registration
- Wildlife Exhibition License
- Wildlife Rehabilitation Permit

### **UNIQUE LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS**

#### Ranger Hotline

The Ranger Hotline program, which provides a way for citizens to report anonymously potentially illegal wildlife and other conservation law violations, continues to be successful. If the information leads to an arrest, the tipster receives a cash reward funded by the [Georgia Natural Resource Foundation](#), whose mission is to protect wildlife by increasing public support for wildlife law enforcement. Last year, 348 tips were received for various violations.



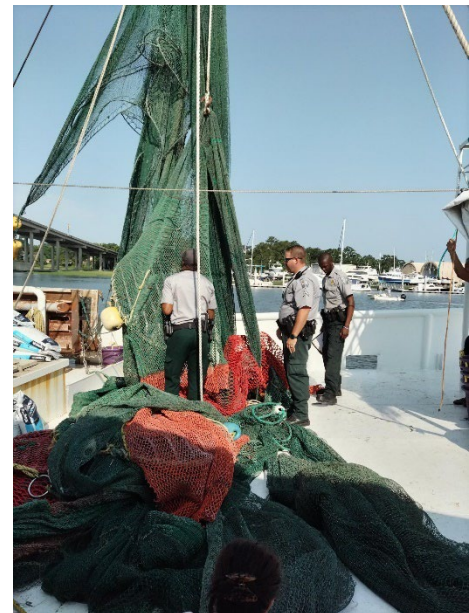
## **OTHER SPECIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ISSUES**

### Crime Suppression

In 2023, the Division continued to assist the City of Atlanta in the multi-agency illegal street racing enforcement and crime suppression effort. Governor Brian Kemp initiated this collaborative effort between the Department of Natural Resources, Georgia State Patrol, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Atlanta Police Department, Fulton County Sheriff's Office, and the City of South Fulton, to assist in the city on weekends with the objective of cracking down on criminal activity and illegal street racing in and around Atlanta. Since its inception in early 2021, the operation has logged 52,622 vehicle stops, 1,178 pursuits, 1,189 DUIs, 863 wanted persons, 874 reckless driving, 200 stolen guns, 34,567 citations/arrests, 2,635 impounded vehicles, 42,816 warnings, and 365 drug arrests. Game Wardens from across the state continue to be deployed on Saturdays and Sundays for this operation.

### Joint Enforcement Agreement

The Joint Enforcement Agreement #20 between Georgia DNR and NOAA office of Law Enforcement called for GADNR enforcement personnel to provide a total of 1,554 hours of marine law enforcement or related work under the agreement. Georgia has 5 Execution Priorities. Execution Priority 1 was Endangered Species Act. There were 296-man hours and 108 hours of at-sea vessel patrol hours dedicated to this priority. These patrols were checking Shrimp Trawlers for TED and net compliance. Execution Priority 2 was dedicated to Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. There were 296-man hours and 108 hours of at-sea vessel patrols dedicated to priority 2. These patrols were to check Red Snapper compliance and any other violation dealing with Snapper/Grouper and HMS species. Execution Priority 3 was National Marine Sanctuaries Act. There were 237-man hours and 79 hours of at-sea vessel patrols dedicated to Priority 3. Execution Priority 4 was Marine Mammal Right Whale. There were 237-man hours and 79 hour of at-sea vessel patrols. These patrols were during the months of November to March and were specifically targeting Right Whale enforcement. Execution Priority 5 was Lacey Act/International (IUU). There were 54 personnel hours dedicated to IUU enforcement. These patrols were assisting NOAA Enforcement Officers with inspection of containers at the Georgia Ports. Vessel patrol hours targeted the following areas: 1) shrimp trawlers checking for TED compliance, 2) intercepts of recreational and commercial fishing vessels returning to Georgia seaports from fishing trips in federal waters, 3) offshore patrols to Special Management Zones and Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary, 4) concentrations of fishing vessels wherever they occur in the Exclusive Economic Zone adjacent to the State of Georgia, and 5) intercepts of recreational fishing vessels for Red Snapper compliance. During this time, Georgia



DNR detected 21 federal violations during these patrols and federal referrals were sent to NOAA Office of Law Enforcement for prosecution.

## VEHICLES & EQUIPMENT

Throughout the year, the Law Enforcement Division acquired some new vehicles and equipment, utilizing funding from various sources. Thirteen new 4x4 Ford patrol vehicles were purchased for field personnel. Through the Public Safety and Community Violence Reduction Grant, the Division was able to secure just over \$1,000,000 in funding to replace 200 aging Panasonic Toughbooks. These computers are used to run Computer Aided Dispatch and E-Reporting software that the Division has been running in conjunction with an ongoing joint partnership with the Georgia State Patrol since 2009. These machines are vital for Game Wardens to be able to identify the identity of subjects, check license statuses, and run GCIC/NCIC queries on items such as guns, ATV, vehicles, etc. In 2023 the Law Enforcement Division began transitioning to an all-band Harris Radio and will begin decommissioning the legacy Motorola system in 2024. The new Harris System is designed to give statewide radio coverage using LTE, VHF and 700/800 MHz capabilities. The department participated in a pilot project in the fall of 2022 with the Georgia State Patrol to test the proposed system capabilities. The new system met exceeded expectations and is allowing increased interoperability as well as better coverage and range for our radios. It is expected that it will take 12-18 months to fully deploy the system to all Game Wardens statewide with a 100% transition.

## KENTUCKY

*Jeremy McQueary, Colonel*

### PERSONNEL

During the past year, 17 Conservation Officer Recruits graduated from two separate academy classes. Nine of those graduates are currently on assigned patrol within the Commonwealth and the other eight are in the



field training program. Our academy attrition rate has remained consistent from year's past. Our recruitment efforts are ongoing, and we recently received an Agency provided pay increase to the Division of approximately 10% annually. Not only does this salary adjustment increase our recruiting competitiveness, but it has also helped retention. Current staffing levels are at 115 sworn officers and three administrative staff.



### EQUIPMENT

The Division recently re-established the K-9 program. Three officers and canines graduated from the Highland Canine Academy in North Carolina in the fall of 2022. The three handlers are each working alongside a canine partner, all three of which are yellow Labrador Retrievers: Gambit,



River, and Cosmo. These teams are geographically placed across the State in strategic areas. The K-9 teams have had an immediate impact in mission focused areas with respect to narcotics detection, article location, and search and recovery.



The Division search and recovery team has continued to grow and develop and have a large impact on the timeliness of victim recovery. The team is increasingly evolving and recently attended grant funded classes to aid in better use and understanding of on-board standard issue patrol equipment.



The Division procured fourteen new patrol trucks and seven new patrol boats. Two of the patrol boats were awarded via federal grant and have been assigned to port designated locations for security functions. Ten of the patrol trucks are Ram 1500's and two are Chevrolet 2500's. All patrol vehicle stripe packages have been completed and updated to incorporate the word "POLICE."

## OUTREACH

The Life Jacket Loaner Station initiative is continuing to grow and be a utilized resource by boating recreators across the State. We currently have twelve designated stations scattered throughout the Commonwealth, each being maintained by various civic groups and organizations.

Our division communications team has added a law enforcement Facebook page to its initiative. An effort to reach more persons across the nation is a focus to inform and educate others about the







mission of our law enforcement division. The page is being moderated by the public affairs team within the Division and growing daily.

## LOUISIANA

### *Colonel Rachel Zechenelly*

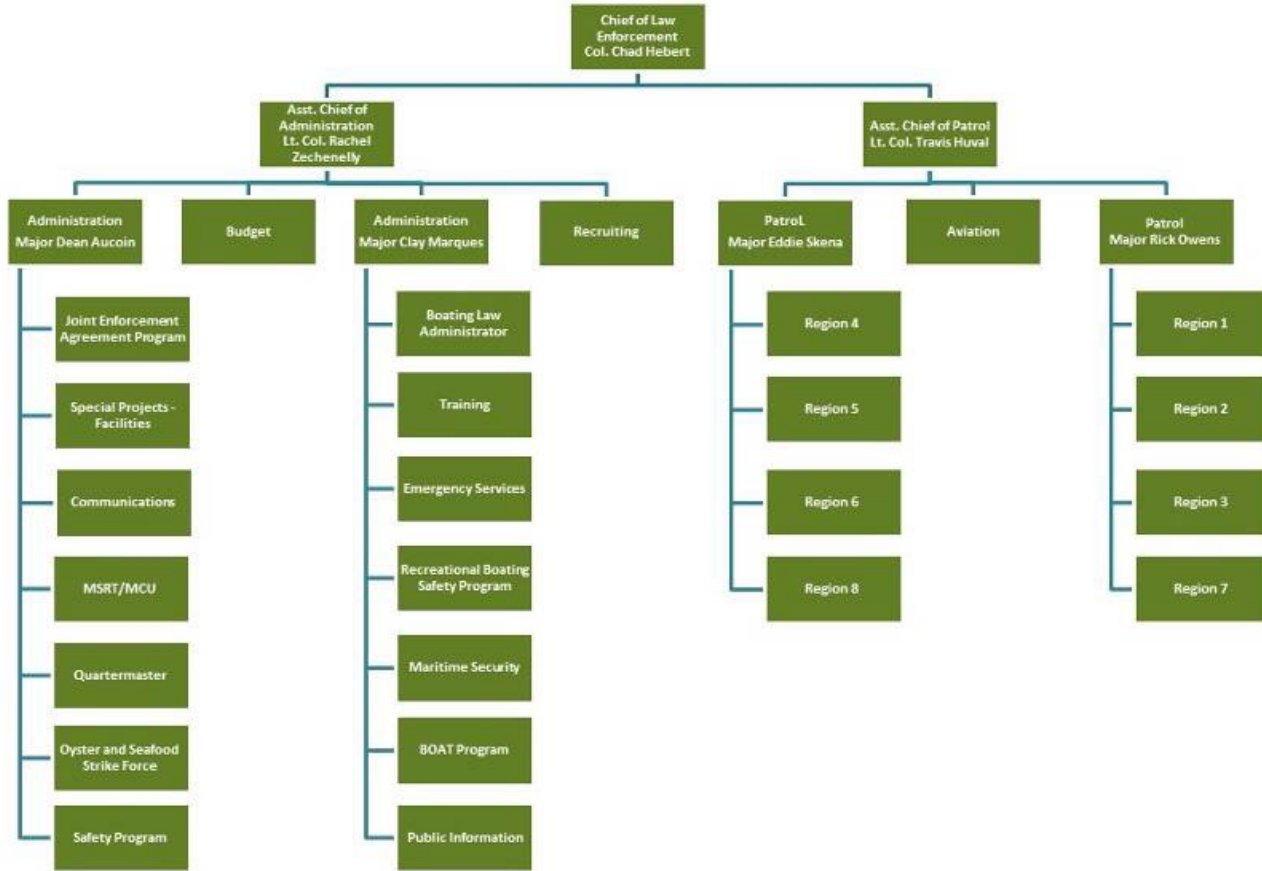
The LDWF Law Enforcement Division's (LDWF-LED) operating budget for fiscal year 2022-2023 was approximately \$43.5 million. Enforcement Division funding is derived from the Conservation Fund (LDWF self-generated revenue), Federal Boating Safety Funds, United States Coast Guard Grant funding, Homeland Security Grant funding, and the LDWF Enforcement Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) with NOAA for Federal Fisheries and various local grants.



LDWF-LED conducted 232,150 patrol hours in FY 2022-2023: 204,603 on land and 66,361 on water. Agents made 631,110 contacts with the public, the majority of whom were in compliance with state and federal wildlife and fisheries regulations. LDWF-LED agents issued 9,011 criminal citations and 7,303 warnings during this period.



## Organizational Structure & Personnel



*\*\*Org Chart is accurate as of June 26, 2023. Col. Hebert retired on that date and Col. Zechenelly took over the top spot in the enforcement division.*

LDWF-LED is organized in a paramilitary structure to assure the efficient use of resources, consistent statewide enforcement policy, and an effective, coordinated response to urgent needs. LDWF-LED is commanded by one colonel, the Chief of Enforcement, who reports directly to LDWF's Secretary and oversees administration of the division. Reporting to the colonel are two Lieutenant Colonels. One Lieutenant Colonel serves as assistant chief of administration while the other Lieutenant Colonel serves as assistant chief of patrol. The administration side includes budget, communications, emergency services, recreational boating safety and education, training, support, and public information. The patrol side includes all state regional field operations and the aviation section.

The LDWF Enforcement Division is currently headed by Col. Rachel Zechenelly, a 24-year veteran at LDWF. Zechenelly was promoted to the rank of Colonel in June of 2023 after replacing Col. Chad Hebert, who retired after 30 years of service.

Zechenelly, a native of Pearl River, has earned numerous awards during her LDWF career. Among those citations include the LDWF Meritorious Service Awards for Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Harvey, Irma and Ida, and the 2016 Flood and BP Oil Spill. She was named the LDWF Agent of the Year for Headquarters Staff in 2008 and received the LDWF Chief's Award in 2022.



*LDWF Enforcement Division  
Col. Rachel Zechenelly*

Col. Zechenelly graduated from the LDWF Enforcement Division Cadet Academy in 1999. She served as a field agent in the southeast region of the state before being promoted to Headquarters staff in 2005. At headquarters she was a vital component in implementing the state's safe boating education program in its infancy. She was also named the state's boating law administrator and assisted in writing several safe boating law changes. During her time as a major and a lieutenant colonel, Zechenelly has served on both the administrative and patrol sides of the Enforcement Division. She has been in charge of the Enforcement Division's budget, training, safe boating program, recruiting, communications and emergency services. She has also supervised four different patrol regions across the state.

The Enforcement Division is divided into eight enforcement regions. Each numbered enforcement region is composed of two or three multi-parish districts. Each region is managed by a captain who supervises two or three district supervisors of the lieutenant rank. Regions have between 16-25 agents, depending on regional size, resident population and participant population. Current funding provides a field enforcement staff of two to four agents per parish, according to the nature of wildlife-based activities in the area, the number of people participating, the frequency of their participation and other factors.

Total division head count is 257 positions including 233 enforcement agents, 13 administrative staff, seven communications officers, two pilots, one grant reviewer and one public information officer. The actual number of filled positions (as of July of 2023) is 228.

### **Regional Enforcement Programs**

Most of the law enforcement activity performed by LDWF-LED is conducted by regional agents. Regional agents work a schedule assigned by their supervisors to address seasonal needs, reported violations, weather conditions and predominant activities. Agents are on-call 24 hours per day and must be willing to change their work hours and locations as circumstances require. Schedules are often changed due to weather and reported violations, and agents are often called out to





respond to violations in progress, boating and hunting accidents, and calls for search and rescue.

Agents use a variety of vehicles during land patrols, primarily four-wheel drive trucks and all-terrain vehicles. The primary patrol vessels used during water patrols are outboard bay boats and 19-to-40-foot marine patrol vessels. LDWF-LED also deploys go-devils, airboats, surface drive, mud boats, bass boats and flatboats.

### **Specialized Units**

LDWF-LED contains two specialized units with selected missions or purposes: The Maritime Special Response Team and the Aviation Section. Agents in specialized units have developed specific skills, expertise and knowledge appropriate for their particular operational fields. Agents in specialized units operate in relatively broad geographic areas and may work alongside regional enforcement agents when appropriate.

#### **Maritime Special Response Team**

The Maritime Special Response Team cooperative endeavor by LDWF-LED and the Louisiana State Police SWAT team addresses maritime security threats within the state of Louisiana. The team provides a maritime tactical response capability at the state level to effectively provide public safety, officer safety, Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High-yield Explosives (CBRNE) prevention, and response and tactical support for LDWF's federal, state and local partners.



#### **Aviation Section**

The Aviation Section contains two pilots and two Kodiak planes and one Cessna 206 amphibian. The Aviation Section's aircraft provide a valuable platform for detecting illegal hunting and fishing activities and frequently play a vital life-saving role in search and rescue operations. The Aviation Section also contributes its services to other divisions for biological missions, such as waterfowl counts and the monitoring of commercial fisheries.

#### **LDWF Enforcement News**

##### LDWF Enforcement Agents Recognized at September Commission Meeting

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Enforcement Division agents were honored at the Sept. 1 Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission meeting held in Baton Rouge.

Shikar-Safari Club International presented their 2021 Conservation Officer of the Year award for Louisiana to LDWF Sgt. Joshua Laviolette. The Shikar-Safari award recognizes an agent from each state for outstanding efforts in conservation law enforcement.



The 2021-22 Mississippi Flyway Waterfowl Protection Officer of the Year award went to Sgt. Villere Reggio.

Sgt. Laviolette has been an LDWF agent for seven years and mainly patrols Orleans Parish. He is one of the leaders in the state in total case production especially as it

relates to the boating safety and recreational fishing enforcement. He is also active in the department's training program serving as defensive tactics, water survival and tactical first aid instructor.

Sgt. Reggio is a 20-year veteran with the LDWF Enforcement Division and mainly patrols Plaquemines Parish. His migratory waterfowl enforcement efforts have resulted in numerous cases including issuing 42 citations and seizing 85 ducks during the opening weekend of the 2021-22 waterfowl season.

#### LDWF Agent Honored at December Commission Meeting

A Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries enforcement agent was honored at the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission meeting, Dec. 1, in Baton Rouge.

Corporal John Miller, of Rayville, was recognized as this year's National Association of State Boating Law Administrator's "Boating Law Enforcement Officer of the Year" award for Louisiana.

Corporal Miller has been an agent for over 15 years and mainly patrols the waterways in northeastern Louisiana. He has been a lead boating education instructor the last nine years and has certified more students in boating education than any other instructor in the state during that time.



"Corporal Miller maintains a professional work demeanor, appearance and is always assisting his co-workers and the general public," said Major Clay Marques, the state's boating law

administrator. "He takes enforcing boating laws on the water very seriously making the waterways in his district safer for the boating public. He is a major asset to the department and more specifically to the safe boating mission."

Corporal Miller is also homemade boat inspector and responsible for coordinating safe boating outreach programs in his region. He was also instrumental in improving the new NASBLA approved online boating education course.

### Two Students Complete the LDWF Enforcement Division Internship Program

Two more students have now completed the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Enforcement Division internship program.

Harley George from Nicholls State University and Jacie Bernard from Louisiana State University at Eunice completed the LDWF Enforcement Division's internship program this morning, Nov. 30. They gave their final presentations at the LDWF HQ building in Baton Rouge to receive college credit from their universities.



The LDWF Enforcement Division started their internship program last year with the goal of providing college students relevant experience in conservation law enforcement and potentially a career as an LDWF Enforcement Agent. A total of four students have completed this internship program.

The internship program lasts between 90 to 130 hours and consists of shadowing LDWF agents in the field such as during patrols, training and outreach programs that will help them acquire a broad knowledge of LDWF Enforcement Agent activities.

College and University Internship Coordinators and Faculty that are interested in offering the LDWF Enforcement Division Internship at their college or university can contact LDWF Internship Coordinator Corporal Anthony Corner at [acorner@wlf.la.gov](mailto:acorner@wlf.la.gov).

### LDWF Agent Receives Charter Boat Association Award at LWFC Meeting

A Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) enforcement agent was the recipient of a Louisiana Charter Boat Association (LCBA) award at the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission meeting this morning, March 2, in Baton Rouge.



Corporal Blaine Wagner received the second annual Theophile Bourgeois Memorial Award for the law enforcement agent that best exemplifies the LDWF mission, specifically pertaining to promoting professionalism within the Louisiana charter for hire industry.

“Corporal Wagner is deserving of this honor because he makes a concentrated effort to contact a large number of charter guide fishing boats in the areas he works,” said Col. Chad Hebert, head of the LDWF Enforcement Division. “He also looks into the finer details to ensure that charter captains are following the regulation set forth in law.”



Corporal Wagner, of Chalmette, primarily patrols the waterways in southeastern Louisiana and has been an agent for over eight years. In 2022, Corporal Wagner wrote approximately a third of the total charter guide violation citations for the state. He was also involved in about half of the charter guide violation cases for the state.

“Led by Col. Hebert’s leadership and Corporal Wagner’s commitment, the LDWF Enforcement Division has done a tremendous job of rooting out many of these illegal charters,” said Richard Fischer, Executive Director of the LCBA. “We look forward to continuing to recognize LDWF Enforcement’s success on this front.”

According to the LCBA, the recipient demonstrates above-and-beyond performance and professionalism in the field, while also demonstrating outstanding conservation of our natural resources and promotion of Louisiana fisheries.

As part of the award, the Louisiana Charter Boat Association gave Corporal Wagner \$1,000 for a donation in his name to the charity of his choice, which was the Family Violence Program of St. Bernard. This organization provides emergency services and shelter to individuals when they need it most as well as advocacy, education and outreach services.

The award is named after Theophile Bourgeois who was a charter captain and owner of Bourgeois Charters. His life ended in 2019 during a seaplane crash in which he was credited with saving the lives of two passengers.

## LDWF honors Enforcement Internship Program Graduates



Caleb Compeaux, Nicholls State University; Chaise Wheeler, Northshore Technical Community College; Dalton Hogue, Grambling State University; Cristion Henry, Southern University; and Gabriel Chelette and Braden Carrier, both of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

Top, from left, Cpl. Anthony Corcoran, Cpl. Jason Sanchez, Lt. Ryan Paul and Cpl. Patrick Dempsey. Bottom, from left, Sgt. Carl Armstrong, Cpl. Richard Egan, Cpl. Adriel Herrera, Cpl. Nelson Kennerson, Sgt. Kyle Magner, Cpl. Chelsea King and Cpl. Tommie White.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries recently honored six Louisiana college students who completed the agency's Enforcement Internship Program. The program's goal is to provide college students the experience of conservation law enforcement and to encourage them to consider a career as a LDWF Enforcement Agent.

The internship is 90 hours and consists of shadowing LDWF agents in the field during patrols, training and outreach programs that provide them with a broad knowledge of the daily work environment of enforcement agents.

All of the interns provided presentations to LDWF Enforcement Administrative Staff on the experiences they had working with enforcement agents and their interactions with the public.

The students who were awarded certificates citing their completion of the program were: Caleb Compeaux, Nicholls State University; Chaise Wheeler, Northshore Technical Community College; Dalton Hogue, Grambling State University; Cristion Henry, Southern University; and Gabriel Chelette and Braden Carrier, both of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

LDWF Enforcement has 16 Regional Recruitment Officers throughout the state that have recruitment duties in addition to their responsibilities as WLF agents.

### LDWF Agent Honored with NASBLA Safe Boating Award

A Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) enforcement agent was recently named the 2023 National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) Southern Region Officer of the Year.

Lt. Jason Russo, of Metairie and a 21-year veteran with the LDWF Enforcement Division, was honored with the NASBLA award for his continuous dedication to enforcing boating safety laws and educating the public.

"This is a great achievement for Lt. Russo and very well deserved," said Col. Rachel Zechenelly, head of the Enforcement Division. "He has always done a great job of enforcing boating safety

laws and teaching boating safety classes to the public. Really happy to see him recognized for this prestigious award.”

Lt. Russo has been a boating safety instructor for over 18 years teaching safe boating classes. His training includes successful completion of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) Marine Patrol Officer's course, FLETC Marine Law Enforcement Training Program, NASBLA's Level I Boating Incident Investigation (BII) course, NASBLA's Level II BII Reconstruction course, and he serves as an instructor for NASBLA's Level I BII course and its Officer Water Survival course.

Lt. Russo has demonstrated leadership when it comes to boating safety as four of the agents he directly supervises have received safe boating awards in the past six years. His commitment to enforcing boating safety laws and educating the public on boating safety in the field have benefited the LDWF Enforcement Division and the people that he serves.

### **BOATING SAFETY PROGRAM**

With 15,000 miles of tidal coastline, 5,000 miles of navigable waterways, three of the busiest ports in the country, a thriving shipping industry, a large commercial fishing fleet, and over 317,000 registered boats, Louisiana contains many geographic, demographic and economic features that pose special challenges for boating safety enforcement.



LDWF-LED agents made 189,530 public contacts during the course of 48,027 patrol hours dedicated to boating enforcement, education and accident investigation in FY 2022-2023. Of those hours, 42,777 patrol hours were performed in vessels on the water.

The adoption of “Rules of the Road” regulations for boaters has enhanced the enforcement of



boating safety regulations and boating under the influence laws. These regulations provide the boating public with clear rules for the manner in which boats are operated and are an important tool in determining fault in boating accidents. The “Rules of the Road” also enhance the ability of agents to address reckless and careless operation of motorboats. In FY 2022-2023, LDWF-LED agents issued 59 citations for careless and reckless operation of a vessel and 103 citations for operating a vessel while intoxicated.



The statewide LDWF-LED boater education course teaches safe, legal and responsible boat operation and is approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators. This program provides a vital outreach to the community and has greatly improved the awareness of and compliance with boating safety practices and regulations in Louisiana.

Agents hold monthly classes in each region for anyone who wishes or is required by Louisiana law to take them. In FY 2022-2023, 9,599 citizens were certified in classroom and online classes. LDWF-LED continues to recruit and train additional volunteer instructors to complement and enhance the efforts of its own agents. Since the inception of the boating safety education course in 2003, LDWF has certified 154,447 students.

LDWF-LED remained committed in marketing and promotion of boating education courses by creating special events and activities for students attending courses.

LDWF participated in the National Association of Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) Operation Dry Water Weekend from July 2-4 in 2022. During the Operation Dry Water weekend, LDWF agents were out in force patrolling state waterways for impaired boat operators. During the weekend, LDWF agents cited 12 people for DUI while operating a vessel.

LDWF participated in several national campaigns including "Wear your PFD to work Day" on May 19 and the "Safe Boating Week" in Louisiana from May 20-26. LDWF Enforcement Division agents were out in full force as always during the safe boating week to perform boating safety checks and driving or operating a vessel while intoxicated (DWI) patrols.

The LDWF Enforcement Division held their annual "Boating Education Lagniappe Day" on April 22, 2023. This was the 12<sup>th</sup> annual Lagniappe Day. LDWF certified 191 boaters at boating safety classes in eight different locations across the state and provided food and drinks, giveaways and door prizes.



Media interviews, news release articles, public relation events and social media comments occurred throughout the state during all listed campaigns.



## **SEARCH & RESCUE OPERATIONS**

LDWF-LED is responsible for providing and coordinating search and rescue response and maritime security activities for the state. This activity supports the state's goal of hurricane recovery and emergency preparedness by planning, training and coordinating local, state and federal response for search and rescue associated with natural or manmade disasters.

Preparedness and efficient execution of search and rescue response events is essential to saving lives and swift recovery efforts. Providing maritime security on our state's waterways is essential to protection of critical infrastructure located in maritime environments throughout Louisiana.

### Search and Rescue Team Successfully Rescues Three Stranded Boaters in Cameron Parish

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) along with the Cameron Parish Sheriff's Office (CPSO) rescued three stranded boaters in Cameron Parish on May 28.



LDWF and the CPSO were notified about three people in a vessel that was taking on water in the Gulf of Mexico just outside the Rockefeller Refuge around 12:50 p.m. on May 28. LDWF personnel and a CPSO deputy responded to the scene immediately and found the three boaters on a rock jetty and learned that two of them could not swim.

The LDWF personnel and the CPSO deputy were able to throw a life ring to the boaters and pull them to their vessel where they were transported back to land. All three boaters were recovered safely with only some minor scrapes and bruises.

Agents learned the three boaters were fishing along the edge of Rockefeller Refuge when they encountered large waves that overtopped the vessel. When they attempted to leave the motor was locked up and not operational. The waves then slammed the vessel up against the rocks at which time the boaters left the vessel and climbed up on the rocks where they called for help.

Personnel participating in this successful search and rescue are LDWF Agent Chelsea Moudry, Rockefeller Refuge Biologist Manager Phillip Trosclair and CPSO Deputy Anthony Suire.

### LDWF Agents and NPSO Rescue Hunter in Natchitoches Parish

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) enforcement agents and Natchitoches Parish Sheriff's Office (NPSO) deputies successfully rescued a hunter following a tree stand accident in Natchitoches Parish on Jan. 14.

LDWF agents and NPSO deputies received a call around 3:25 p.m. about a stranded hunter that was injured after he fell from his tree stand. Agents and deputies responded immediately to the area and found the injured man. Agents and deputies then extracted the hunter from the woods and loaded him into a helicopter and he was airlifted to LSU Health Shreveport hospital with rib and back injuries.

LDWF agents will be the lead investigative agency for this hunting accident. Due to the terrain, it took agents and deputies about two hours to extract the hunter from the woods to the awaiting helicopter. The hunter was not wearing a safety harness at the time of the accident.

According to the hunter, he finished his hunt and was climbing down his ladder stand when he lost his footing and fell 12 feet to the ground striking a limb that was lying in front of his ladder stand. He was able to call a friend who was then able to call 911 for help.

## **LDWF TRAINING**

### Academy

On March 29, 2023, LDWF graduated its 35th class of cadets into the ranks of LDWF Enforcement Division agents at a ceremony in Baton Rouge. After six months of training at the academy, 19 newly commissioned agents are ready to begin enforcing hunting, fishing and boating regulations that govern the use of the state's natural resources.



The LDWF Law Enforcement Division started the hiring process in May of 2023 to hire up to 25 cadets for a Cadet Academy class slated to start at the end of October to bolster the ranks of agents in the field.

### **LDWF:**

- Certified three lifeguards in 2022-23 bringing their total to 12 certified lifeguards. Lifeguarding with CPR with AED for professional rescuers. First Aid and administering emergency oxygen. American Red Cross Certification.
- Has 13 NASBLA Officer Water Survival credentialed Instructors.
- Sent two agents to Florida whom successfully passed and became managers for our Field Training Officer program.



- Completed and enhanced the vehicle operator course. LDWF has delivered 20 scheduled courses to all agents with nine instructors that are certified in the Enhanced Driving Instructor course by the LSP.
- Partnered with Texas with a goal to certify all agents in the NASBLA Airboat Operator Course and has completed 4 out of 20 courses scheduled.
- Has 12 Agents that are certified in the Monadnock DT instructor course.
- Has five road SFST instructors and have 12 agents who are NASBLA credentialed instructors for the BUI seated SFST course.
- Sent one agent to Texas which gives us a total of two certified ATV Safety Institute Instructors.
- Has 19 agents who are licensed through the FAA as remote pilots for our unmanned aircraft system (UAS) program.
- Has a total of 14 active Agent Crisis Team (ACT) members who have successfully passed a critical incident stress management course.
- Hosted a NASBLA GPS Forensics course and certified 15 agents. Louisiana hosted the course as law enforcement personnel from Texas, Mississippi and the USCG attended.
- Had five agents attend and successfully pass a Boating Incident Investigation and Reconstruction (BII-Level 2 advanced) course in Florida.
- Sent two agents to Georgia who became certified in FLETC's Digital Photography for Law Enforcement Course.
- Sent four agents to Baton Rouge who became certified in a Female Law Enforcement Survival Tactics Course.
- Sent 25 agents to become certified in the Instructor Development Course by POST.
- Sent two agents to become certified by the U.S. Coast Guard Marine Law Enforcement Academy in Federal Fish Law, Fish ID, Case Package Preparation, Mock Boarding's and Gear Examinations.
- Sent two agents to the FLETC Mental Health Crisis Instructor Course whom have successfully become instructors.
- Sent five agents to Baton Rouge who have successfully passed the State Fire Marshall's Wide Area Search Course.



- Had 11 agents successfully complete a Bear Attack Response Team (BART) course taught by Florida Fish and Game.
- Certified 25 agents to become WebEOC Operators to help with request and logistics for any upcoming ESF-9 events.
- Had two agents successfully complete the Train the Trainer Exterior Response to Active Shooter Events (ERASE) course by Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT).
- Had two agents attend and successfully complete the FLETC Basic Incident Response to Digital Evidence (BIRDE) for first responders.
- One LDWF Dispatch successfully completed the Active Attack Integrated Response Course by ALERRT.
- Had four agents attend an Honor Guard training hosted and coordinated by the St. Tammany Sheriff's Office.
- Had two agents attend and successfully pass the FLETC Professional Standards course.
- Had two agents attend and successfully complete the Strategic Self-Defense and gun Fighting Tactics (SSGT) instructor course.
- Had two agents attend and successfully complete an AR-15 and the Remington 870 Shotgun Armorer's Course hosted by the Denham Springs Police Department.
- Had one agent attend and successfully pass the Chemical Weapons Instructor course giving LDWF a total of three instructors.
- Had three agents attend and successfully pass a Verbal De-Escalation course by the University of Tennessee Law Enforcement Innovation Center.
- Had two agents attend and receive a Force Science Analysis certification in Texas.
- Had two agents attend an Advanced BUI Train-the-Trainer Workshop in Kentucky.

### Recruiting Section

In 2017, LDWF established a Recruiting Section consisting of one full-time recruiter with the mission of attracting and retaining the best, brightest, and most talented candidates to become LDWF agents. In 2021, the Enforcement Division added a second full-time recruiter and 16 regional agents tasked with the part-time duty of recruiting. The two full-time recruiters attended law enforcement recruiting courses from the Public Agency Training Council (PATC) and Law Enforcement Seminars (LES). These current best training practices were the foundation used to train region agents tasked with recruiting duties to maximize recruitment efforts and develop recruiting programs. Also in 2021, the recruiting section launched its Ride-Along Program. In 2022, the recruiting section launched its Enforcement Internship Program. Both of these programs are designed to give prospective applicants the awareness and exposure needed to pursue a career in conservation law enforcement. In addition, LDWF revamped its website and produced multiple enforcement videos intended to recruit, inform, and retain future agents.

### In-Service

At the end of 2022, agents completed their annual and fall/spring firearms in-service training requirements, which consisted of the following:

### Spring/Fall: In-Service

- Firearms – Rifles, Shotguns and Pistols

### Annual: In-Service

- First Aid/Blood Borne Pathogens/CPR for the Professional Rescuer
- MDTs (Monadnock Defensive Tactics Systems) Defensive Tactics/DT Scenarios
- MEB (Monadnock Expandable Baton) Retrainer
- HIATT Tactical Handcuffing
- DWI Intox. 9000 Recertification
- Standardized Field Sobriety Testing

### DWI

Two agents were certified as Drug Recognition Experts (DRE), bringing the LDWF-LED total to 22 DREs.

### Marine Law Enforcement Training Program

At the end of 2022, all agents had completed their annual recertification as Boat Operators for Search and Rescue (BOSAR) in the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA), Boat Operations and Training Program (BOAT). Additionally, we're in the process of certifying multiple agents as NASBLA Instructors for BCM (Boat Crew Member), BOSAR (Boat Operations Search and Rescue), TOC (Tactical Operator Course) and the AOC (Airboat Operator Course).

### Crisis Intervention or Critical Incident Training

LDWF currently has 14 Crisis Intervention and Critical Incident members whom are part of the Agents Crisis Team (ACT) and are trained in Crisis Intervention. The ACT team consists of agents who are specially trained as skilled listeners. The objective of ACT is to provide support for law enforcement personnel, and their immediate family, who have experienced a critical incident or traumatic event. A Critical Incident is defined as any incident, action, or event, which has the potential for producing significant emotional trauma that may adversely affect the psychological well-being of law enforcement personnel.

## **EMERGENCY SERVICES**

### Maritime Special Response Team

The LDWF/LED Maritime Special Response Team (MSRT) partners with the Louisiana State Police (LSP) SWAT team to address maritime security threats within the state of Louisiana. The team provides a maritime tactical response capability at the state level in order to effectively provide public safety, officer safety, and tactical support for LDWF/LEDs federal, state and local partners.

During this period the LDWF/LED MSRT team completed their annual training which consisted of:

- Close Quarter Battle Techniques (CQB)
- Firearms Training



- Security Zone Enforcement Procedures
- Underway Training
- Hostage scenarios
- Large Vessel Training
- Rural Operations and Tactical Tracking
- Water Survival

At the end of 2022, MSRT members had completed their annual recertification as Tactical Operators Course (TOC) in the NASBLA BOAT Program.

Preventative Radiological and Nuclear Detection (PRND):

LDWF continues to work with key local, state and federal partners to implement a PRND program in the state of Louisiana. Through our partnership with the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO), the state has developed a statewide concept of operations plan (CONOPS), as well as standard operating procedures (SOPs) for individual agency partners. LDWF and PRND partners successfully completed a three-day training exercise as well as a full scale exercise.

**2022-2023 ACQUISITIONS**

- 36 - Point Blank Bullet Proof Vests
- 4 - Honda FourTrax Rancher 4x4 ATV's
- 4 - Suzuki 350 HP Motors
- 48 - FORD F250 4x4 Trucks
- 1 - MCU
- 17 - RAM's
- 19 - Lightbars
- 4 - Durango's
- 1 - Trailer
- 3 - Ford's (2-F250's- 1-Exp)
- 2 - Lawrence HDS16 Side Scan Sonars
- 3 - Consoles Dispatch
- 22 - Winches
- 2 - Glock's

**OPERATION GAME THIEF**

Louisiana Operation Game Thief (OGT), Inc. is a program which provides cash rewards to those providing information leading to the apprehension of wildlife violators. Violations can be reported anonymously by calling a 24-hour toll-free telephone number (1-800-442-2511) or by using LDWF's tip411 program. To use the tip411 program, citizens can text LADWF and their tip to 847411 or download the "LADWF Tips" iPhone or Android apps from the Apple App Store and Google Play free of charge. The hotline and the tip411 program are monitored 24



hours a day by the LDWF Communications Center. Reports are immediately referred to agents for action.

During the 2022-23 year, OGT paid out \$20,650 in rewards. In the 2022-23 year, the LOGT board reviewed 28 cases that led to 52 subjects getting cited or arrested and a total of 203 citations issued. From 1984 until the time of this report, the LOGT board has paid out a total of \$477,560 in reward money to informants.



### **JOINT ENFORCEMENT AGREEMENT**



LDWF-LED again entered into a Joint Enforcement Agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Office for Enforcement. LDWF-LED received approximately \$820,626 in FY 2022-2023 to patrol for compliance with federal commercial and recreational fisheries regulations, primarily in the Gulf of Mexico.

### **PUBLIC INFORMATION**

The LDWF-LED Public Information section does various media and public information related tasks. The public information section handles public emails, Facebook questions, media requests including setting up interviews, and gathering enforcement related information. The public information section also provides footage and photos to media outlets both in-state and nationally.

LDWF-LED issued 149 enforcement related press releases during FY 2022-2023. These press releases were issued to a media contact list via email both state and nationwide. They were also posted on the LDWF website. The press releases ranged from rewards for information on current cases, conviction results, announcements of event and upcoming cadet academies, highlighting important and unusual cases, enforcement division and agent achievements and awards won, and boating safety information.

LDWF-LED public information also produces videos for external and internal use. The videos range from public service announcements, cadet recruitment, hunting and boating safety and cadet training. The videos for this fiscal year included safe boating patrol stop, personal flotation device education and Operation Dry Water.



# MISSISSIPPI

*Colonel Jerry L. Carter*



## AGENCY OVERVIEW

The Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks Law Enforcement Bureau which currently consist of 173 Sworn Game Wardens that enforce the wildlife laws of hunting and fishing and recreational boating in the state. The men and women are extremely well trained and dedicated in their enforcement efforts in protecting and enhancing the abundant wildlife resources for future generations to enjoy.

## TRAINING

In Service training has resulted transition from the Glock 40 caliber to the Glock 9mm both will now be used as the primary and backup weapon.

## FUNDING AND STAFFING ISSUES

On March 1, 2023, a total of 15 Cadets were hired, out of the 15 Cadets hired we are holding steady at 12. They are the attending basic law enforcement training academy which is considered Phase II of the agency's cadet program. Graduation set for August 3<sup>rd</sup>. The next step for our Cadets will be reverting to Phase I of the academy training by completing the remaining weeks of our game and fish academy with graduation set for August 31<sup>st</sup>. During and after the pandemic, we have been faced with the challenge of replacement of patrol vehicles.



## MAJOR CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT TRENDS

MDWFP Operations Unit attended the 2023 Southeastern Investigations & Intelligence Conference Investigators attended the 2023 Southeastern States Investigations & Intelligence Conference in Helen, Georgia. The conference was hosted by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources at Unicoi State Park. This was the first such conference held in the southeast since 2018. Fifty-four (54) attendees from Thirteen (13) State Wildlife Agencies, the University of Florida Wildlife Forensic Lab and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service attended the conference. Vendors from multiple intelligence and investigative service platforms were also present to provide attendees with information relative to the services that each provided. Investigators attending the conference presented case studies of current investigations and trends that occurred across the Southeastern United States. Intelligence Analysts from Florida & Georgia provided presentations of case studies and the benefits of having an Intelligence Unit embedded within an Investigations Unit. Overall,



the conference was well received by all in attendance as it gave Investigators and Intelligence Analysts an opportunity to network with multiple state and federal partners. Facebook and all social media platforms continue to be a vital tool in the investigations and apprehending of wildlife violators.

## **STATE, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL ISSUES, LEGISLATION, LEGAL CHALLENGES AND COURT DECISIONS IMPACTING NATURAL RESOURCES LAW ENFORCEMENT**

The Mississippi Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks has adopted a few regulatory changes over the past year.

HB 516: TO DECREASE THE MINIMUM YEARS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT EXPERIENCE REQUIRED TO BE APPOINTED A CONSERVATION OFFICER FROM FIVE YEARS TO TWO YEARS

HB 979: TO ADD FORWARD-LOOKING INFRARED (FLIR) AND THERMAL IMAGING DEVICES TO THE PROHIBITED MEANS OF TAKING GAME AT NIGHT; TO PROVIDE THAT A PERSON WHO HUNTS, TAKES OR KILLS ANY ANIMAL DURING LEGAL HUNTING HOURS, AND SUBSEQUENTLY SEARCHES FOR AND/OR RECOVERS SUCH MORTALLY WOUNDED ANIMAL WITH THE AID OF A LIGHT OR LIGHTING DEVICE, IS NOT IN VIOLATION OF THIS SECTION; TO CLARIFY THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE USE OF TRACKING DOGS FOR THE RETRIEVAL OF WHITE-TAILED DEER SHOT AND WOUNDED DURING LEGAL HUNTING HOUR

SB: 2534: TO REQUIRE A FRESHWATER FISHING GUIDE OR SERVICE THAT USES A BOAT TO OBTAIN A FISHING GUIDE BOAT LICENSE AND DECA

### Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

The expansion of the department SRT Unit will now include a K-9 and Dive Team. These two new units are now in Phase I starting with interviews and the purchasing of equipment, attending training and certification classes.

Boating Coordinators have completed Phase I and II of accident reconstruction, BUI Train the Trainer class.



Recruitment is still a big part in today's conservation law enforcement. We are in the process of getting a better marketing plan to assist in our efforts. The bureau is also looking at conducting a cadet class of prior sworn officers to help build up our work force.

Law Enforcement officers are now issued cell phones with C-Spire as the provider for service to enhance their communications during routine work efforts and during critical events, plus Officers will now be issued a new laptop unit called Tuff Books.

Under the state's shooting range program, we have now acquired a mobile 5-stand shooting clay. This mobile unit is design to offer shooting opportunities in areas of the state that is not equipped

with the standard up to date shooting ranges. We feel that this project will help enhance and develop future sportsman for our state and abroad.

We are finishing the final phase of weapon transition for all sworn personnel as we have now been issued the new Glock model 45 9mm and Glock model 43 9mm.

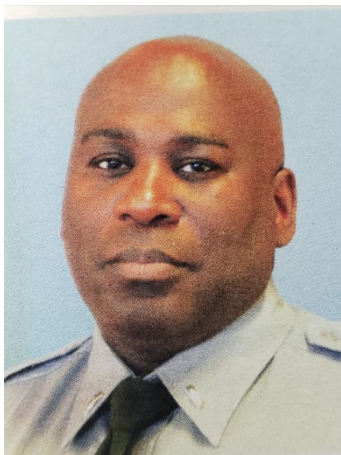
## **LEADERSHIP**

The Law Enforcement Bureau is proud to announce the promotions of Captains Chris Clark, Glen Jackson, and Tracy Tullos to the rank of Majors.

Major Clark will now oversee the state's Boater and Hunter Ed programs and is now the agencies newly BLA for the state of Mississippi. With a staff of 6 Coordinators, they will assist our Field Officers with additional training in their enforcement efforts related to investigations, fatalities, theft, and educational classes. Major Clark is a 21-year veteran starting out his career as a Field Officer assigned to Kemper County, then later assigned to his home county of Winston. He has excelled throughout the course of his career as a Boater and Hunter Ed. Coordinator, a Field Supervisor, and a Regional Captain within the Central Region (East). With his law enforcement experience and investigative skills, he will be a vital asset to our program.



Major Jackson will now serve as our Administrator of our state's shooting ranges. His duties will be to oversee the daily operations of the use of these facilities. He and his staff will work closely with the Mississippi Scholastic Shooting Program (MSSP) This program is a team-based, youth development program that utilizes the shotgun sports of skeet, trap, and sporting clays to reenforce life skills, such as discipline, safety, teamwork, ethics, and self-confidence. Major Jackson is a 24-year veteran with the agency starting with our then Marine Enforcement working the coastal waters. He was later assigned to his home county of Sharkey and later to Washington County as a Field Officer. In addition, throughout his career Major Jackson was later assigned to the Covert Unit, along with other covert officers that were involved in the prosecution of an illegal wildlife operation called "Operation Cold Storage" Major Jackson furthered his career by being promoted to Field Supervisor and to Regional Captain of the Central Region (West). A trained and certified Armor specialized in Glocks weapons skills that are very useful for shooting ranges and firearms qualifications.



Major Tullos will oversee Special Operations. A 24-year veteran of the department he started his career as a Field Officer in Prentiss then reassigned to his home county of Warren. He later excelled through the ranks as a Field Supervisor then on to a Regional Captain. Major Tullos was then assigned to the Investigation Unit, with a new role as the CWD Coordinator and working with the Wildlife Enclosure Program. While being assigned to the program and with his impeccable investigative skills he was able to document and enter for prosecution of illegal importation of white-tail deer in our state. This case is still pending with several violations of the Lacey Act and state law addressing CWD. Major Tullos serves as an instructor for our wildlife academy teaching cadets state statues and our administrative rules related to wildlife enforcement.



## **MISSOURI**

### ***Chief Randy Doman***

#### **TRAINING ISSUES**



#### Conservation Agent Training Academy

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) Agent Training Academy started on March 16, 2023. The six-month (approximately 1200 hour) academy consists of sixteen (16) Agent Trainees (11 males and 5 females) with graduation set for early October. With fourteen (14) current vacancies, this is the third consecutive class, with classes in 2021, 2022, and 2023.

One challenge our academy faces is training the non-traditional candidates that we have been attracting over the last several years. By non-traditional, we mean candidates that have the right education, demeanor, communication skills, and passion for the outdoors to be successful in this career but may not have had the traditional consumptive resource use experience that this career typically attracts. During the academy we have started to take advantage of every opportunity possible to get trainees hands on training and experience in practical application/enforcement of the traditional consumptive resource regulations. We have entire training days blocked off for experience in paddlefish snagging, furbearer trapping, and turkey season enforcement. In addition, they attend shorter workshops on turkey hunting basics, deer hunting basics, bear hunting basics, fishing, native plants, pond management, and much more.



*Missouri Conservation Agent Training Academy Class of*



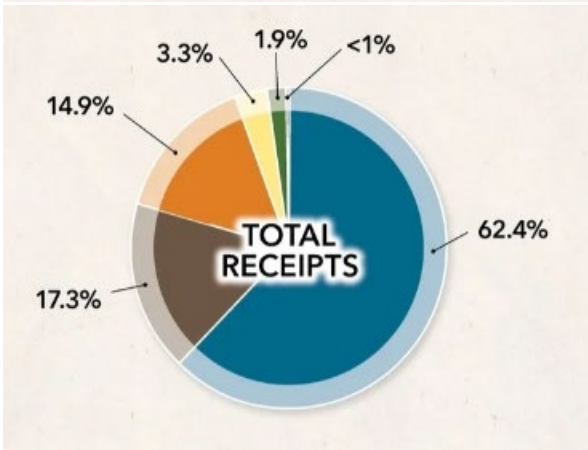
## FUNDING AND STAFFING ISSUES

### Funding

The operating budget for MDC represents less than one (1) percent of the total state budget and receives no state general revenue. The primary sources of revenue are the one-eighth of one percent Conservation Sales Tax at about \$148 million, permit sales at about \$41 million, and federal reimbursements at about \$35 million. Total receipts for FY 2022 were \$237.8 million.

**MDC FY22 Actual Receipts**  
MDC gets the majority of its funding through the **conservation sales tax**. For every \$8 spent on taxable items, one penny goes to conservation.

Conservation Sales Tax	\$148,432,999
Permit Sales	\$41,185,759
Federal Reimbursements	\$35,330,861
Sales and Rentals	\$7,896,832
Other Sources	\$4,437,503
Interest	\$521,710



MDC has a priority-based budgeting program specifically tied to the Department’s Strategic Plan: *Design for the Future*. This plan identifies three goals to direct the efforts associated with specific FY22-24 Department priorities.

- MDC Takes Care of Nature
- MDC Connects People with Nature
- MDC Maintains Public Trust

**MDC FY22 Actual Disbursements**  
Funds are distributed throughout MDC to accomplish the **state's top conservation priorities**.

Habitat Management	\$44,298,434
Conservation Business Services	\$43,299,232
Fish and Wildlife Management	\$40,904,071
Recreation Management	\$22,850,521
Education and Communication	\$22,637,724
Capital Improvements	\$12,208,679
Staff Development and Benefits	\$6,999,488
County Assistance Payments	\$5,747,850
Land Conservation and Partnerships	\$2,365,170

### Staffing and Employment Diversity

Protection Branch currently has 14 vacancies out of 181 full-time employees. MDC and Protection continue to focus on recruiting and retaining staff who more closely represent the demographics of Missouri. Protection Branch leads these efforts by progressing into year two of the Conservation Preparation Internship Program that is designed to help recruit and develop well qualified, non-traditional candidates. The paid internship provides these candidates experiences and opportunities to help them be more competitive and successful in the application and interview process for the Conservation Agent Training Academy. As a result, the 2022 and 2023 academy classes more closely represent the statewide demographics with four (4) out of ten (10) interns, all non-traditional, making it into the academy. Three (3) more of those ten (10) are looking to apply to future academy classes or be hired elsewhere in the Department.

Recruiting efforts have also been supplemented significantly from the efforts of our administration and the Conservation Commission. Throughout 2022 and the beginning of 2023, the Conservation Commission approved several improvements to the total compensation package

received by MDC employees. Individual increases were based off the following: market-based salary adjustments, years of service with MDC, performance pay based on set performance measures, increased insurance premium contribution by the Commission, and other scheduled pay adjustments including a recent 8.7% cost of living increase. MDC employees enjoyed anywhere from a 10% - 20% increase in salary and “take home” pay. These improvements have directly impacted the ability to recruit and retain high performing candidates and employees. The starting salary for a Conservation Agent Trainee, while they are in the academy, is now \$48,744.00 which bodes well for future recruiting efforts.

## MAJOR CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT TRENDS



*Patrons at the KC O&C Expo.*

Missouri’s Commercial Wildlife and Special Investigations Unit continue to combat the issues that arise from increased interest in commercial trade and trafficking of native wildlife and wildlife parts. We are continuing to see additional demand for Missouri’s native turtles, snakes, and herps in the international pet trade and food markets as well as an increased demand in wildlife and wildlife parts being sold at “Oddities & Curiosities” (O&C) expos and markets. Oddities & Curiosities Expos have become a method of trafficking wildlife and wildlife parts across the United States. These Expos provide a venue to exploit protected wildlife species. Vendors sell native wildlife parts and recruit collector and providers for obtaining new illegal wildlife parts to be sold at other events. In 2022, O&C had 24 Expos across the United States with plans to have 30 Expos across the country in 2023.

Missouri conservation agents from across the state assisted with the Special Investigations Unit’s efforts at the 2022 Oddities and Curiosities Expo in Kansas City, Missouri, on June 25, 2022. One hundred sixteen (116) vendors had booths at the Expo. Covert teams attending the Expo sent vendor names, locations, and photographs of illegal wildlife for sale to uniformed agents staged outside the Expo. Both covert and uniformed teams were provided guidance for processing and documenting wildlife violations during the contacts. Covert teams were able to purchase wildlife parts from twenty-two (22) different vendors. These purchases involved twenty-nine (29) illegal wildlife items including: racoon feet, turtle shells, turtle bones, turtle feet, bear skull, bear toe bones, fox skull, badger paw, armadillo scalp, beaver foot, rattle snake rattle, and jars containing whole snakes, turtles, squirrel fetus, and squirrel heart. Nineteen (19) citations were issued along with ten (10) warnings for the illegal sale of wildlife and wildlife parts.



*Preserved wildlife and wildlife parts being sold in jars and snow globes at the KC O&C Expo.*

## Community Policing

The Protection Branch has a rich history of community policing efforts and takes pride in being known for those efforts. In September of 2022, the branch implemented one of its newest initiatives with the Protection “Community Outreach Meals” (COMs) program. Historically, conservation agents frequently interacted with citizens at their local coffee shops, diners, cafes, etc. This practice has significantly declined over the past twenty (20) years due to changes in meal reimbursement policies and increasing demands on agents’ limited time. To help reverse this trend and increase public contacts outside of the traditional enforcement contact, this program was implemented to encourage and incentivize agents to spend time with constituents in their local food establishments.

These interactions are intended to facilitate individual and group discussion with citizens on various conservation issues, to answer questions, and to proactively communicate Department programs and services with the citizens they serve. Agents are expected to conduct at least three (3) COMs meals per month during the breakfast and lunch hours in their communities, using their state purchasing card to pay for their meals, and are required to sit with or nearby members of the public to help facilitate these conversations. We have found that this approach works well in both rural and urban settings, and in communities that we have not traditionally been able to reach with typical programs or conservation enforcement. Since full implementation of the program, conservation agents have conducted over 4,300 community outreach meals, and have reached over 26,000 Missouri citizens.

#### **UNIQUE CROSS BOUNDARY OR COOPERATIVE ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS**

MDC is a part of the Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership, which is comprised of over fifteen (15) federal and state agencies, as well as agriculture and conservation NGOs. The Partnership operates under the common goal of eliminating feral hogs from public and private lands throughout Missouri. During 2022, the Partnership removed 6,289 hogs from the landscape. Over the last three years the Partnership has removed over 28,781 feral hogs off Missouri’s landscape. Conservation agents remain actively involved in trapping efforts on private and public property as well as law enforcement patrols on U.S. Forest Service land and Missouri Conservation Areas throughout southern Missouri.

Missouri’s Special Investigations Unit (SIU) continues to aid in interagency investigations when appropriate and remains active as a contributing member of the multi-state Aquatic Resources Task Force comprised of their counterpart investigators from Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Tennessee.

#### **NEW INNOVATIONS IN CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT**

##### Body Cameras



The Protection Branch has completed the rollout of its Body Worn Camera (BWC) Program with the final policy approved, and 180 cameras being assigned and deployed across the state as of February 28, 2023. With an ever-changing landscape in law enforcement, and efforts to be more transparent, professional, and maintain the trust of Missouri citizens, Protection leadership felt it was time to develop its program as soon as possible, but also wanted to make sure they were deliberate in selecting the right BWC platform (Axon Body 3) and crafting the policy specifically for



*Axon Body 3 recording during the 2022 Firearms deer season.*

a resource law enforcement roll. They were also looking for a platform compatible with our in-car CradlePoint systems, that would not create additional infrastructure and data storage burdens to IT staff. This allows agents to be more effective and efficient, providing the ability to upload electronic evidence to the online management system directly from the vehicle's Wi-Fi signal, and without the need of a docking station. Since full implementation of the program at the end of February, conservation agents have recorded over 9,000 interactions with the public.

### K-9 Unit

Protection Branch added four (4) new canines to the K-9 unit in 2022, bringing the unit up to a total of nine (9). The four (4) new handlers and their K-9s recently wrapped up their initial training in Ohio and will receive their commissions at the Conservation Commission meeting in May. The capabilities of MDC canines are extensive in conservation related work, but common uses include tracking, evidence recovery, search and rescue, wildlife detection, and public outreach programs. With the new additions, Protection Branch has a K-9 unit in seven (7) of the eight (8) regions across the state. The K-9 unit has proved to be an invaluable asset not only in enforcement efforts of evidence recovery, tracking, wildlife detection and search and rescue, but in public outreach as well. In 2022 the K-9 unit conducted 229 public programs, reached over 15,000 program participants, and had over 2,000 deployments.



*K-9 Waylon helps make the case on a turkey poacher.*

## **STATE, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL ISSUES, LEGISLATION, LEGAL CHALLENGES AND COURT DECISIONS IMPACTING NATURAL RESOURCES LAW ENFORCEMENT**

In Missouri, we are anxiously awaiting the decision from the Supreme Court of Missouri in *Conservation Commission and Missouri Department of Conservation v. Eric Schmitt and Sarah*

*Steelman*. In summary, this case challenges the Missouri model of Conservation and discusses the Conservation Commissions constitutional authority in general, but more specially relates to land acquisition and appropriation of funding.

According to Supreme Court case summaries, the main question this case presents is whether the Commission has exclusive authority over the conservation fund. Related issues include whether the Missouri Constitution requires an act of appropriation by the general assembly before conservation funds can be withdrawn from the state treasury; whether the plain language of the constitutional provisions pertaining to the Commission mean the conservation fund automatically stands appropriated or require mandatory appropriation for land acquisitions; and whether the Commission’s authority to control and manage wildlife resources extends to expenditures from the conservation fund.

### **COST SAVINGS INITIATIVES**

The Protection Branch continues to utilize a very active and successful Protection Volunteer Program consisting of approximately 100 volunteers spread across the state. In 2022, they contributed around 3,500 hours of volunteer work to MDC. These volunteers assist conservation agents and other MDC staff with projects including enforcement patrols, outreach and education programs, training scenarios and wildlife surveys. The volunteer program has also proven to be a valuable recruitment tool.

### **OTHER SPECIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ISSUES**

#### Conservation Agents

The backbone of Protection Branch is the conservation agents. In Missouri there is one (1) or two (2) agents per county to officially represent the Department.

The main focus is on increasing voluntary compliance with the *Wildlife Code*. Protection Branch has put an emphasis on providing a strong law enforcement presence while using all the tools in an agent’s tool belt to address violations. Last year the branch developed a dashboard to help determine resource contact compliance rates and conviction rates across the state. This helps analyze data to drive decision-making and helps measure efforts in citizen engagement, education, and community policing which should all correlate to a high contact compliance rate.

Protection Branch has an annual goal to maintain an 84% contact compliance rate. This data also helps ensure we are proactively working to maintain good relationships with prosecutors and judges and are turning in good cases (with good reports) which correlate to a high conviction rate. We have also added a new measure, based on a quarterly conservation monitor survey, which measures public perception towards Protection’s community policing efforts. Specifically, a survey question which asks the level of agreement with the question, “Is MDC doing a good job enforcing fish and wildlife laws?” Together, these three (3) measures help drive decision-making and help



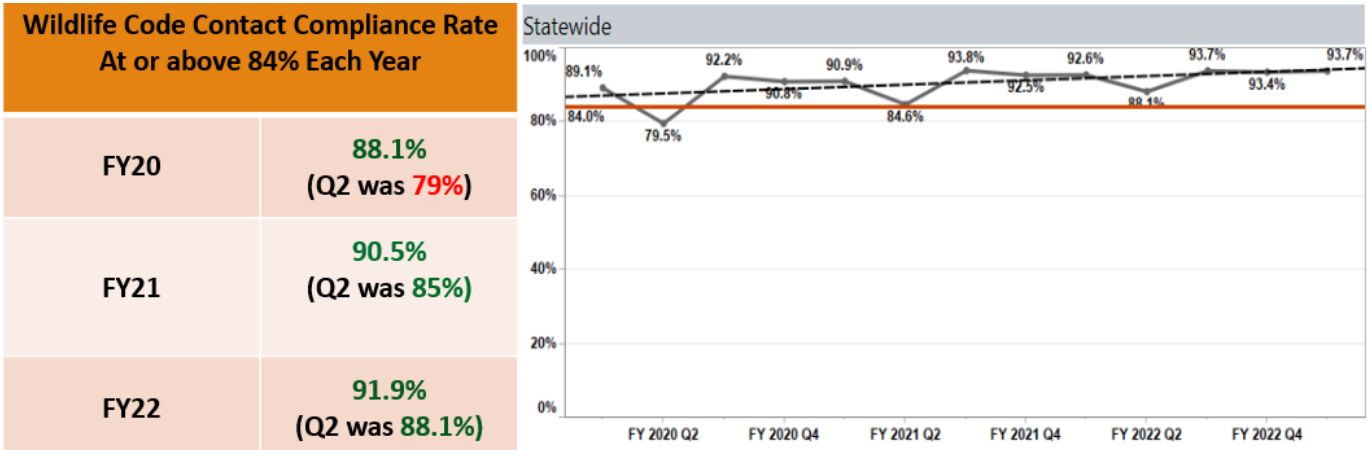
*Conservation Agent Mark Henry issues a Sonic Citation for free ice cream.*

quantify community policing efforts towards increasing voluntary compliance with the *Wildlife Code of Missouri*.

- **2022 Law Enforcement Contacts** ..... 204,578
- **2022 Non-LE Contacts**.....338,668
- **2022 Resource**

In FY22, the statewide resource contact compliance rate was at 93.7%, meaning that for every 100 law enforcement contacts made, there were an average of 6.3 violations discovered.

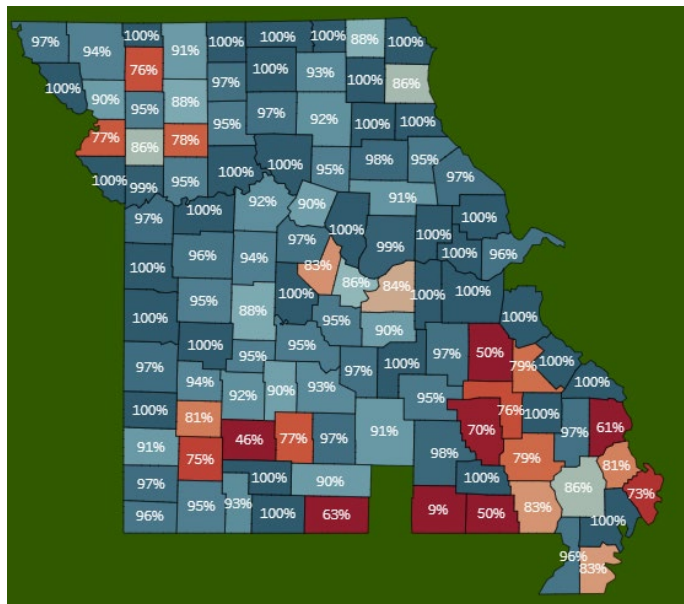
*Conservation Agent's yearly accomplishments*



*Dashboard to demonstrate contact compliance rate per fiscal year.*

Equally as important is the statewide conviction rate. This map shows a statewide conviction rate of over 90% for calendar year 2022. The map breaks the numbers down by county to show where agents are doing well and the counties that need additional focus between local agents, prosecutors, and judges.

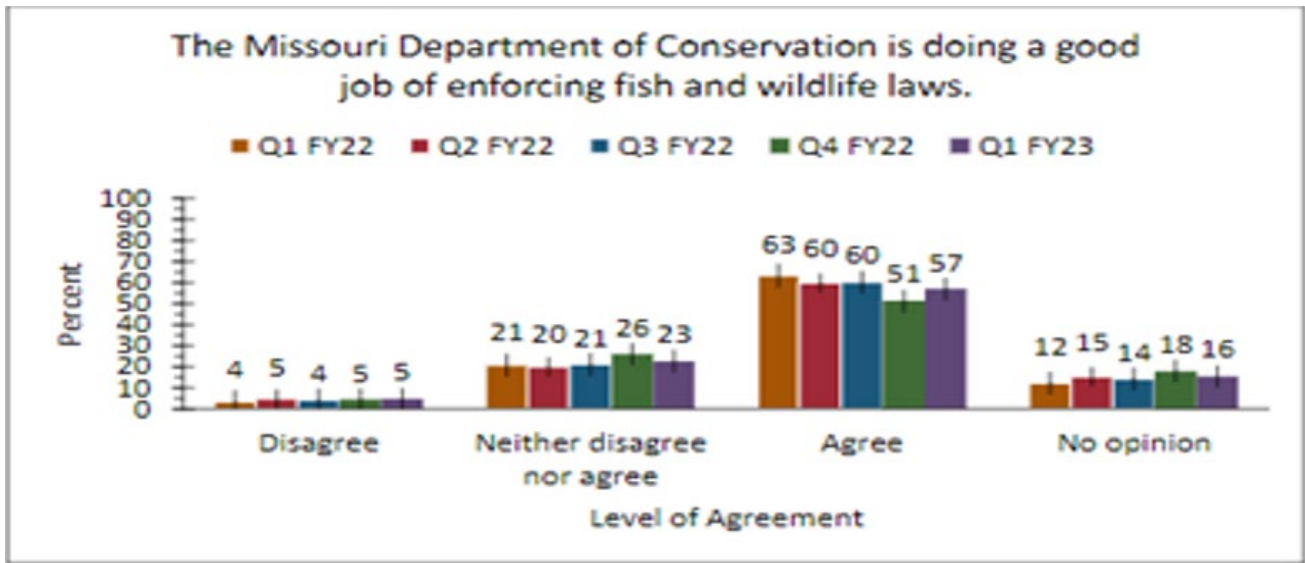
Statewide Conviction Rate	
# of Convictions	<b>3,773</b>
# of Citations	<b>4,111</b>
Conviction Rate	<b>91.78%</b>



Below is a graph that depicts the survey question to Missouri citizens: "Do you think the Missouri Department of Conservation is doing a good job of enforcing the fish and wildlife laws?" As you



can see there is only a small percentage of Missourians that disagree, but we do have a lot of room to reach more Missourians that are indifferent or have no opinion.



SOURCE: MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION ANNUAL REVIEW, MISSOURI CONSERVATIONIST  
 SOURCE: MISSOURI FERAL HOG REPORT 2022  
 SOURCE: JUDICIAL BRANCH. (2021). CASE SUMMARIES FOR SUNDAY, APRIL 23, 2023 - MISSOURI. MISSOURI COURTS . RETRIEVED APRIL 26, 2023, FROM [HTTPS://WWW.COURTS.MO.GOV/PAGE.JSP?ID=171834&YEAR=2022&MONTH=02&DAY=07&SPLITDOCKET=TIMESLOT&TIME=1330](https://www.courts.mo.gov/page.jsp?id=171834&year=2022&month=02&day=07&splitdocket=timeslot&time=1330)  
 SOURCE: MDC PROTECTION BRANCH, TABLEAU DASHBOARD  
 SOURCE: PROTECTION GUIDELINE 5.13

## NORTH CAROLINA

### Ben Meyer, Colonel

#### AGENCY OVERVIEW

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) Law Enforcement Division’s mission is to conserve wildlife resources; promote safe, responsible boating; and provide public safety, through proactive law enforcement and the instruction of quality education.

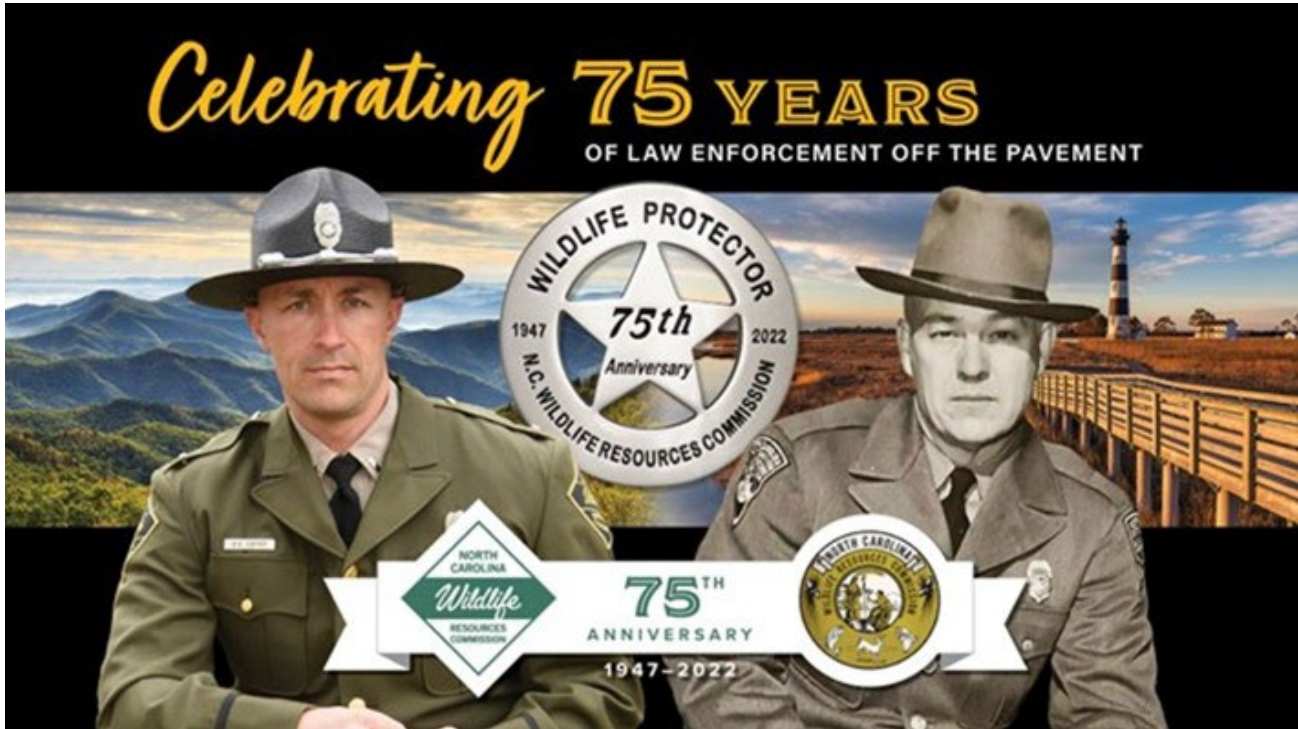


The division consists of 228 sworn law enforcement officers. Command staff includes the Colonel, Major of Field Operations, Major of Support Operations, Training Director, Telecommunications Lieutenant, Professional Standards Lieutenant, Business Operations Manager, Telecommunications Supervisor, seven telecommunicators and four administrative assistants.

#### 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE NCWRC

In 2022, the NCWRC celebrated 75 years of history. The first bird and game wardens began enforcing the game law in 1903 leading to the creation of the NC Wildlife Resources Commission in 1947. The year concluded with the Wildlife in NC magazine ran an article in the Jan / Feb issue

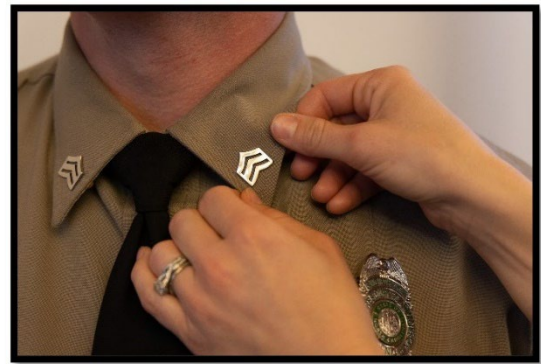
entitled "A History of Law Enforcement off the Pavement." The article focused on historical highlights and changes during the Agency's 75-year history.



### PROMOTIONS

The NCWRC would like to congratulate the following individuals for their promotions over the last year.

- John Beardsley, Lieutenant District 1
- Mark Dutton, Major of Support Operations
- Darby Enoch, Lieutenant-Training Director
- Nathan Green, Lieutenant – Support Operations
- Clayton Ludwick, Sergeant – District 2 – New Hanover
- Tim Godwin, Sergeant – District 5 – Durham
- Trent Parrish, Sergeant – District 1 – Hyde
- Josh McConnell, Captain – District 6
- Phillip Tallent, Captain – District 8
- Ben Meyer – Colonel



## AWARDS

### 2022 SEAFWA Officer of the Year: Sgt. Brandon Lyon

During the year, Sgt. Lyon had occasion to respond to missing children on a boat in sub-freezing temperatures. Sgt. Lyon was able to locate all the children after a 5-hour search and bring them



to safety. While they were all transported to the hospital and treated for severe hypothermia, the outcome was good. In addition to these efforts, Sgt. Lyon issued charges for 63 hunting, 96 boating, 62 fishing, 23 littering, and 23 other violations. Included in the 267 total charges were 2-night deer hunting, 8 hunting ducks use/aid bait, 8 taking deer during closed season, 4 take over limit antlered bucks, 4 hunter trespass, 5 boating while impaired, and 1 driving while impaired violation. By completing

detailed case files and working closely with prosecutors, Sgt. Lyon secured 16 hunting license revocations to these serious wildlife offenders. One night deer hunting case's judgment rewarded a confidential informant \$500 through NC WILDTIP. Sgt. Lyon was the responding and primary investigating officer when a subject was hunting deer out of season and accidentally shot his girlfriend in the chest and abdomen with a crossbow equipped with a 3-blade fixed broadhead. She survived after undergoing extensive emergency surgery and long hospital stay. Sgt. Lyon charged the subject with multiple wildlife violations. Brandon also assisted the Special Operations Unit with an investigation that apprehended a man who killed multiple bear and deer illegally from the piedmont to the mountains of NC. All of this work was done in addition to training two new LE Officers. Sgt. Lyon has successfully completed NASBLA Boating Accident Investigation Levels 1 & 2 training, he holds an Advanced Law Enforcement Certificate.

### 2023 North Carolina MADD Hero Award and NC NASBLA Boat Officer of the Year: Master Officer Ryan Biggerstaff

During the 2022 boating season Officer Biggerstaff conducted multiple media interviews, providing critical boating safety information to the public. Biggerstaff utilized these interviews to reach a large audience, providing information regarding topics such as PFD use, navigational rules, and the importance of designating a sober vessel operator. These media contacts assisted with the agency's proactive law enforcement initiatives by promoting safe responsible boating on the waters of North Carolina.

In less than Six years of law enforcement time, Biggerstaff has arrested or investigated over sixty-five boating while impaired





and driving while impaired offenses. Over the past year alone, he arrested seventeen boating while impaired offenders, including multiple drug impairment cases. Biggerstaff's work ethic and dedication to providing safe boating opportunities has made our states waterways a safer and more enjoyable place for outdoor enthusiasts.

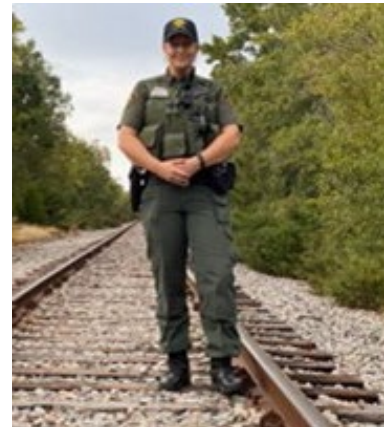
NC Bowhunters Association Officer of the Year: Master Officer Tyler Campbell

Master Officer Tyler Campbell was awarded the 2022 North Carolina Bow Hunter's Association Officer of the Year honors. During the 2022 deer season, Campbell led his assigned trainee (Nathan Kreitman) in detecting and addressing over thirty hunting violations. This included four closed season deer hunting violations as well as four trespassing deer hunter violations. Additionally, Campbell and Kreitman were able to apprehend three subjects who were found night deer hunting with the use of a solar powered light that overlooked a bait site. Master Officer Campbell continues to be an asset to the NCWRC, his community and to the bowhunter's of North Carolina.



NASBLA 2022 Southeast Region Educator of the Year: Master Officer Ashley O'Hare

After completing the weeklong NHTSA SFTS train the trainer class, Officer O'Hare went on to complete the 24-hour NASBLA BUI train the trainer course. In this course she learned how to instruct the seated battery of standardized field sobriety test. Upon completion, she conducted in-service training for her fellow wildlife officers. She also helped teach these valuable skills to our newest officers at the Basic School. This training is essential in our mission to promote safe, responsible boating and to provide public safety through DWI/BWI detection and apprehension. Officer O'Hare also conducted a make-up SFTS refresher for officers that could not attend regularly scheduled training. Additionally, she helped instruct the NASBLA Seated Battery SFST Transition training to outside agencies such as the Holly Springs Police Department. She is currently teaching a class for the Davidson County Sheriff's Office and other surrounding agencies.



**TRAINING**

59<sup>th</sup> Basic School

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission Law Enforcement Division now has sixteen new wildlife law enforcement officers. The recruits were sworn in during a graduation ceremony held on July 18<sup>th</sup> in Pinehurst. The graduating officers are:

- Avery J. Allen, Salisbury, NC
- Nathan M. Baespflug, Sumner, WA

- Eric Burkhalter, Harrisburg, NC
- Matthew D. Burlingame , Jackson, WY
- Anthony C. Bynum, Lincolnton, NC
- Alicia M. Calogero, Skaneateles, NY
- John C. Hall, Lexington, NC
- Bryce O. Harrington, Goldsboro, NC
- Cameron C. Kepley, Midland, NC
- Ethan P. Lewis, Crumpler, NC
- Javier S. Monroe, Silver Spring, MD
- Jacob A. Pattison, Waxhaw, NC
- Quantra M. Taylor, Florence, SC
- Tyler N. Walker, King, NC
- Matthew D. Woodlief, Henderson, NC
- Zackary M. Xiong, Albemarle, NC



To successfully complete the WRC Basic School recruits are required to complete conservation-specific training on fish and wildlife laws, motorboat accident investigation and protected species training. Instruction covers statutory and investigation procedures, defensive tactics, and pursuit driving and boating.

It's 29 weeks of rigorous training in a para-military environment that includes N.C. standard basic law enforcement with 1,110+ hours of classroom and practical exercise. Recruits receive instruction on a wide range of laws from general crime, traffic offense, ABC/drug law, juvenile law, as well as hunting, fishing, boating, and trapping laws. They also receive training in practical exercises such as driver's training, firearms, subject control/arrest techniques, conducting traffic stops, patrol techniques, and game warden tactics.

### 60<sup>th</sup> Basic School

NCWRC is currently in the process of hiring qualified applicants to begin the next Basic School in January 2024. 18 qualified individuals will be selected for a pool of more than 1100 that applied. 165 are being interviewed by officer panels to determine who will move onto to the next step of criminal background checks and be selected as our newest officers.

### Law Enforcement Training Facility

The NCWRC broke ground this year for a facility to meet all the LE Division's training needs now and in the future. This facility can house 55 recruits, officers and instructors along with a 1600 square foot mat room, gym, dual classrooms and recreational areas. It will be located on the NC

Dept of Public Safety Campus with access to state-of-the-art training facilities to equip new law enforcement officers with the skills necessary for the job. This facility will also house a Game Warden Museum dedicated to remembering the history of all the officers that made us who we are today. The planned opening will be in August of 2024.



## LAW ENFORCEMENT TRENDS

### Wildlife Law Enforcement Women's Hunt

With a growing number of women filling the ranks of the NCWRC, Master Officer Ashley O'Hare organized a special hunt opportunity for female officers with the Wildlife Commission. The hunt was conducted in Anson County at Griffin Hunting Lodge (owned by the family of Ralph Griffin, Anson County Wildlife Protector from 1951 to the 1980's). Officers were able to hunt for deer, raccoon and participate in a falconry hunt. Nine female officers attended the hunt.





### Community Outreach and Public Service

Many WRC Law Enforcement Officers participated in community outreach events throughout the holidays. Officers from the mountains to the coast and in between, were featured in local Christmas Parades and “Santa Cop” events. These proactive efforts helped to spotlight our great agency, while connecting with those in their local communities. The Shop with a Cop events focused on fostering positive relationships between youth and law enforcement officers. While local parades assisted in displaying an active role within their communities. Many of these events highlighted WRC officers, equipment, and were even supported by members of their own families. Seen below are Officers from Districts 2, 5 and 9.



### Saving a Life

Master Officer Rodney Jack and Officer Spencer Hamilton were on patrol in Bertie County last December when they came upon an unlawfully parked vehicle at a boating access area. The officers quickly realized something more was going on after discovering the driver visibly distraught and quickly reached out for a mobile crisis unit. After spending several hours with the individual, they agreed to be transported for medical attention but not before hugging and thanking everyone on the scene. The compassion and actions of these officers undoubtedly saved a life that day.



### Officer Tends to Needs of Homeless Family

Recently, while on patrol, Officer Weeks encountered a family of homeless immigrants who were abandoned at a local boat ramp. The family of five had only been in the country for four days and were fishing for food to feed three small children. Officer Weeks went above and beyond by purchasing food for the entire family from his own personal funds. Officer Weeks quickly located a translator and aided the family with many essential resources to include local shelters, food banks, and resources to aid them in their struggle. This is merely one example of the daily excellence exhibited by Officer Weeks and officers from the Enforcement Division.



### Special Olympics 2023

So far NCWRC employees have raised over \$14,000 for the Special Olympics in 2023. Officers and additional WRC staff participated in eight torch-run events and are in the process of raising even more money for this great program.



## **BOATING OPERATIONS**

### Law Enforcement Major and Recruit Save Boaters

While conducting Basic Boat Operations Training for the 59th NCWRC class, Major Mark Dutton and Recruit Jacob Pattison quickly found themselves in a real-life rescue operation. While operating a patrol boat towards the mouth of Dutchmen Creek in Brunswick County, Major Dutton and Recruit Pattison spotted a boat with two passengers frantically waving their arms. With the stern of the distressed vessel rapidly sinking, and the intense current pulling it down the Intracoastal Waterway, Major Dutton instructed the first passenger to get onto his patrol boat. As life jackets floated throughout the sinking vessel, the second passenger attempted to board the boat as well. Soon the weight shifted causing the man to be ejected into the swift water. Recruit Pattison quickly pulled the passenger aboard the 21' Bay Rider patrol boat. The victims soon realized they'd gone from being in fear for their lives to being safe in a matter of seconds. As they looked around, they saw fourteen wildlife officers, sixteen WRC recruits, and ten patrol boats who'd come to their aid.



Five Stranded Boaters Rescued from the Neuse River



While off duty on June 4, 2023, Sergeant Daniel Kennedy received a report of a vessel in distress on the Neuse River. According to the report, a group of five boaters were stranded on a sailboat with wave heights reaching 4-6' feet. Sergeant Kennedy immediately responded by launching his patrol boat at the Oriental Boating Access Area in Pamlico County. He soon loaded additional emergency personnel onto his patrol boat and set out to locate the stranded boaters. Sgt. Kennedy navigated the treacherous waters, keeping everyone safe, while locating the five boaters and their two dogs. Due to the intense waves, his stern light broke, and his patrol boat eventually lost power. He diagnosed and corrected the mechanical issues, restoring power and returning everyone to safety.

On the Road and On the Water

Lake Wylie, D6 & D8 Members of the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, NC State Highway Patrol, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, NC Alcohol Law Enforcement, United States Coast Guard, DHHS Forensic Testing for Alcohol, Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources teamed up to kick off the 2023 On the Road and On the Water media event at Lake Wylie.



Operation Dry Water



Wildlife Officers throughout the state participated in the 2023 Operation Dry Water safety campaign from July 1-3. NC Wildlife Law Enforcement Officers led the charge in this heightened awareness campaign. The purpose of the campaign is to reduce the number of serious incidents and deaths resulted from impaired boaters.

The NCWRC Law Enforcement Division was awarded the "Top Large Agency" award in 2022. This year's efforts are shaping up to be as impactful as those of last year.

2023 Operation Dry Water – NCWRC results

# of vessels contacted:	1,181	# of boaters contacted:	4,257
# of boating citations:	448	# of BUIs:	40
Highest BAC:	0.17	# of boat warnings:	639
# of media contacts:	36	Non-Boating Violations:	133
# Boating incidents:	9	Other agencies assisting:	27



## EQUIPMENT

Utilizing the Port Security Grant, the WRC was able to acquire a 27' Onslow Bay to assist with large open water patrols, and search and rescues along the Outer Banks of NC. This vessel will also provide security to the NC Ferry System carrying passengers from the mainland to Ocracoke and Hatteras Island.



## SWIFT WATER TEAM

NCWRC's recently developed swift water team continued training to meet the requirements for team deployments in flood and swift water events in NC and across the Southeast. This team is made of 24 members with 7 Zodiac boats strategically stationed across the state to respond to local or statewide emergencies.



## LAW ENFORCEMENT FIELD OPERATIONS

NCWRC officers continued their pro-active efforts to combat wildlife and fisheries violations using a variety of law enforcement methods and technology. The NCWRC Special Operations Unit contributed significantly to detecting and investigating egregious wildlife crimes.



# OKLAHOMA

*Nathan Erdman, Colonel*



## AGENCY OVERVIEW

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation is comprised of 6 divisions which include: the Law Enforcement Division, Wildlife Division, Fisheries Division, Communication and Education Division, Administration Division, and Federal Aid Division.

The Law Enforcement Division consists of a Colonel/Chief of Enforcement, Lt. Colonel/Asst. Chief of Enforcement, Captain/Operations Manager, Wildlife Investigative Specialist, and an Administrative Assistant located at our headquarters in Oklahoma City. There are approximately 117 field employees, including Game Wardens who are divided into 8 districts, each containing two Lieutenants and a Captain. A game warden's primary responsibility in Oklahoma is to enforce the state's wildlife laws. However, game wardens also have the jurisdiction to enforce all other state laws when necessary. Beyond law enforcement, game wardens are responsible for conducting public outreach programs as well as assisting other divisions with research and other projects. Game wardens often assist with spotlight counts, controlled burns, fisheries research assistance, and other Department programs and projects.

In addition, the agency has a reserve force consisting of 5 reserve officers. These reserves are agency employees assigned to various divisions whose primary duties are other than law enforcement. This program has been dwindling as employees retire and we are not actively enlisting new reserves at this time.

The division operates with a straight-line chain of command.

## TRAINING ISSUES

It appears that the state law enforcement training council has restricted the basic academy to only two sessions per year, with a maximum of 30 cadets per academy. Unfortunately, this limited number of positions may not be sufficient to meet the demands of all Oklahoma state agencies. It seems like an effort to compel agencies to send their cadets to Vo-tech for the basic academy, which would incur a cost for each agency, rather than opt for the cost-free CLEET academy. Agencies may conduct their own basic academy or participate in those offered by other agencies. As such, we hope to have our Game Warden Academy training recognized as basic academy training hours. Subsequently, we would send our cadets to another agency's academy to fulfill the remaining training hour requirements.

## FUNDING AND STAFFING ISSUES

Our financial situation is causing some difficulties. Unfortunately, the license bill has failed to pass for the fourth year in a row, which is making things harder. Currently, wardens are only receiving



62% of the salary earned by Oklahoma Highway Patrol officers. We are currently searching for alternative sources of funding to help alleviate these issues.

We've also been facing some challenges with our 2016 and 2017 Chevrolet trucks as we've had to replace 24 transmissions this year.

In April 2023, we successfully concluded our third game warden academy, where 10 probationary game wardens graduated. The academy lasted for 9 weeks and incorporated new classes like Fisheries Enforcement Techniques, Wildlife Enforcement Techniques, NASBLA Officer Water Survival Training, and extensions of the previous classes. The upcoming Game Warden Academy is scheduled to commence in February 2024, subject to budget recovery, and has the potential to offer 8-10 or more vacancies. However, due to budget constraints, some of these positions may remain unfilled. The open positions are a result of retirements and resignations.

We acquired a total of 24 Dodge four-wheel drive 4-door pickups and 1 Durango. These trucks have been outfitted with various features, such as LED light bars, locking double gun racks, front-end leveling kits, tinted windows, and grill guards. Additionally, we've added a 21 ft rib boat to our collection. Finally, we ordered 150 new Gen 5 Glock model 45 9mm pistols with Holosun Red Dot sights due to the shortage of 40 cal. ammunition.

### **UNIQUE CROSS-BOUNDARY OR COOPERATIVE ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS**

Our new Wildlife Investigative Specialist (Investigator Long), who is working as a joint task force officer with USFWS, now has a Wildlife Investigative Team of 16 volunteer game wardens who assist her on investigations that focus on state charges. She is also in charge of training and coordinating their efforts.

Long also attended the AFWA Investigators Intelligence Summit in San Diego this year.

### **NEW INNOVATIONS IN CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT**

1. The use of GeoFence warrants played a huge role in a high-profile endangered species/ MBTA case. The case has been presented to the AUSA and plea agreements are being discussed.

The use of Google for gathering data is well-documented and is utilized in GeoFence warrants to pinpoint devices that have accessed Google and were in close proximity to a specific location during a particular time period. It is not beneficial for urban areas due to population, but our wardens are using it more and more to successfully narrow down suspects. Once devices are identified near a location and time of a poaching incident, wardens have had no issues with receiving search warrants for those individuals who own those devices (most commonly phones).

2. We joined the Regional Organized Crime Information Center (ROCIC). Our wardens have access to a wealth of resources for just \$300 a year, including equipment and expert assistance. They can borrow over 80 pieces of equipment, such as IP cameras and GPS trackers, and return them when they're done. Additionally, they can rely on experts to analyze cell tower data and provide informative reports, as well as obtain GeoFence warrants. The Criminal Intelligence Unit of ROCIC is capable of providing vital information regarding suspects, and they also issue BOLOs or bulletins regarding officer safety concerns across the state.

## **STATE, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL ISSUES, LEGISLATION, LEGAL CHALLENGES AND COURT DECISIONS IMPACTING NATURAL RESOURCES LAW ENFORCEMENT**

Regulation Changes: The following are brief descriptions of regulation changes.

In addition to general housekeeping changes and reorganization of Title 800, fishing regulation changes for 2022-2023 include the following:

- The key change to fishing regulations involves a modification of the statewide size and bag limits for largemouth and smallmouth basses. Specifically, the statewide limit for largemouth and smallmouth basses (in aggregate) is six (6) fish per day, only one (1) of which may exceed sixteen (16) inches in length (See page 12). Public fishing waters with special area regulations may differ from the statewide limits.
- When an individual angler possesses a tournament exemption authorized by the Department, daily bag and size limits may deviate from those listed here. Instructions for the tournament exemption application process are provided at [www.wildlifedepartment.com/blackbass](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/blackbass).
- The catfish (blue and/or channel catfish, in aggregate) daily limit is six (6) in the Fourche Maline River within Robbers Cave State Park (from Carlton Lake Dam downstream to the state park boundary).
- Trout bag limits and harvest areas in the lower Mountain Fork River trout area have been changed. The trophy harvest area downstream of the State Park Dam has been restored and is now subject to a daily bag limit of up to one (1) rainbow trout which must be greater than twenty-five (25) inches and up to one (1) brown trout which must be greater than thirty (30) inches.
- Other changes: Any fish subject to size limits must remain intact (head, tail, and skin/ scales not removed) while the angler is actively engaged in fishing.
- Unattended fishing equipment (e.g. stringers, creels, baskets, containers) used to store live fish in the field (both caught fish and fish used as bait) must be labeled with the angler's customer ID number and attended at least once every 24 hours.
- The boundaries have been expanded for collecting bait with cast nets in the lower Illinois River.
- Vann's Lake Refuge is open to fishing and non-hunting use February 1 - October 14.
- Marbled Crayfish has been added to the list of restricted aquatic species

Regulation Changes: The following are brief descriptions of regulation changes.

In addition to general housekeeping changes and reorganization of Title 800, hunting regulation changes for 2022-2023 include the following:

- New methods of take are available during open rifle seasons, for more information please visit [www.wildlifedepartment.com](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com).
- Spotlighting/Headlighting Coyotes/Feral Hogs: See General Hunting Regulations
- Quail Season on Department Managed Land: Closed to non-resident hunting February 1-15 on western Wildlife Management Areas.
- Trapping on Department Managed Land: Open same as statewide regulations from February 1 to the end of February. See Special Area Regulations
- Camping on Department Managed Land: Limited to a maximum of 16 consecutive days.
- Mergansers now included in duck daily bag limit.
- Squirrel: Season open year-round for falconry.

## **COST-SAVING INITIATIVES**

Currently, we are considering the possibility of reducing purchases of vehicles and boats. Additionally, we may refrain from filling open positions until the budget has recovered.

We are currently exploring ways to classify new hires using the academy address as their duty station, to avoid the need for per diem payments during the game warden training academy.

## **SOUTH CAROLINA**

***Chisolm Frampton, Colonel***

### **AGENCY OVERVIEW**

The mission of the Law Enforcement Division is to preserve the peace, protect human lives, and property. To develop public support through outreach, education, and safety programs. And to enforce the state and federal criminal laws through the detection, apprehension, and prosecution of persons who violate those laws.



### Divisional Chain of Command Promotions & Staff Awards

The following officers received promotions:

Region 1:

- L/Cpl. Dan Bridges was promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant of Unit D
- Region 2:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant Will Coleman was promoted to Lieutenant of Units A, B, & C.
  - L/Cpl. Wes Stewart was promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant of Unit B.
  - L/Cpl. Brian Urquhart was promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant of Unit E.
- Region 4:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant Ryan Williams was promoted to Lieutenant of Units A, B, C, and D.
  - L/Cpl. James Mills was promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant of Unit D.
  - B/Sergeant Ben Duncan was promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant of Unit C.



- L/Cpl. Garrett Hearing was promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant of Saltwater Enforcement Unit.

### Awards

- Captain Lee Ellis, Captain Daniel McCaskill, and Lieutenant Dennetta Dawson completed the University of Louisville – Southern Police Institute Command Officer Development Course. Captain McCaskill was the valedictorian and Captain Ellis served as class Vice-President.
- Lieutenant Charlotte McKee completed the FBI National Academy and was elected class President.
- Lt. Amy Staton completed the FBI Command College in NC.
- 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant Brian Urquhart won the American Police Canine Association National ‘Sniff Off’ championship in Rhode Island with his DNR K-9.
- Captain Dentis Riley received the FOLKS Leadership Award.
- Pfc. Jonathan Willis received the Blue Ridge Electric Officer of the Year Award

### Division Purpose

**The mission of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources is to serve as the principle advocate for and steward of the state’s natural resources**

Since 1878, Game Wardens have been protecting South Carolina’s natural resources. The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division isn’t like other law enforcement agencies. We believe in preserving the peace, in protecting the people and natural resources of South Carolina, and in making a difference in conservation of the state’s natural resources for future generations.

The Division of Law Enforcement is responsible for enforcement of state and federal laws that govern hunting, recreational and commercial fishing, recreational boating, and other natural resources conservation concerns. The division conducts South Carolina’s hunter and boater education courses, as well as other outreach programs including the Take One Make One and Archery in the Schools programs aimed at introducing youth to the sport of hunting. The division is responsible for investigating boating and hunting accidents, and DNR officers regularly conduct search and rescue missions in outlying areas and assist other law enforcement agencies in investigations. The Division has officers



trained in underwater diving that assist in law enforcement, search and rescue, and evidence recovery missions. The Division also utilizes aircraft for law enforcement patrol, search and rescue, and other department missions. The division and its officers are called upon to provide homeland security missions related to water borne activities including commercial ship escorts, hydroelectric dam, nuclear facility, and energy plant security. Most recently the division has been called into the state security plan in assisting with civil disturbance issues and crime suppression initiatives in various counties around the state.



SCDNR Law Enforcement Officers must have compassion for wildlife and be strongly motivated to protect South Carolina's natural resources through enforcing the state and federal hunting, fishing, and boating laws. Officers must have strong communication skills, be able to operate offroad vehicles, operate various styles of vessels, and be able to defend themselves and other law enforcement officers. SCDNR Law Enforcement Officers spend most of their time in the outdoors. Officers must be able to ride on rough roads or water for long periods of time. They must walk long distances on rough

terrain, through marsh and swamps, be willing to sometimes work alone during the day and night. This includes during inclement and hazardous weather and sometimes in dangerous conditions. At times, officers are required to work in stressful situations that may require them to make decisions that can put their health and safety at risk. This can include search and rescue operations, working with people who are injured, violent, emotionally upset or otherwise pose a danger.

I am pleased to present the SEAFWA Annual Accomplishments Report for the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division for the year 2022-2023. As the Colonel of the division, I am proud to highlight the significant achievements of our officers across various areas of patrol and investigation. The following sections provide a comprehensive overview of our accomplishments during this reporting period:

### Patrol Hours

- I. Patrol Hours:
  - Boating Hours: Our dedicated officers spent a total of 44,161 hours patrolling South Carolina's waterways, ensuring compliance with boating regulations and promoting safe recreational boating practices. Their presence on the water remains essential to maintaining public safety and protecting our state's valuable natural resources.
  - Night Patrol Hours: We logged 32,340 hours of night patrols, working diligently to safeguard our natural resources during critical hours when illegal activities are more

likely to occur. These patrols play a crucial role in deterring wildlife poaching, enforcing boating regulations, and ensuring the overall well-being of our citizens.

- Search and Rescue Hours: The division dedicated 4,895 hours to search and rescue operations, responding promptly to emergencies and aiding individuals in distress across South Carolina's diverse landscapes. Our officers' commitment to these missions exemplifies their dedication to preserving life and protecting the public.
- Assisting Outside Agencies Hours: We allocated 13,588 hours towards assisting outside agencies, fostering collaboration with local, state, and federal partners to address shared enforcement concerns. By working together, we maximize our impact and effectively combat natural resource violations.
- Homeland Security Hours: In support of our commitment to safeguarding South Carolina, our officers spent 3,410 hours on homeland security duties. This involved patrolling sensitive areas, conducting security assessments, and collaborating with relevant agencies to maintain the integrity of our critical infrastructure.
- Heritage Trust Patrol Hours: The division dedicated 4,773 hours to patrolling Heritage Trust lands, protecting these valuable natural areas, and ensuring their preservation for future generations. Our officers played a crucial role in preventing unauthorized activities and enforcing the rules that govern these protected spaces.



- II. Investigation Hours:

- Hunting Accident Hours: Our officers spent 836 hours investigating hunting accidents, diligently gathering evidence, and determining the causes and contributing factors of these incidents. This investigative work aids in improving hunting safety practices and reducing the occurrence of accidents.
- Boating Accident Hours: We allocated 4,657 hours to investigating boating accidents, aiming to identify causes, mitigate risks, and promote boating safety awareness. Through these efforts, we strive to prevent accidents and enhance the overall safety of our state's waterways.
- Litter Investigation Hours: The division dedicated 7,826 hours to investigating cases of littering, taking a proactive approach to combat environmental degradation. These investigations aim to hold responsible individuals accountable for their actions and foster a culture of environmental stewardship.
- In addition to the patrol and investigation efforts, our officers achieved remarkable results in various other areas:



- Drowning Investigations: Our division successfully investigated 14 drowning incidents, providing thorough analysis, and contributing to improved water safety protocols.
- Fatality Investigations: Our Division successfully investigated 19 boating fatalities and 3 hunting fatalities.
- III. Enforcement Activities:
  - Officers wrote 8,886 summons and issued 25,181 written warnings, resulting in \$1,136,029 collected in fines. This demonstrates our commitment to enforcing regulations and ensuring compliance among the public.
  - Federal Enforcement Actions: We issued 316 federal enforcement action reports for federal fisheries charges. Additionally, 8,834 summons were successfully adjudicated, emphasizing our dedication to upholding federal laws pertaining to fisheries and conservation.
  - Vessel Inspections: Officers conducted 63,584 vessel inspections, ensuring compliance with boating safety standards and regulations, and promoting responsible boating practices.
  - Hunter and Fisherman Checks: Our officers conducted 64,348 hunter checks and 73,905 fisherman checks, actively monitoring, and engaging with outdoor enthusiasts to ensure adherence to wildlife management and conservation regulations.
  - Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) Patrols: The division completed 2,820 hours of JEA patrols, enhancing collaboration with other agencies to enhance enforcement capabilities and protect South Carolina's natural resources.
  - Nuisance Animal Calls: Our officers responded to and handled 3,233 nuisance animal calls, aiding residents, and ensuring the well-being of both the public and wildlife.
  - Incident/Accident Reports: The division generated 808 incident/accident reports, capturing essential data, and contributing to informed decision-making and resource allocation.
  - Warrants/Suspensions Served: Officers served 237 warrants and suspensions, ensuring compliance with legal requirements, and maintaining public safety.
  - Depredation Permits: We issued 897 depredation permits, facilitating responsible management of wildlife-human interactions and minimizing negative impacts.
  - Public Presentations: Our officers conducted 4,331 public presentations on hunting, fishing, and boating ethics, and safety, fostering public awareness and education about responsible outdoor practices.



- III. Technological Advancements
  - SCDNR LE has made significant technological advancements this year, leveraging the SmartCop records management system and field-based reporting tools to enhance our operations. One notable innovation is the adoption of iPads and thermal rugged printers for efficient and mobile reporting in the field.
  - The implementation of the SmartCop records management system has revolutionized the way SCDNR LE manages and stores law enforcement data. This comprehensive system allows officers to electronically record and organize incident reports, citations, warnings, and other essential information. It offers a centralized and streamlined approach to managing records, ensuring accuracy, accessibility, and improved workflow within the department.
  - Field-based reporting using iPads and thermal rugged printers has further enhanced the efficiency of SCDNR LE officers. With the iPads, officers can easily input data, capture photos, and complete reports directly in the field. The thermal rugged printers provide on-the-spot printing capabilities, enabling officers to generate hard copies of citations, warnings, and other necessary documents promptly. This not only saves time but also ensures that accurate records are immediately available to the parties involved.
  - In addition to the SmartCop system and field-based reporting tools, SCDNR LE has introduced an iOS-based e-citation and e-warning solution. This solution allows officers to document violations of the law electronically, directly on their iPads. It streamlines the process of issuing citations and warnings, making it more efficient and reducing paperwork. By leveraging digital tools, officers can capture violator information, record offense details, and generate digital citations or warnings quickly and accurately.
  - To enhance accident reconstruction capabilities, SCDNR LE has adopted the FARRO accident reconstruction software. This software is specifically designed for boating and hunting fatality accidents, as well as severe recreational boating and hunting accidents. The FARRO software provides advanced tools for analyzing accident scenes, collecting, and visualizing data, and creating accurate reconstructions. By utilizing this software, SCDNR LE can better investigate accidents, determine causes, and gather evidence for legal proceedings.
  - The accomplishments outlined above are a testament to the dedication, professionalism, and tireless efforts of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division. I extend my appreciation to our officers, staff, and valuable partners for their contributions to achieving these remarkable results. Together, we will continue to strive for excellence in the enforcement and conservation of South Carolina's natural resources.

## TENNESSEE

*Darren Rider, Colonel*



### TRAINING

Twenty-one new officers were hired, and they were trained in firearms, ATV operation, defensive tactics, EVOG (truck and boat operation), boating accident investigation, BUI investigations that included a wet lab, hunting accident investigation, black bear enforcement, commercial fishing enforcement, trapping enforcement, nuisance animal training, water survival, waterfowl enforcement and wildlife immobilization. In addition, these newly hired officers were certified as hunter and boater education instructors.

Annual in-service training was conducted for the Agency's 270 commissioned personnel – Annual in-service training now consists of blended learning, officers must complete learning modules from Virtual Academy, this year's modules consisted of: Child Sexual Abuse; De-escalation for Law Enforcement; Components of Child Abuse Investigations; Emotional Intelligence and Duty to Intervene; Field Sobriety Refresher; MACTAC: Active Shooter response; Mental Illness and Crisis: A Law Enforcement Response; Physical and mental Wellness Coping Strategies; and Public Assembly and Community Interaction. In addition, defensive tactics, emergency vessel operation, firearm re-qualifications, public service hours and first aid/CPR/AED recertification.

### FUNDING AND STAFFING ISSUES

Agency employees in a wildlife class position in which wildlife officers were included a pay package was developed this year. It adjusted each ranking position in law enforcement to a fair marketed value. It also adjusted the eleven existing steps in each job class and created a new salary amount for each step and for each position. The starting pay for a Wildlife Officer is now \$59,600. Two regional Captain positions were re-purposed to now add an additional statewide boating incident investigator now giving the Agency four across the state the other position was re-purposed to focus on the transition and development of the Agency's training Academy.

### LAW ENFORCEMENT TRENDS

In July 2023, TWRA partnered with state and local law enforcement agencies across the state in Operation Dry Water (ODW) from July 1 – July 3. TWRA partnered with Tennessee Highway Patrol, Knoxville Police Department and Knox County Sheriff's Office to participate in the ODW campaign. These joint operations identified and removed impaired operators from Tennessee waters. ODW resulted in 168 officers participating; 3,260 total officer hours; 2,907 total vessels checked; 233 citations written, 484 warnings written, 28 BUI arrests and 46 boaters were assisted.

### UNIQUE CROSS BOUNDARY OR COOPERATIVE ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

Investigators with TWRA's Special Investigations Unit have been working jointly with the USFWS and bordering states on investigations dealing with illegal hunting, commercialization of wildlife and Lacey Act violations. Investigators from the SIU attended the Intelligence Summit this year.



## **INNOVATIONS IN CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT**

The Law Enforcement Division is now utilizing Ready Ops, a platform where communication can be instant through text messaging. In addition, Ready Ops has the ability to create a form for the capturing of any data that is needed, this captured data is real time and is very valuable to report to Director's, Commission, Legislatures and Media requests.

Law Enforcement officers are now issued cell phones with First Net as the provider for service to enhance their communications during routine work efforts and during critical events when cell service is unable.

The Agency was able to conduct the fifth class of the Tennessee Wildlife Officers Training Academy. TWOTA is a twenty-week law enforcement training program for all newly hired law enforcement commissioned personnel. The Agency acquired a new tract of land Catoosa Ridge that borders the existing Catoosa Wildlife Management Area. There will be one-hundred and six acres earmarked for the development of a new training academy and funding for planning has been approved to include in this year's budget.

## **STATE ISSUES/LEGISLATION AFFECTING LAW ENFORCEMENT**

Commercial non-motorized vessel operators that use TWRA owned or managed access areas for their take outs or put ins are required to have a permit and required to provide an annual report. BUI now carries the same penalties as DUI, in addition, anyone who has had a previous DUI conviction and is convicted of a DUI they will be sentenced as a second time offender (BUI = DUI). We no longer required to file proclamations with the county clerks they are to be made available on the Agency's website. Handguns can now be carried while hunting. Law Enforcement is required to create a policy for drone use.

## **SPECIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ISSUES**

Oral argument was conducted in regard to the Agency's appeal of a ruling from a three-judge panel that ruled our officer's violated a person's right to privacy by use of trail cameras on private property. In addition, the ruling stated our officers could not go on private property unless they either had the landowner's consent or a search warrant. As a result of this ruling, a landowner consent card and a search warrant template were developed for the officer's use creating uniformity and consistency across the state. The Agency is awaiting the opinion from the oral argument board.

## **TEXAS**

***Chad Jones, Colonel***

## **TEXAS GAME WARDEN TRAINING CENTER UPDATES (TRAINING ISSUES)**

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Law Enforcement Division (TPWD-LE) continues to develop and adopt training as needed to ensure Game Wardens and



State Park Police Officers are prepared to meet the demands of their job. Through the assistance of the Division's Texas Game Warden Training Center Staff:

- The 65<sup>th</sup> Texas Game Warden Cadet class of 24 Game Wardens and 10 State Park Police Officers graduated on June 2, 2023. (The class began with 26 Game Wardens and 22 State Park Police Officers)
- Texas Game Wardens have done a thorough evaluation and test of pistol mounted optics. TPWD-LE has made the decision to move forward with pistol mounted optics for every TPWD commissioned peace officer with plans to roll out a train-the-trainer program during the 2024 fiscal year.

### **LAW ENFORCEMENT STAFFING**

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Law Enforcement Division (TPWD-LE) understands that its most valuable assets are its people, and that each person is unique and capable of bringing different important contributions to the workplace. TPWD-LE continues to strive towards maintaining a balanced workforce that is diverse and inclusive to ensure we provide high-quality outdoor recreational experiences and that we execute the most effective conservation initiatives for our state's lands, waters, fish, and wildlife by:

- Goal 1: Recruit from a diverse, highly skilled group of potential applicants to secure a high performing workforce drawn from all segments of American society.
- Goal 2: Cultivate a culture that encourages accountability, collaboration, flexibility, and fairness to enable individuals to contribute to their full potential.
- Goal 3: Create awareness and develop educational structures and strategies to institutionalize a culture of inclusion for current and future employees.

A recent Survey of Employment Engagement (SEE) revealed that TPWD-LE's areas of:

- Strength were Strategic, Supervision and Workplace.
- Concern were Pay, Internal Communication, and Benefits.

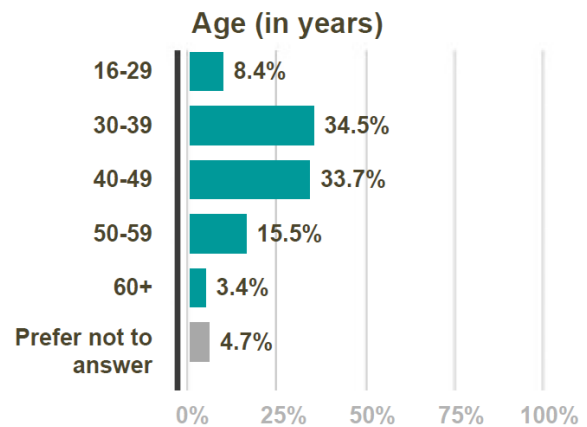
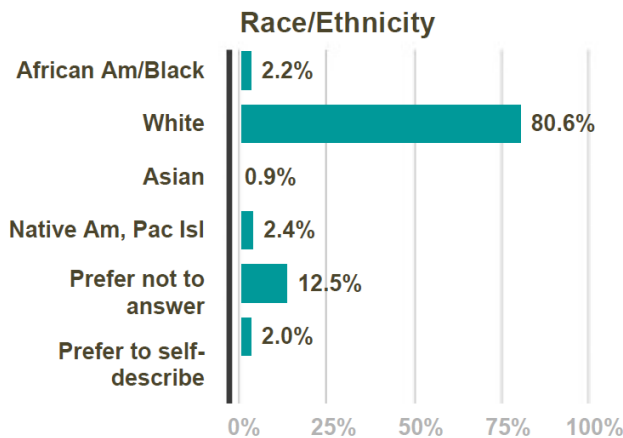
#### Regarding areas of strength:

- The strategic construct captures employee's perception of their role in the organization and the organization's mission, vision, and strategic plan. The identification of strategic as a strength suggests that employees understand their role in the organization and consider the organization's reputation to be positive.
- The supervision construct captures employee's perception of the nature of supervisory relationships within the organization. The identification of a supervision strength suggests that employees view their supervisors as fair, helpful, and critical to the flow of work.
- The workplace construct captures employee's perception of the total work atmosphere, the degree to which they consider it safe, and the overall feel. The identification of a workplace strength suggests that employees see the setting as satisfactory, safe and that adequate tools and resources are available.

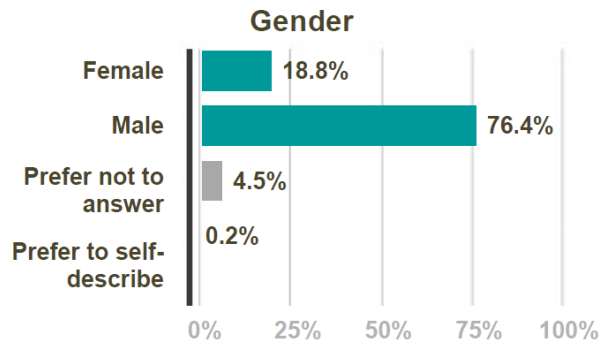
Regarding areas of concern:

- The pay construct captures employee’s perception about how well the compensation package offered by the organization holds up when compared to similar jobs in other organizations. The identification of pay as an area of concern suggests that pay is a central concern or reason for discontent and is not comparable to similar organization.
  - Plan of Action: Recent legislation related to salaries for state employees and that was supported by both the House and Senate passed that would increase salaries for staff by 10% over the next biennium.
- The internal communication construct captures employee’s perception whether communication in the organization is reasonable, candid and helpful. The identification of internal communication as an area of concern suggests that employees feel information does not arrive in a timely fashion and is difficult to find.
  - Plan of Action: The TPWD-LE Director has implemented an action plan that will actively seek out more feedback from field staff through regional meetings, encourage field staff participation in additional HR related outreach, reinstate official notetaking at senior staff meetings for the purpose of dissemination among the Division, create a consistent timeline for the internal newsletter, and proactively work with program outreach and communications to explore new modes of communications between staff and senior leadership.
- The benefits construct captures employee’s perception about how the benefits package compares to packages at similar organizations and how flexible it is. The identification of benefits as an area of concern suggests that employees perceive benefits as less than needed or unfair in comparison to similar jobs in the community.

Additionally, the Survey of Employment Engagement (SEE) revealed that TPWD-LE’s demographics are as follows:







**MAJOR CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT TRENDS**

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Law Enforcement Division (TPWD-LE) continues to work closely with TPWD biologist from the Coastal Fisheries Division and Wildlife Division to ensure conservations measures are being adhered to in response to recent negative impacts to certain natural resources.

- Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) – CWD continues to be a threat within the State of Texas. TPWD-LE continues to be a representative within the State’s CWD Taskforce made up of biologist, industry partners, and wildlife non-profit organizations for the purpose of finding solutions to contain the spread of CWD while supporting the needs of those engaged in deer breeding practices. TPWD staff is currently working through the development of “emergency rules” to in efforts to slow down and contain multiple recent detections of CWD in several areas where it had not been present before.
- Wild-Oysters – TPWD-LE continues being a member of a Texas Taskforce, made up of biologist, industry partners, and fisheries non-profit organizations, for the purpose of identifying options for the commercial harvesting of oysters, while, maintaining sustainable natural oyster beds in Texas.
- Commercial Oyster Mariculture – Although the practice of farming oysters within public waters is not a new concept/industry, it is fairly new to Texas. As of this report, Texas has three (3) active Commercial Oyster Mariculture facilities. TPWD-LE has been working closely with biologist and industry partners for the purpose of establishing parameters that meet the needs of the industry while ensuring public health safety and minimizing any risk to the State’s wild oyster population. Additionally, TPWD staff is currently working on the establishment of a commercial oyster mariculture advisory board as a result of recent legislation that mandates it and that passed during the Texas 88<sup>th</sup> legislative session. This board shall consist of seven (7) members, made up of four (4) members that represent the commercial oyster mariculture industry, seafood, or related industry and three (3) members that represent the scientific and conservation community.

**NEW INNOVATIONS IN CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT**

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Law Enforcement Division (TPWD-LE) continues to explore technological opportunities to provide its law enforcement officers with the tools necessary for the safe, effective, and efficient enforcement of water safety and conservations laws.

- TPWD-LE has migrated its record management system from Caliber to Versaterm Public Safety. Through research and testing, it was determined that Versaterm Public Safety was the solution for the agency, allowing it to explore the technological advancement in other areas of need. TPWD-LE currently operates without a computer aided dispatch where officers still write paper citations. With that said, Versaterm Public Safety, as a “one stop shop” offers an RMS that integrates with a computer aided dispatch and an E-ticking option.

## **STATE, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL ISSUES, LEGISLATION, LEGAL CHALLENGES AND COURT DECISIONS IMPACTING NATURAL RESOURCES LAW ENFORCEMENT**

TPWD-LE navigated through the 88<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative Session during calendar year 2023. TPWD-LE staff sought out the following priorities at the onset of the 88<sup>th</sup> legislative session.

- Budgetary – TPWD requested 5 exceptional items totaling \$7.7 million over the biennium which included the following for LE:
  - Law Enforcement Vessels - \$8 million for the purchase of vessels.
  - Law Enforcement Aircrafts - \$15.6 million for the purchase of two aircrafts.
  - 10% salary increase for non-commissioned staff.
- Enforcement Priorities
  - Dedication of boater education fees to the administration of the program.
  - Amendment of the current statute related to the sale and purchase of shark fins for the purpose of supporting prosecution efforts.
  - Amendment of the current general commercial fisherman license exemption for the purpose of aligning conflicting sections in code.
  - Amendment of the current public information act for the purpose of allowing the disclosure of boat accident reports to parties who have significant need to obtain such reports.
  - Amendment of BWI statutes for the purpose of enhancing criminal offenses when a BWI occurs with a child passenger.
  - Adoption the Uniform Certificate of Title for Vessels Act (UCOTVA) for the purpose of incorporating nationally adopted standards that would increase consumer protection, allow for a first right of lien, and provide security interests.

At the conclusion of the 88<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative Session, TPWD-LE, “walked-away” with the following priorities adopted:

- Budgetary
  - Law Enforcement Vessels - \$4 million (50% of request) for the purchase of vessels.
  - Law Enforcement Aircrafts - \$15.7 million for the purchase of two aircrafts.
  - \$31.5 million for a 5% salary increase for commissioned and non-commissioned staff for FY24, plus an additional 5% in FY25.

- \$6.6 million for targeted salary increases for non-commissioned positions that warrant an increase and/or reclassification.
- Enforcement Priorities
  - Dedication of boater education fees to the administration of the program.
  - Amendment of the current statute related to the sale and purchase of shark fins for the purpose of supporting prosecution efforts.
  - Amendment of the current general commercial fisherman license exemption for the purpose of aligning conflicting sections in code.
  - Amendment of the current public information act for the purpose of allowing the disclosure of boat accident reports to parties who have significant need to obtain such reports.
  - Amendment of the BWI statute for the purpose of enhancing criminal offenses when a BWI occurs with a child passenger.

## VIRGINIA

*John J. Cobb, Colonel*

### MESSAGE FROM THE COLONEL



CONSERVE. CONNECT. PROTECT.



In my second full year as Colonel, I believe we have made great strides of coming out of the woods and off the water to be seen and heard by those less familiar with what we do. Hopefully this will lead to a greater appreciation and support for the wildlife and public safety services we offer each and every day to the Commonwealth. As evident by our 120 years of dedication as protectors and passion as ambassadors, I know there is no one better trained and suited than us.

I generally do not spend much time looking back on the initiatives implemented and past accomplishments as I am more focused on the future (currently working on the development of a VCP Relevancy Plan). However, the purpose of the VCP 2022 Annual Report is to look at that specific year in retrospect, so here is a list gathered from our monthly Rollcall Newsletters:

Governor Youngkin 74th Inauguration Parade, as well as assisting the Capitol Police and Richmond Police Department with related security at both this event and on Lobby Day.

New training initiative, called Game Warden Experience, designed to focus on traditional boots-on-the-ground techniques using hands-on approach over multiple days in the field.



Development of beard and updated grooming standards, along with the issuance of new firearms, outer carriers, and uniforms from recommendations of SMEs and field trials.

Implemented UAV Drone Program through the Employee Suggestion Program with a workgroup that developed a comprehensive program with training and certification.

Fourth Annual VCP Awards Ceremony combined with the Basic / Modified Academy Graduation. an opportunity to formally recognize 44 officers and staff members. This included 16 Basic and 6 Modified Graduates of our Conservation Police 11th Academy.

Implementation of the New VCP Command Structure with a dedicated “proactive” purpose for each rank: Colonel = Provide Strategic Direction and Vision; Major = Align · Empower · Forecast; Captain = Develop Best Practices and Administer Programs (Section); Lieutenant = Advocate and Facilitate (Region); added the new position of First Sergeant = Lead and Coordinate Operations (Area); and Sergeant = Coach and Mentor (District).

Established the North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation (NAWLEA) Program, by creating the Program Standards Manual and NAWLEA Board By-Laws, which will lead to improved quality public service, networking, collaboration, and credibility.

Implementation of the VCP Career Progression Program (CPP), designed to advance those nonsupervisory sworn Conservation Police Officers (CPOs), including K9 CPOs and Special Agents, to higher levels with seven baseline salary increases for a total of 45%.

DWR, DCR and MRC Law Enforcement Static Display / Boat Operations which was attended by the Secretaries of Natural & Historic Resources and Public Safety & Homeland Security as well as some of the Governor’s Staff and members of the General Assembly.

NASBLA Officer Water Survival Course (OWS) became part of our training portfolio due to working in varied environments and the likelihood that we may end up in the water.

VCP had a prominent role in the Governor’s Summit on Rural Prosperity to include a booth that was set- up directly by the main door and provided numerous vessels for river tours.

Revised residence requirements to better accommodate our field staff that are looking for promotional opportunities at the manager ranks without having to relocate.

Flippo-Gentry WMA Dedication Ceremony where we honored and remembered our last two fallen officers, Allen Flippo and Donald Gentry who 50 years ago this year lost their lives in a tragic plane crash together while patrolling for those engaged in illegally spotlighting deer. Their End of Watch came on December 19, 1972. They gave everything they had as “Protectors of Wildlife and Natural Resources”.

The DWR Board had passed a resolution on March 24, 2022, that approved the renaming of the Parker's Branch WMA to the Flippo-Gentry WMA in Sussex County. A great number of fallen officer family members and friends were in attendance along with retirees who had served with them.

You will see certainly some pictures and stories in this report that highlight these efforts of many officers and staff to continually move us forward in our "Pursuit of Excellence". We cannot be successful without their significant contributions and sacrifices in family/work life balances due to increased demands for our public safety services combined with historically low staffing levels.

We continue to offer "Quality Public Service" at very high standards thanks to our VCP Officers and LE Staff. This year to streamline operations, we added the shops of Permits to the Law Enforcement Division. As an organization that desires to be an "Employer of Choice", we spent this year wisely implementing new initiatives and advocating for our dedicated and passionate employees. The importance of developing our officers and staff cannot be overstated, in fact this year we saw the conclusion of our first ever VCP Leadership Development Program (LDP); Cohort 1 completed this two year program along with their capstone project.

Within these pages of this annual report, you will see many of our accomplishments where it is evident that we are the "Protectors of Wildlife and Natural Resources" as well as those who want to enjoy the great outdoors and all that it has to offer. It is absolutely my honor and privilege to be the Chief of our Law Enforcement Division. I am confident we will develop ourselves to be even more successful as public servants and will be looked on as an example of excellence.

Colonel John J. Cobb, Chief of Law Enforcement

### **MESSAGE FROM THE OPERATIONS MAJOR**

The annual report serves as an excellent opportunity for us to reflect on what we accomplished the prior year and assess whether we met our goals. Well folks, I am here to tell you that based on my review, the law enforcement division knocked it out of the park! The quality and quantity of work produced is a direct reflection of the incredible staff, sworn and civilian, that we are so fortunate to employ. The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources is certainly a Premier Wildlife Agency.

A primary focus for our Division in 2022 was restructuring the chain-of-command within the Operations Section. The key to this restructuring effort was the addition of the first sergeant position to our ranks. We found ourselves in a unique position where approximately 50%, or more of our field officers have less than 5 years of service. We also determined that our sergeants were overtasked with administrative duties, and we lacked appropriate oversight of complex incidents and investigations due to our geographical challenges. We really needed our sergeants working in the field, alongside their officers and serving as coaches and mentors. I am happy to report that we were successful in



filling seven of the eight first sergeant positions and plan to readvertise the unfilled position in 2023. These first sergeants hit the ground running and we have already seen tremendous benefit to our operations.

In addition to adding the first sergeant position to our ranks, we repurposed our field captain's position. Instead of four captains, we now have two, with each one overseeing two of the four regions and our lieutenants now serve as the regional law enforcement manager. The purpose of this reorganization was to create more consistency in operations across the division and utilize the field captains to assist with the review and implementation of best practices.

With the addition of the eight first sergeant positions and other separations, we found ourselves running a significant number of promotional processes. In 2022, we promoted a total of 18 sworn positions into a new role. I am not sure if this is a record for the division, but if it is not, it has to be close.



I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the staff members that were promoted in 2022.

The fact that they are willing to make the sacrifices necessary to serve as a leader within this organization or, for some of them, expand their level of influence by taking another step up the ladder is commendable. Regardless of where they are in their career, they all started out full of vigor and passion; determined to make a difference and to leave things just a little better than how they found them; knowing that the only thing they were entitled to is an honest paycheck in a very noble profession. For those who have been recently promoted, not much has changed; their passion and commitment to excellence is ever present.

As law enforcement professionals, we have been through some very difficult and dark times over the last few years. The profession we have devoted our professional lives to was in turmoil and under incredible scrutiny. During this time, we lost a lot of really good officers for various reasons. However, we learned a lot. The development of thoughtful, effective police leadership is critically important in creating a better culture of policing. Quality police leadership needs to be by design, not by chance. The communities we serve deserve policing that is fair, equitable and free of all biases and discrimination.

Well folks, it's not all doom and gloom. The sun has started to rise over the horizon, and we have a young corps of officers standing at the ready; they are ambitious, energized, passionate and hungry for leadership and direction. These young officers want to be led, so we will lead them. Remember, comfort is the enemy of progress. Discomfort forces us to act. It pushes us to change our environment and make improvements. If you become too comfortable, you stop aiming for something better.

"The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant." —Max DePree

Major Ryan M. Shuler, Deputy Chief of Law Enforcement



## COMMUNICATION CENTER 2022

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) continues to operate a 24 hour, 7 days a week Law Enforcement Communications Center. Our staffing levels have increased by 1 full time dispatch position bringing up the staffing to 11 full time dispatch positions and 2 supervisor positions. We also filled the position of Communications Manager.

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources Communications Center provides support throughout the entire Commonwealth, not only for all the DWR personnel, but also for the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) State Park Rangers. In addition, the Communications Center is used by the Virginia Department of Forestry as an emergency contact for high-risk situations.

Overall calls for service were up over 6% from 2021. From 50,136 calls created in 2021, to 53,235 calls in 2022, this trend continues as we move into the new year and can most likely be attributed to the recovery from the pandemic, weather, and other factors.

Lastly, the Communications Center, in coordination with the Office of Professional Standards, recognized the 2022 Dispatcher of the Year, Donna Byrd. Communications Officer Byrd joined the

DESCRIPTION	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Total CAD Calls for Service</b>	48,442	58,734	57,409	50,134	53,235
<b>Crimeline Reports</b>	2,170	5,090	5,836	6,065	5,734
<b>Environmental Issues/Fish Kills</b>	205	206	185	225	243
<b>Wildlife Nuisance/Permits/Injured related calls</b>	5,932	6,748	5,185	4,734	4,493
<b>CPO/Ranger Patrols</b>	21,106	25,133	24,864	19,643	20,445
<b>Hunt/Boat/Fish/Trapping Violation Type Calls</b>	6,414	5,226	6,460	5,650	5,531
<b>General / Traffic Violations</b>	1,594	1,828	1,003	788	843
<b>Service-Related Type Calls</b>	2,757	3,994	3,287	3,098	4,241
<b>Hunt Incident Reports</b>	31	34	32	36	35
<b>Boat Accident/Sinking/Drowning Reports</b>	100	98	78	128	121
<b>Distress/Overdue Hunters, Fishermen or Boaters</b>	149	223	331	204	226
<b>Accidents Involving DWR Persons/Equipment</b>	22	27	32	1	27
<b>Criminal Investigations/Complaints</b>	620	358	924	78	806
<b>Stolen Property Reports/Investigations (Boat, other, etc.)</b>	101	109	73	58	133
<b>Abandoned or Recovered Boats</b>	220	177	279	170	179



DWR Law Enforcement Division in 2020 with prior experience as a Communications Officer. Since beginning her career over 2 years ago she has demonstrated her willingness to learn and was able to complete her training program early. Currently she is working on our records management projects, along with assisting with Bureau and Outreach Division projects on her time off. Recently she volunteered to be a part of the CWD sampling in Hillsville, Virginia this fall. Donna is always displaying a cheerful attitude, which is immediately felt by everyone in the center and the units on the radio. She volunteers to cover vacancies that occur in the center to ensure that the Communications Center is fully staffed due to leave, sickness, or a need to adjust a schedule.

## **K 9 TEAM**

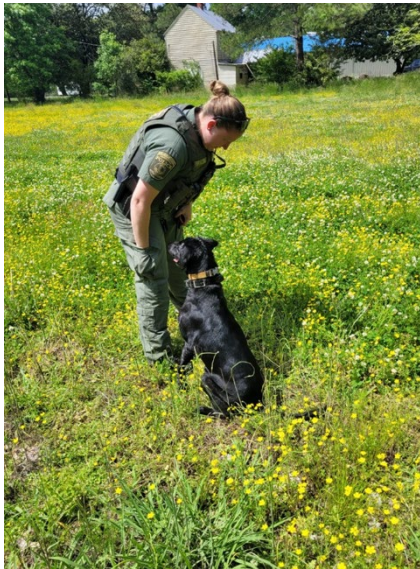
2022 brought several changes to the DWR K9 Unit. Long-time officer and K9 Handler Richard Howald was promoted to Sergeant over the DWR K9 Unit. Along with promotions the unit also experienced some losses, Senior CPO Jim Patrillo took another position within the Agency. Patrillo's K9 partner Bailey was retired and is now living her best life with Jim and his family.

Before accepting a new position and K9 Bailey's retirement Officer Patrillo and Bailey assisted officers within DWR and multiple other agencies. One such assist came from an outside agency. Senior Officer Patrillo and K9 Partner Bailey were requested to assist with locating evidence in a homicide. After searching the area K9 Bailey kept returning to a vehicle and presenting an alert. Officer Patrillo explained to the investigators that the vehicle was likely involved. Further investigation led to the discovery of blood on the vehicle, which had been disguised so that it did not match the description of the vehicle involved. On the same day Officer Patrillo and K9 Bailey also assisted DWR Officers. They first responded to a shoot from the road incident. Before arriving on-scene the requesting Sergeant located a large hole in a street sign. Once on-scene Officer Patrillo deployed Bailey, and after a short search of the road edge he observed her display a trained final response. Officer Patrillo and Bailey located a wadding from a rifled shotgun shell to help further the Sergeant's investigation. After locating evidence for two cases one would think that Jim and Bailey would be finished for the day, but not these two. Before finishing the article search along the road they were requested by another officer. Once finished the Officer Patrillo and Bailey along with the district Sergeant responded to the requesting officer. Once on-scene the officer pointed out a parked vehicle and advised that the property was posted by Henrico Co. and nobody had permission to hunt or fish. Bailey was again deployed. She quickly went into tracking profile and led the Officer down the main road, through several large cut corn fields before ending 2 miles away at a large pond. Once at the ponds the Officers located three individuals trespassing to fish. These three events all transpired on one day and easily demonstrates the capability and versatility of DWR's K9 program.



Without K9 Bailey and Officer Patrillo’s assistance on that day, crucial evidence would have been missed. We want to wish Officer Patrillo the best with his future endeavors and thank him and Bailey for the many years of hard work they have provided to the DWR K9 Unit.

Now that we are two years’ post-COVID and most normalcy has returned our unit has seen an increase in requests for public appearances. Officers and K9 partners have been requested to provide K9-Demos



as well as manning

event booths throughout the state. This is a welcome relief for the K9s who have missed all of the interaction and attention they receive while at these events.

Officer Chaffin and K9 partner Molly, along with Officer VanDyke and K9 partner Coal completed the Indiana Department of Natural Resources K9 Academy in May 2022. Soon after completing their academy officers and K9 partners hit the ground running. They along with the other members of the K9 unit ran multiple tracks, article searches, and area searches. This led to multiple cases, and safe returns for missing parties.

The past year has been a busy one; the following table contains summary information for the K9 unit since 2020 and includes a snapshot of what Officer First Class Chaffin and K9 Molly, Senior Officer Tyler Blanks and K9 Bruno, Officer First Class Bonnie

Braziel and K9 Grace, Master Officer Mark DiLuigi and K9 Lily, Sergeant Richard Howald and K9 Sky, Senior Officer Ian Ostlund, and K9 Reese, Officer Jim Patrillo and K9 Bailey, and Master Officer Mark VanDyke and K9 Coal did during the calendar year 2022.



*Summary for K-9 Activity from 2018 to 2022 (\*separation of uses and patrols starting in 2018)*

<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
TOTAL USES	267	286	292	295	319
CALLS FOR SERVICE	-	-	1870	576	1871
PUBLIC APPEARANCE	85	89	14	91	111
TRACKS	63	71	74	82	92
WILDLIFE DETECTION	28	18	17	15	14
AREA SEARCH	51	63	177	118	116
NONSPECIFIC USE	40	45	10	2	9
HUMAN REMAINS DETECTION	-	-	1	4	3

## UNMANNED AERIAL SYSTEM (UAS)

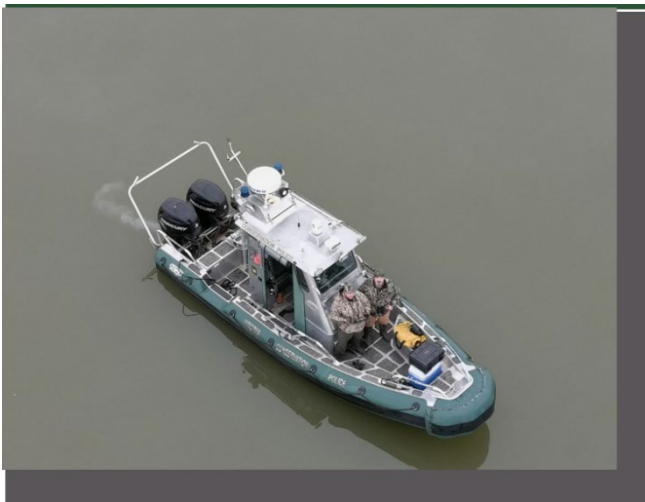
The launch of the Drone Program marks a significant milestone, reflecting our dedication to staying at the forefront of technological advancements in law enforcement and resource management. We firmly believe that this initiative will empower our officers and enable them to carry out their duties more safely and effectively.

This comprehensive overview of our roadmap for successfully implementing the Virginia Conservation Police (VCP) Unmanned Aerial System Program, commonly known as the Drone Program. Through this snapshot, we aim to shed light on the key initiatives and activities undertaken during the formal launch of the program in the year 2022.

The Virginia Conservation Police Unmanned Aerial System Program is a pivotal step forward in enhancing our law enforcement capabilities and strengthening our commitment to conservation and public safety. By leveraging the potential of cutting-edge drone technology, we strive to achieve greater efficiency, effectiveness, and versatility in our operations.

Throughout the planning and execution stages, our team has worked diligently to design a program that aligns with the unique requirements of the Virginia Conservation Police and complements our existing initiatives. The roadmap outlined in this document provides a clear path for the successful integration of unmanned aerial systems into our law enforcement strategies.

GOAL: Our initial goal was to create a deployable UAS capability to meet the agency's mission requirements. We researched and developed a plan to accomplish this by gaining an understanding that building a UAS capability requires planning, organizing, equipping, training, and exercising. We quickly realized that buying equipment does not enable an agency to deploy a drone. Finally, we knew that we must also consider and address numerous policy and training related issues.



STEPS FOR SUCCESS: Prior to launching our UAS Program, we identified ten steps that would be necessary for VCP to be successful in the airspace. The ten step processes that we used was as follows: we defined our Objectives and Outcomes; we created Policy, Plans and Procedures that would comply with Legal Requirements; we identified Risks and Mitigation Strategies; we developed a Realistic Budget which highlighted building out our program and UAS capability in phases; we

ensured all the right people, disciplines, and agencies were involved and purchased the right equipment that was appropriate for the agencies mission; we recruited and developed operating pilots with the right training; and finally, we developed a plan to exercise this capability.

Early on we recognized that Virginia law was very restrictive but that it did allow certain uses. Our intent was to utilize our drones as a force multiplier in these permitted activities. Thus, we adapted the following situations for which we could employ a drone: To enhance Situational Awareness, to be a Supervisory Aid in planning for events; during Search and Rescue operations, to assist with Amber, Silver and Blue alerts, and missing persons alerts; as a Visual Perspective, to provide direction in complex environments; to assist with Scene Documentation, as a tool to document accident and crime scenes; to assist with Natural Resource Management, specifically to aid in resource decisions; to maintain Training, and thus to be proficient; and finally to Maintain and Test our equipment so that we would be fully operational.

HISTORY: Approximately 3 years ago we began discussions about developing a Law Enforcement Drone Program. A small workgroup, 4 officers, 1 from each region, was assembled to begin discussions on developing a program. One of the driving motivators was when an officer attended some training and saw firsthand how we were missing an opportunity. Discussion at a Command Staff meeting gave us an understanding that this could be a tremendous opportunity for us to add a significant force multiplier in our law enforcement operations. Thus, our journey began, and we formed a Drone Committee Team. Our team started out with 5 members, 1 manager to keep the group focused and moving forward, 1 officer who was already a certified pilot and 3 officers who already flew personal drones. Very soon all 4 officers became certified pilots. We developed goals, conducted research, and attended professional meetings. We learned and gathered as much information and literature as possible. We reached out to other agencies, and other states, for assistance. We researched Virginia law. We researched many different drone manufacturers to find the best fit for our agency. We developed our General Orders, Standard Operating Procedures and Reporting Forms. Finally, we created a purchase order requisition to purchase two drone systems.

In April 2022, we received the first two drone systems and began our transition from concept to reality. From April to August, we attended meetings, conducted training, trained, and swapped the drones among the pilots so that each could become familiar with them, learn how they operated, and fly training flights. While this was occurring, we developed training for Visual Observers, and all sworn officers completed this training. Fast forward to early-December when we received two additional drone systems and fielded them. Now, each pilot had their own drone system, and each operations patrol region had a drone pilot.

FUTURE: Our vision for success was developed around different phases of our program. In Phase I, we established and launched the VCP Law Enforcement Division Drone Program / Team. Our plan is to maintain this until we begin to expand into Phase II. In Phase II, we want to develop additional training standards, recruit, and train new members, and expand the program to 8 drone pilots, with 2 in each region of operations. Our long-term goal, Phase III, is to expand this



capability to include underwater drones to aid in all underwater search and rescue and boating accident investigations. With 2022 now behind us, it is important to capitalize on our journey, our successes and how far we have come in a few short months. Perhaps one of the best ways to do so is to highlight our UAS activity for the calendar year.

Activity Efforts

2022 UAS - ACTIVITY RECAP			
Activity	Pre-Live	Live	TOTALS
# Of Calls	19	13	32
# Of Uses	19	23	42
107 Flight Hours	9.5	20	29.5
Training Hours	12.5	0.5	13
COA Flight Hours	0	0	0
# Citations	0	1	1



PRE-LIVE PERIOD BREAKDOWN (April -August)					
Activity	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	REGION 4	TOTALS
# Of Calls	17	0	1	1	19
# Of Uses	12	2	3	2	19
107 Flight Hours	7	0.5	1	1	9.5
Training Hours	8	1.5	1.5	1.5	12.5
COA Flight Hours	0	0	0	0	0
# Citations	0	0	0	0	0
# Of Public Relations Events	3	0	0	0	3
Activities	8	0	2	2	12



LIVE PERIOD BREAKDOWN (September -December)					
Activity	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	REGION 4	TOTALS
# Of Calls	6	4	0	3	13
# Of Uses	6	4	0	13	23
107 Flight Hours	7	6.5	0	6.5	20
Training Hours	0	0	0	0.5	0.5
COA Flight Hours	0	0	0	0	0
# Citations	1	0	0	0	1
# Of Public Relations Events	0	0	0	0	0
Activities	6	3	0	3	12

Finally, here is a breakdown of some of our Public Relations Events and our Activities and Narratives related to those activities.

Public Relations Events: (April-August)

- (R1) Lakeview Elementary School Career Day in Portsmouth, VA on 04/08/22. Approx. 300 students rotated through the demonstration. Attending were CPOs Smith, Corley and Braziel.
- (R1) DWR Static Display on 7-7-22 at First Landing State Park in Virginia Beach. Approximately 40 people contacted, including members of state level cabinet. Multiple Conservation Police Officers present for the event.
- (R1) Career Day event

UAS Activity/Comments: (April-August)

- (R1) Demonstrated the UAS for several K-6 elementary school kids. Special training: included launching, operating, and landing UAS on a boat in Back Bay.
- (R1) SAR training Cavalier WMA
- (R1) Training from a boat in Suffolk
- (R1) Training at Cavalier WMA and training, observing bear crop damage.
- (R1) SAR training
- (R2) Setup drone and controller up this month and familiarization with equipment.
- (R3) Familiarization with equipment
- (R3) Show drone to DWR tracking team.
- (R3) Used for crop damage
- (R4) Familiarization with equipment.
- (R4) Training flight over my personal property, prior to getting USFS flight permission. I sent my daughter out into my brushy field to hide. I then used the drone to find her. I used the camera first to ID what I thought could be a person hiding, then switched to thermal and confirmed that it was her.
- (R4) Training flight in the vicinity of a missing person on USNF.

Public Relations Events: (September-December)

- none

UAS Activity/Comments: (September-December)

- (R1) SAR in Suffolk.
- (R1) Trespassing complaint in Suffolk.
- (R1) Boat accident in Chesapeake
- (R1) Nansemond River in Suffolk, looking for waterfowl bait in public waters
- (R1) Back Bay in Virginia Beach, looking for waterfowl bait in public waters
- (R1) Tar Bay in Prince George, looking for waterfowl bait in public waters
- (R2) Utilized to document 2 boats that were involved in a boat crash that resulted in a double fatality.
- (R2) Missing boater search on the James River.

- (R2) Search for possible drowning victims.
- (R4) On November 16, 2022, I flew 7 missions over the James River below the Dam at Big Island, off Elon Rd in Bedford County. This was in reference to a SAR for a missing boater. I did not locate the missing person.
- (R4) On November 17, 2022, I flew 5 missions over the James River at Balcony Falls and downstream along the RR tracks (Rockbridge Co). I checked both sides of the river, all islands and log jams. This was in reference to a SAR for a missing boater. I did not locate the missing person.
- (R4) On Tuesday Dec. 27, 2022, I was requested to fly on a SAR mission the next day on the James River in the Maidens area of Goochland Co/Fluvanna Co. On Wednesday Dec. 28, 2022, I arrived on scene at 0930 hrs. and flew 1 training mission in the parking lot while waiting for my assignment. Cadaver dogs alerted to a target along the riverbank and UAS flights were held by Incident Command. I was released from the scene without flying on any missions when the Chesterfield Dive Team arrived to clear the target area found by the cadaver dogs. The missing woman was found by divers that evening.



## WEST VIRGINIA

*Bobby L. Cales, Colonel*

### OFFICER TRAINING

The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Section had an extremely extensive training year during FY23. The FY23 Quarterly training consisted of off-duty (concealed) secondary handgun training, moving targets firearms training, defensive tactics refresher with Scenario-Based Response to Resistance/Use of Force reporting, and unstable platform firearms training. During the statewide training/meeting held at Pipestem State Park, Natural Resources Police Officers received a Search and Seizure/Open-Field Doctrine refresher, wildlife law enforcement K9 training, and Body-Worn Camera initial integration, Colonel Cales presented the first Natural Resources Police Basic Leadership Development Training course. Colonel Cales NRPO Basic Leadership Development Training Course has been scheduled and presented for each quarter of the year. During the statewide meeting, the civilian staff received Customer/Hospitality Service Training. During FY23, two West Virginia DNR Law Enforcement personnel attended an advanced Defensive Tactics Instructor School, four NRPOs completed the Instructor Development Course, and 12 Swift Water Rescue Technicians were certified. Seven newly sworn Natural Resources Police Officers attended the mandatory eight (8) hour Seated Battery Transition Course for BUI



enforcement, while 102 NRPOs completed the four (4) hour Seated Battery refresher course, and seven officers attended Motorola APX radio programming training. During FY23, two NRPOs attended Waterfowl Enforcement School, and six NRPOs completed a 40-hour course on Wildlife Enforcement Intelligence and Investigations Training. Six District Lieutenants received training on evidence handling and NICS (National Instant Criminal Background Check System) training, and 22 NRPOs completed the Smith and Wesson M&P 15 Armorer's course. During FY23, two NRPOs attended a Wildlife Enforcement Agency Accreditation Manager training, and a total of 30 NRPOs received training on Law Enforcement UTV operation. Supervisory In-Service in FY23 consisted of technical sessions during national conferences, UCR Crime Reporting/NIBRS, and various virtual trainings approved by West Virginia Law Enforcement Training Subcommittee. During FY23, the WV DNR Law Enforcement Section instituted its first Wildlife Enforcement K9 Program, the six K9s and their handlers completed a total of 360 training hours.

The Law Enforcement Section Honor Guard/Color Guard continues to attend opening ceremonies for sporting events, special events and funeral services.

### **FUNDING AND STAFFING**

The WV DNR Law Enforcement Section normally has a staffing level of 126 Natural Resources Police Officers (NRPO) and 10 support personnel. Currently we have 117 Natural Resources Police Officers (NRPO) actively working. During FY2023, 1 officer retired, and 5 officers separated from service, 2 new officers were hired, and 6 officers were promoted. 1 civilian support personnel retired after 38 years of service and 1 civilian support personnel resigned.

### **LAW ENFORCEMENT TRENDS**

The Law Enforcement Section continues to focus on water safety and increased lifejacket usage by the public through the *Wear It Campaign, Operation Life Jacket, and Spring Aboard*.

The Law Enforcement Section offers in-seat Boating Safety classes in all counties in West Virginia. Students may view class information and register online at [www.register-ed.com](http://www.register-ed.com). The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and The U.S. Power Squadron also teach Boater Education within the State of West Virginia. NASBLA and State of West Virginia approved On-line Boater Education courses can be found on [www.wvdnr.gov](http://www.wvdnr.gov). Anyone born on or after December 31, 1986, is required to successfully complete a NASBLA-approved boating safety course before operating a motorboat. While using news releases and interviews during **Spring Aboard**, the mandatory Boater Education message reaches many new boaters.

The public and media continue to follow the work of our officers on the WV Natural Resources Police Officer Facebook page, [www.Facebook.com/DNRpolice](http://www.Facebook.com/DNRpolice). The Facebook page continues to see increases in media contacts for additional information within the state and nationally. The reporting of wildlife violations on the DNR website, [www.wvdnr.gov/lenforce/poachers.shtm](http://www.wvdnr.gov/lenforce/poachers.shtm) is increasingly useful.



## **UNIQUE CROSS BOUNDARY OR COOPERATIVE ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS**

One Sergeant and four officers are working the Hatfield-McCoy Regional Recreation Authority. The Authority reimburses the Section for salaries, benefits, and associated equipment expenses. This trail system is growing, and we are working together to make sure we have coverage for the safety of the public. It is our hope that more officers will be added as the system grows.

A grant from the Governor's Commission on Drunk Driving Prevention provided the Law Enforcement Section additional funding for enhanced BUI patrols on West Virginia waters from July 1, 2022, to September 29, 2022. These patrols resulted in 14 BUI arrests, and 786 other citations/warnings.

Natural Resources Police Officers participated in the nationwide program *Operation Dry Water* from July 2, 2022, to July 4, 2022, to reduce alcohol-related boating incidents. This operation resulted in 262 citations/warnings, and 6 BUIs. The Section has renewed its efforts toward water safety and increased lifejacket usage by the public through our *Wear It Campaign* on Facebook and general boat patrols.

## **COST SAVING INITIATIVES**

The Section continues to conduct a vehicle/boat accident review board semi-annually to identify incident types and causes. We are always looking for ways to reduce insurance premiums. We are continually utilizing technology to reduce travel costs. Cell phones, computers, radios, and the internet are used to transmit reports, complaints, and information. Virtual meetings are used to conduct staff meetings, boards, or planning sessions to cut down in-state travel.

The Section keeps vehicles, if the vehicle is operating efficiently, 5 years or 125,000 miles to reduce vehicle expenditures. High maintenance cost vehicles are traded earlier to avoid excessive repairs. All state vehicle contracts were canceled. Manufacturers are still trying to get back on track from their own supply issues and new manufacturers do not produce contract quality vehicles for consumer product lines, so we are currently searching for and picking up SUV's and trucks as we can find them on dealer lots that meet our basic requirements but are not premium vehicles. During FY2023 we received 25 new vehicles (4 Tahoe SSV's, 6 Tahoe PPV's, 5 Ford Interceptors, and 10 Ford Rangers). Boat motors have a similar supply and lead time issues as vehicles. Boats ordered at the end of the last fiscal year for deployment this year have been delayed until 2024 at earliest. Most specialty boat companies manufacturing pursuit or whitewater crafts have suspended new orders until the current orders are filled.

Due to every growing issue of Litigation, not only for the Section but for the officers, the Colonel has implemented a technology advancement plan for the field officers. Body worn cameras have been purchased and are currently being deployed. All the beginning phases for in-car WIFI (Cradlepoint), Toughbook style laptops, and a CAD system have been started. The in-car laptops and CAD system will allow them to run real time identity, license, warrant checks which is crucial

for officer safety and will also let the officers see the locations of everyone in the system for emergency responses.

Being the oldest law enforcement agency in the State and celebrating our 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Colonel Cales implemented the WV DNR K9 Program. The section purchased 6 canines consisting of Labs and German Shorthairs. Ziva, Luna, Xena, Pepper, Maze, and Keen were all purchased from the Tarheel Canine and trained through the Virginia DNR and the Ward Burton Wildlife Foundation. Six officers, one from each district, were selected for the program and underwent extensive training with their new partner before being released for duty during our Spring Statewide meeting. The new K9 Officers specialize in evidence recovery and search and rescue.

WV DNR Law Enforcement Section is beginning the process of becoming an accredited agency, by joining in the North American Wildlife Enforcement Accreditation (NAWLEA).

The Section continues to work with federal and state agencies to procure grants to assist with equipment purchases. The USFWS Hunter Education and U.S.C.G. Recreational Boating Safety grants are being monitored to maximize returns from expenditures of time and resources.

## **LEGISLATIVE CHANGES**

### HB 3299

Provides for additional recruitment and retention opportunities for Natural Resources Police Officers. Allows new officers to transfer a maximum of 3 years from Public Employees Retirement system over to NRPO retirement plan.

### HB 3122

New code created 20-2-5L. Allows breech loading muzzleloaders that use an encapsulated powder charge (i.e., firesticks) to be used during any established muzzleloader season (i.e., deer muzzleloader season). To further clarify, this allows breech loading muzzleloaders to be used during established muzzleloader seasons. These types of muzzleloaders CAN be used outside of established muzzleloader seasons provided no other rules or laws are being violated. Cannot be used during the Mountaineer Heritage season.

### HB2189 "Protection of Property from Warrantless Searches Act."

This bill would have abolished the open fields doctrine in WV and required search warrant to enter private property. The bill made it to first reading on the House side but was pulled from the regular calendar after considerable effort from Law Enforcement groups. Expect it, or similar bill, to run again this year.

### SB 733

Creates nonresident lifetime licenses and makes changes to the Class A-1 Small Arms (Handgun) Hunting stamp.

SB 200

Code affected 20-2-5j. Expands dog tracking of mortally wounded deer or bear. to include turkey, wild boar, and elk (during season).

## **U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT**

***Stephen Clark, Special Agent in Charge***



The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement focus in FY 2023, is to investigate wildlife crimes; regulate wildlife trade; help people understand and comply with federal conservation laws; work in partnership with federal, state, tribal, and international counterparts to conserve fish, wildlife, and plant resources; and protect our nation’s border and natural resources by interdicting illegal wildlife products and injurious species before entering or leaving the country.

We achieved such by the implementation of Strategic Goals to include:

- Actively Combating Global Wildlife Trafficking
- Protecting the Nation’s Fish, Wildlife, and Plants from Unlawful Exploitation, Industrial Hazards, and Habitat Loss
- Facilitate and Expedite Legal Trade
- Enhance Management Accountability

For FY 2023 the Office of Law Enforcement, Atlanta, GA SAC Office continued to ensure the safety of personnel and customers during the final stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The OLE fulfilled the mission of the Service and facilitated legal wildlife trade, and during this recovery time, nearly doubled the number of inspections of wildlife shipments from the previous year. The OLE hired a new Assistant Special Agent in Charge as well as three new Resident Agents in Charge for three of the four operating districts in the Southeast Region and continued to hire more special agents and inspectors throughout the Region. Wildlife Inspectors (WIs) in the Southeast Region continued to conduct inspections and make appropriate seizures while the special agents continued to perform their duties and roles in complex investigations, apprehending traffickers, and collaborating with partner enforcement agencies.

A query of the Law Enforcement Management Information System (LEMIS) reflected the following casework handled by Southeast Region during this period:

- New Cases opened in FY 2023: 1,417
- Total # cases currently active: 482

Inspection Areas:

- Total Shipments: 38,264
- Declared Value: \$611,646,743
- Total # Inspections: 4,825
- Total # Seizures: 383

**FY 2023 ADJUDICATION STATISTICS- SOUTHEAST REGION**

Criminal Fines/Penalties						
Fines Imposed	Fines Suspended	Restitution	Forfeiture of Collateral	Criminal Forfeiture	Property Forfeited	Other Directed Sanctions
\$ 138,246.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 35,550.00	\$ 81,120.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 13,949.00

Civil Penalties			
Property Forfeited	Negotiated Other Payments	Negotiated Agreement	Civil Penalty Assessments
\$ 2,155.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00

Sentencing Summary						
Jail (months)	Suspended (months)	Probation (months)	Home Confinement (months)	Halfway House (months)	Community Service (hours)	Suspension/Revocation of Privileges (months)
83.5	0.0	1,026.0	7.0	0.0	550.0	612.0

**FY 2023 VIOLATION BY ACT- SOUTHEAST REGION**

Act Description	Act	New Cases	Ongoing Cases	Total Violation Investigations	Act Description	Act	New Cases	Ongoing Cases	Total Violation Investigations
African Elephant Conservation Act	AEC	6	2	8	Marine Mammal Act	MMA	12	5	17
Airborne Hunting Act	ABH	0	0	0	Migratory Bird / Stamp Act	MHS	2	0	2
Archeological Resources	ARA	1	4	5	Migratory Bird Treaty Act	MBT	40	58	98



Conspiracy	CON	1	22	23	National Wildlife Refuge	WRF	0	0	0
Document Smuggling	SFD	1	0	1	Obstruction Of Justice	OBJ	1	4	5
Eagle Protection Act	EPA	5	6	11	Other Federal Laws	FED	8	19	27
Endangered Species Act	ESA	1,220	496	1,716	Permit / License	PLI	0	0	0
False Statements	FSE	3	6	9	Rhino Tiger Act	RTA	3	0	3
Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA)	FIF	0	0	0	Smuggling	SMG	16	41	57
Foreign Laws	FOR	4	2	6	State Law	STL	4	23	27
Lacey Act	LAC	257	213	470	Undefined	XXX	1	2	3
Lacey Act - Wildlife	LAW	42	24	66	Wild Bird Conservation Act	WBA	23	7	30
Major Crime	MJC	0	0	0	<b>Total Acts for All Cases</b>		<b>1,650</b>	<b>934</b>	<b>2,584</b>

### FY 2023 PORT STATISTICS- SOUTHEAST REGION

Port	Total Shipments	Total Species	Avg. Number of Species per Shipment	Total Declared Value	Number of Inspections (by shipment)	Total Number of Seizures (by shipment)
WP-West Palm Beach	77	185	2	\$288,115	8	8
AT-Atlanta	3,282	9,688	3	\$23,210,886	522	41
CR-Charleston	193	315	2	\$10,752,392	1	1
ER-Erlanger	598	986	2	\$1,398,681	150	19
Fernandina Beach	3	3	1	\$1,393	0	0
FL-Fort Lauderdale	139	151	1	\$606,640	110	110
JX-Jacksonville	58	70	1	\$3,640,117	5	1
LO-Louisville	16,051	26,345	2	\$63,746,622	1,013	58
MB-Mobile	4	8	2	\$463,508	0	0
ME-Memphis	7,800	12,783	2	\$150,307,782	2,164	28
MI-Miami. FL	8,097	23,324	3	\$212,452,690	451	108
NO-New Orleans	419	925	2	\$102,650,809	306	5
OR-Orlando	139	1,034	7	\$677,444	32	0
PE-Port Everglades	256	536	2	\$8,181,014	1	0
SA-Savannah	514	1,031	2	\$15,526,843	6	0
SJ-San Juan	211	332	2	\$14,073,672	2	1
TP-Tampa	420	1,422	3	\$3,662,564	54	3
WI-Wilmington	3	4	1	\$5,571	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>38,264</b>	<b>79,142</b>		<b>\$611,646,743</b>	<b>4,825</b>	<b>383</b>

*\*Seizure count is for all shipments which were fully or partially seized.*

## EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

### OLE Port of Memphis, TN

The Port of Memphis inspection program was honored to have Ms. Maria Garcia (Biologist for the Dominican Republic Ministry of Environment Biodiversity Unit) and Mr. Eduardo Nieves (translator from El Salvador) shadowing the daily operations at the FedEx International World Hub. Wildlife Inspector Billy Bates is participating in the exchange program and guided the two throughout the week as they observed the numerous inspection duties performed around the port of Memphis. In August 2023, WI Bates will travel to the Dominican Republic to Shadow Ms. Garcia.

### OLE Port of Louisville, KY

In June of 2022, a WI from the Port of Louisville presented an informational overview at the Wildlife Intelligence Review and Exchange hosted by Environment and Climate Change Canada of the ongoing investigation into the illegal international trade in ivory and black coral prayer beads. The investigation thus far has documented more than 40 violations in both the US and Canada. This collaboration with our Canadian partners has resulted in the disruption of the unlawful commercialization of ivory and black coral in both countries.

### OLE Port of Miami, FL

In April of 2023, the USFWS Miami, Florida RAC Office hosted Adhim Santiago Jr, a representative from Brazil's Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) in Phase #1 of the Wildlife Inspectors Exchange (WIE) Program sponsored by U.S. Department of the Interior's International Technical Assistance Program (DOI-ITAP). Adhim is an Environmental Analyst with Brazil's IBAMA and shadowed Supervisory Wildlife Inspector (SWI) Alberto J. Gonzalez for one week, being exposed to the many aspects of the Wildlife Inspection Program throughout the Miami, Orlando, and Tampa Offices. In the months ahead, it will be SWI Gonzalez's turn to travel to Brazil to shadow Adhim as he performs his duties as an Environmental Analyst in Sao Paulo, Brazil. This specialized program is designed to strengthen global law enforcement relationships to combat poaching and trafficking in wildlife and forest products. International WIE participants with their U.S. wildlife inspector counterparts spend up to two weeks at the U.S. duty stations, as part of field operations shadowing exercise. The focus of the time spent at the ports is to foster a greater understanding of the illegal wildlife trafficking concern globally, strengthen individual and international relationships, global networking, and build adaptive leadership. The program kicked off at the USFWS National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Additional participating countries include Belize and the Dominican Republic.

In February of 2023, the Southeast Region, Regional Directorate Team visited the Port of Miami to learn about the Office of Law Enforcement Wildlife Inspector and Special Agent Programs. The WIs presented highlights of major cases and conducted physical inspections of reptile shipments, including a highly venomous shipment which resulted in law enforcement action on CITES Appendix II listed beaded lizards (*Heloderma horridum*) imported from Mexico. The wildlife was re-exported back to country of origin the following day.

## SIGNIFICANT WILDLIFE INSPECTION PROGRAM SEIZURES

### OLE Port of Miami, FL – R.G. Reptiles

In September of 2022, a commercial shipment of CITES and Non-CITES reptiles arrived at Miami International Airport from Germany. The shipment consisted of 98 venomous snakes and seven Ball pythons (*Python regius*). USFWS Miami OLE WIs reviewed the eDec and observed that there were 14 Philippine pit vipers (*Trimeresurus flavomaculatus*) and six Inland Taipans (*Oxyuranus microlepidotus*). The Philippine pit viper is endemic solely to the Philippines and the Inland Taipan is endemic only to the Australian mainland. USFWS HQ SWIs had already confirmed with the Management Authorities for the Philippines and Australia that neither species were ever legally exported from their countries of origin for commercial purposes. WIs refused clearance and seized all 14 Philippine pit vipers and six Inland Taipans as the parental breeding stock had been illegally exported from the Philippines and Australia. The importer violated the Lacey Act 16 USC 3372(a) (2) (A) (Violations of foreign law). The seized wildlife were placed at several live animal housing facilities with expertise in venomous reptiles. The retail value of the animals in the US is around \$15,000 - \$16,000.



Credit: USFWS

### OLE Port of Orlando, FL- Sand Dollar/Star Cacti

In February of 2023, the WI in Orlando, FL was alerted of a shipment in Jacksonville, FL containing 528 Sand dollar/Star cacti (*Astrophytum asterias*). This species is listed as Endangered under ESA and as Appendix I of the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES). The shipment, coming in from Thailand, was intended to commercially sell/propagate the species. All cacti were seized, and civil forfeiture proceedings have been initiated. The cacti were transferred to a university in Texas for housing and care for while the case is pending.



Credit: USFWS

### OLE Port of Atlanta, GA – Paint Brushes

WIs at the Port of Atlanta found a shipment of paint brushes while conducting proactive inspections for a Service licensed importer located in North Carolina coming from Germany. The shipment contained 3,616 artist paint brushes manufactured with Siberian Weasel (*Mustela sibirica*), a CITES Appendix III listed species, 420 Badger (*Meles meles*), 2,943 Chinese Ferret-Badger (*Melogale moschata*), and 98 Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*).

Once the wildlife was forfeited to the Service, the paint brushes were transferred to the Service Federal Duck Stamp Program from the OLE to be distributed through the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program (JDS Program). When distributing these materials, the JDS Program will actively promote the conservation role that the Service's Office of Law Enforcement provides. Initiated in the late 1980s, JDS Program is one of the Service's primary youth outreach programs and is active in all states, D.C., the U.S. territories, and among American military families living overseas. On average, over 20,000 K-12th grade students participate in their state art contests each year; an estimated 300,000 students, educators, families, and community members also take part in annual activities and events that celebrate "wildlife conservation through the arts". As visual art educators and resources available to students become increasingly limited, the JDS Program provides free art and wildlife conservation activities, lessons, and supplies to educators and families. By targeting materials and resources toward underrepresented communities and urban youth, we hope to increase the diversity of students exploring natural resource-related activities and careers.



Credit: USFWS

### OLE Port of Louisville, KY – OPERATION MITTEN CATCHER

In September of 2022, WIs located at the Port of Louisville, KY while working at the United Parcel Service (UPS) World Port inspected a proactively selected shipment invoiced to contain "polyester jacket" imported from China and destined for Ridgewood, New York. Upon physical inspection, WIs found the shipment to contain dozens of live, mitten crabs (*Eriocheir sp.*), which are listed as injurious under the Lacey Act. WIs immediately disposed of the illegal shipment. Operation Mitten Catcher is an ongoing, nationwide inspection operation developed to provide coordinated



Credit: USFWS

interdiction of live mitten crabs being imported into the U.S. The previous year's Operation Mitten Catcher resulted in the interception of more than 15,000 mitten crabs.



### OLE Port of Louisville, KY - LIMMER

Between the dates of January 27, 2022, and May 4, 2022, the WI at the Cincinnati, OH-Erlanger, KY, and Kentucky Port selected for proactive inspection seven (7) commercial shipments originating



from various exporters and destined for Charles LIMMER (LIMMER) of LIMMER ENTOMOLOGICAL in Commack, New York. The shipments were found to contain over 15,000 different butterflies, beetles, moths, bees, and other insects. One (1) shipment contained 175 Bicolored Round Leaf bats (*Hipposideros bicolor*), 193 Cave Nectar bats (*Eonycteris spelaea*), and 44 Greater Short-nosed fruit bats (*Cynopterus sphinx*). The US Importer was being investigated for undervaluing shipments, Lacey Act violations, CITES violations, and CDC violations among others.

Credit: USFWS

### OLE Port of Louisville, KY- Cacti

WIs in Louisville intercepted multiple shipments exported from Mexico and destined to multiple location around the world containing CITES protected cacti. WIs interdicted a shipment importing from Mexico to Hayward, California containing two live Living-rock cacti (*Ariocarpus bravoanus*), a CITES I species endemic to South-Central Mexico, one live Button cactus (*Epithelantha species*), a CITES II species found in MX and the US, and one live yet to be identified cactus (*Cactaceae*). WIs also intercepted and shipment in-transit from Mexico to Vietnam containing 20 live Living-rock cacti (*Ariocarpus bravoanus*) and 188 live Living-rock cacti (*Ariocarpus kotschoubeyanus*), both are CITES I species endemic to South-Central Mexico. OLE SAs and service attachés in multiple countries assisted with this investigation. Some of the shipments were seized and the cactus were sent to a rehabilitation center, others were documented and put back in the sort to travel to destination where law enforcement officers from the respective countries continued with the investigations.

### OLE Port of Memphis, TN – CORAL REACH

WIs at the Port of Memphis, TN conducted a three-month operation at the FedEx International World Hub intercepting numerous undeclared shipments containing live CITES regulated coral species being shipped from Canada declared as “aquarium supplies.” Four shipments were seized at the Port of Memphis and one at the Port of Louisville. WIs were able to develop a contact with a wildlife officer with Canadian Environment and Climate Change (CECC). WIs informed the CECC Officer of the violations incurred by BIG SHOW FRAGS (BSF). In January of 2023, WIs received

notice from the CECC officer that a \$4,000 Canadian Administrative Monetary Penalty was issued to BSF for the unlawful export of Torch coral (*Euphyllia glabrescens*) to the US.

OLE Port of Memphis, TN - Cacti

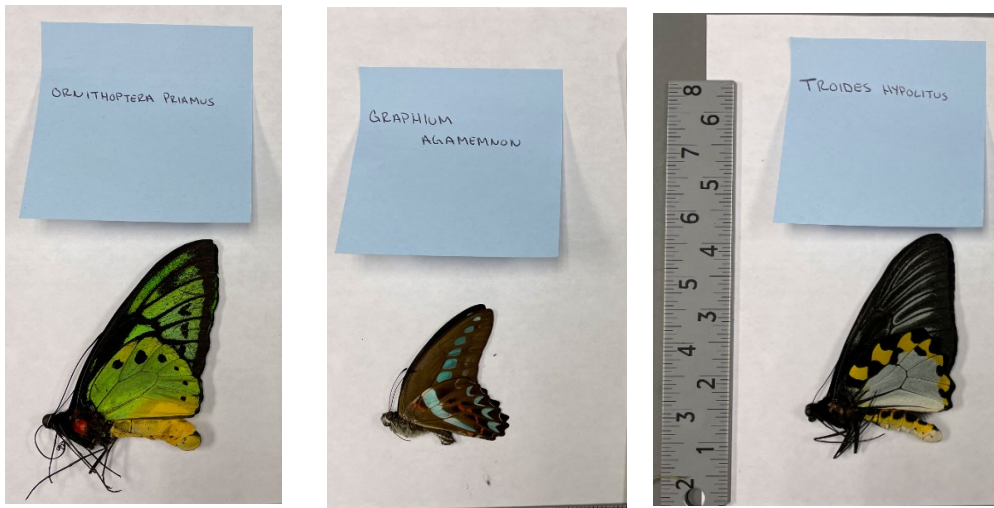
WIs in Memphis were presented with three shipments from FedEx Trade Networks for pro-active inspection at the FedEx International World Hub. The shipments were in-transit from Mexico to Laos. Full inspection of all three shipments discovered a total of 518 live cacti (*Ariocarpus kotschoubeyanus*), which are CITES Appendix I classified. These shipments were mis-manifested as "Artificial plastic plants". All three shipments were seized by OLE. WIs are working with the Plant Rescue Center for placement of the cacti.



Credit: USFWS

OLE Port of Memphis, TN- KEY WEST BUTTERFLY

In August of 2022, KEY WEST BUTTERFLY & NATURE CONSERVATORY (KWBNC), a valid license holder, unlawfully imported for commercial purposes items declared as "Plastic Statue Handcraft" from Indonesia into the Western District of Tennessee via the FedEx International World Hub. KWBNC imported wildlife protected under the Conservation International Trade in Endangered Species of Wildlife Fauna and Flora (CITES) without a CITES permit, failed to file a Declaration for Importation or Exportation of Fish or Wildlife, and failed to comply with marking requirement. The shipment contained 150 Swallowtail butterfly (*Papilio blumei*), 100 Tailed-jay butterfly (*Graphium Agamemnon milon*), 100 Orange Albatross butterfly (*Appias nero*) dried specimens. Also co-mingled within the shipment were an additional 151 butterfly specimens identified as Birdwing butterfly species. These additional specimens were found under a paper layer separating them from those previously identified. The Birdwing species were later identified as three separate species, all listed at a CITES Appendix II level. In total, there were 66 Birdwing butterfly (*Troides hypolitus*), 50 Common Birdwing butterfly (*Troides helena*), and 35 Priam's Birdwing butterfly (*Ornithoptera priamus*). Violation Notices were issued to KWBNC for multiple import violations to include violations of CITES. Case was referred to local Special Agent for further investigation.



Credit: USFWS

## SPECIAL AGENT PROGRAM – SIGNIFICANT INVESTIGATIONS

### Southern Surge Task Force (SSTF) - SOUTHERN HOT-HERPS

In November of 2022, Chun Ku, d/b/a Dynasty Reptiles appeared in the Southern District of Florida and was sentenced to one year and one day imprisonment, a \$20,000.00 fine to be paid into the Lacey Act Reward Fund, and two years of supervised release upon completion of imprisonment. Ku had previously pled guilty for his involvement in conspiring with co-defendants, Daisuke Miyauchi & Ka Yeung Marvin Chan, to smuggle CITES II reptiles through his CITES Permit spanning a seven-year period, in which Ku engaged in at least 108 separate criminal acts, smuggling to Asia a total of 8,738 CITES II protected species with a retail market value of \$25,867,094.70. In addition to the CITES II species, the fraudulent shipments contained 62,020 non-CITES species which were also smuggled. In January of 2023, Ka Yeung Marvin Chan was sentenced to 14 months imprisonment, the surrendering to immigration for removal from the United States after imprisonment, and two years of supervised release upon completion of imprisonment after pleading guilty to Conspiracy to Smuggle Wildlife, and to Making False Records for his involvement with Chun Ku d/b/a DYNASTY REPTILES to launder CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), through Ku's business, and in essence smuggle said reptiles to Japan.

### SSTF- OPERATION TURTLE TRAP

In September of 2022, Nathan Horton voluntarily surrender himself to the custody of the U.S. Marshal Service, upon conviction of a felony Lacey Act violation. Horton began his sentence of one year and one day in Federal prison, followed by three years of supervised probation at which time he is restricted from obtaining any fishing or being involved with any turtle trade. Horton was also assessed a fine of \$10,000, ordered to complete 200 hours of community service and complete a drug rehabilitation



Credit: USFWS



course. This sentencing was based upon an investigation revealing records during 2016 through 2017 that subject Nathan Horton illegally trapped and shipped over 2000 turtles from Georgia to the California area where they were subsequently exported to China. During that same timeframe, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GA-DNR) cited Horton on two different occasions for using illegal turtle traps. The case was prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia.

#### SSTF - OPERATION TAILS N' SCALES

On May 22, 2023, U.S. District Judge Mark Scarsi, in the Central District of California, sentenced Nevada resident David Ryan Sneddon to one year of probation including five months of house arrest and time served for one day at the time of his arrest. All fines and restitution were suspended due to his inability to pay. Sneddon pled guilty on October 3, 2022, to one felony count for wildlife trafficking and criminal forfeiture under the Lacey Act.

#### OLE Florida - THE MONKEY WHISPERER

In June of 2022, U.S. District Judge sentenced Jimmy Wayne Hammonds, aka "the Monkey Whisperer" to five years of probation, including eight months of home confinement, and fined Hammonds \$90,000 related to Hammonds' acceptance a plea agreement in March of 2022. Hammonds owns and operates The Monkey Whisperer, LLC, a business engaged in the breeding and selling of wildlife. From September 2017 until February 2018, Hammonds conspired to sell a Capuchin monkey to a celebrity client in California, even though that buyer could not lawfully possess a Capuchin monkey in California. Hammonds facilitated the transportation of the Capuchin monkey, from Florida to California, through individuals who were not permitted to possess a Capuchin monkey in either state. The client paid over \$12,000 for the Capuchin monkey. Additionally, Hammonds illegally sold Cotton-Top Tamarins, which are primates listed as an endangered species, to buyers in Alabama, South Carolina, and Wisconsin. To conceal his unlawful wildlife trafficking, Hammonds submitted false records to a law enforcement officer and attempted to persuade a witness to lie to a law enforcement officer by saying that they had purchased the Cotton-Top Tamarins at a flea market. This case was investigated by the USFWS, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

#### OLE Tennessee- LAKE COUNTY TN SHOT BALD EAGLE

In July of 2022, JASON Perkins was arrested by OLE Special Agents for an arrest warrant issued out of the Western District of Tennessee. Perkins was arrested for felon in possession of a firearm and shooting a bald eagle in violation of the Bald and Golden Eagle Act. On April 21, 2023, Perkins was sentenced in Federal District Court for pleading guilty to illegally shooting and killing an American bald eagle as well as being a felon in possession of a firearm. Perkins was sentenced to two years' incarceration as well as three years supervised probation following the term of imprisonment. Perkins will remain



Credit: USFWS



incarcerated for a remaining 15 months given time served since his initial arrest in July of 2022.

#### OLE Florida- BOX OUT

In October of 2022, Zeyu Yan, a Chinese foreign national, pled guilty to felony conspiracy against the United States and was sentenced by a Federal District Court Judge for his part in an outbound smuggling of reptiles scheme that utilized the U.S. Postal Service Foreign Mail Facility in Miami, FL. YAN was sentenced to time served (five months incarceration), one year supervised release, \$100 special assessment. ICE removal process is currently pending.

#### OLE Tennessee- OPERATION MARYLAND BEARS

A joint investigation effort involving USFWS, Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency (TWRA), Maryland Fish and Game (MGF), and Maryland State Police (MSP) involving violations of the Lacey Act for the illegal harvest and transport of American Black Bear from Tennessee to Maryland. In January of 2023, initial appearances took place for four Tennessee subjects. All four subjects waived further hearings and plead guilty to Conspiracy to Violate the Lacey Act. The subjects received fines ranging from \$1500 and \$3000 and were placed on two years of unsupervised probation with their hunting privileges revoked during the entire period while on probation. Three Maryland subjects waived further hearings and pled guilty to Conspiracy to Violate the Lacey Act. One subject received a fine of \$1,850 and was placed on two years of unsupervised probation with her hunting privileges revoked during the entire period while on probation. The other two subjects received fines and restitution totaling \$7,500 each and were placed on three years of unsupervised probation with their hunting privileges revoked during the entire period while on probation. The case was prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Tennessee.

#### OLE Mississippi- OPERATION SPOONIE

In July of 2022, a Northern District of Mississippi defendant was found guilty to a one count felony criminal information for the illegal take, possession, transport, and sale of paddlefish from Mississippi to Kentucky. The defendant was ordered to pay a \$7,500 fine amount to the Lacey Act Rewards Account and was placed on five years of supervised federal probation, which includes a five recreational or commercial fishing revocation within the state of Mississippi and a worldwide fishing ban for any fish containing roe during his term of probation.

In September of 2022, a co-defendant plead guilty to a felony for conspiring to violate the Lacey Act for illegally taking, transporting, and selling MS paddlefish and its roe to Kentucky buyers from MS closed waters. The defendant was sentenced to six months of incarceration, followed by three years of supervised release, and ordered to pay a fine in the amount of \$20,000 to the Lacey Act Reward Account. The defendant, a commercial fisherman, is banned from all fishing worldwide, both commercial and recreational, for a period of five years from date of judgment and reported to prison on November 28, 2022. In February of 2023, another co-defendant plead guilty to aiding and abetting others to sell in interstate commerce, female paddlefish roe, which had been harvested in violation of Mississippi State Law. This defendant operated the boat and was ordered to pay a \$3,000 dollar fine to the Lacey Act Rewards Account. This joint investigation was conducted by OLE and the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks.

#### OLE Miami- Ivory Smuggling

On March 3, 2023 an individual was sentenced in federal court to 51 months of imprisonment, followed by three years of probation, and a court fee of \$20,000. At the conclusion of the subject's trial on December 7, 2022, they were found guilty of nine counts of ivory smuggling and one count of obstruction of justice. The OLE worked in conjunction with Homeland Security Investigations and U.S. Customs and Border Protection while conducting the investigation.

#### OLE Miami Parrot Egg Smuggling

On March 23, 2023, A Chinese National on an inbound flight to Miami from Nicaragua, with a destination of Taiwan, was found to have bird eggs in a clandestine incubator as his carry-on bag. The eggs began to hatch, and he was detained at Miami International Airport by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The subject was arrested and charged with smuggling. 24 of the 29 eggs hatched and are from the genus *Amazona* (CITES I).

#### OLE Tennessee OLE Dyer County Deer

In March of 2023, Toby Mejia and Bailey Walker were sentenced in Federal District Court, each pleading guilty to one count of information for violating the Lacey Act, 16 USC 3372(a)(2)(A). Both



*Credit: USFWS*

Mejia and Walker were sentenced to one-year unsupervised probation, forfeiture of hunting privileges for one year, forfeiture of all illegal wildlife and restitution in the amount of \$2,500. The sentencing in Federal court concluded the two-year, multi-state investigation conducted by USFWS, TWRA, Missouri Department of Conservation, Arkansas Game and Fish



*Credit USFWS*

Commission and Kansas Department of Parks and Wildlife. In addition to the federal convictions, Mejia and Walker were also found guilty of numerous wildlife violations in multiple state courts. In total Mejia and Walker received fines in the amount of \$851, restitution in the amount of \$5,300.00, forfeiture of collateral in the amount of \$46,750.00, 120 months of unsupervised probation and 96 months revocation of hunting privileges.

### **OLE Florida- OPERATION ORNERY BIRDS**

In November of 2022, SAs, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) SAs, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) conducted seven arrests in the Tampa, FL area and in April of 2023 OLE SAs, HSI SAs, and FWCC Special Operations Group personnel, arrested an additional ten subjects in Dade and Palm Beach Counties, FL. This is the culmination of a multi-year, multi-jurisdictional collaborative investigation addressing the illegal trapping and trade of MBTA-listed bird species.



*Credit; USFWS*

### **OLE Arkansas- LIL CUBBIE**



*Credit: USFWS*

In April 2023, an operation was conducted by Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, USFWS, and local agencies to rescue an illegally possessed male tiger cub. The tiger cub was safely rescued and transported by USFWS to the Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge where he was placed into quarantine and given a full medical screening. The investigation is supported by the Big Cat Safety Act Task Force and the Department of Justice Environment and Natural Resources Division.

OLE Puerto Rico- PUERTO RICO ZOO

Throughout 2023, OLE SAs, along with numerous local, state and federal agencies have assisted with the security and facilitated the transport of various species of wildlife from the Puerto Rico Zoo. After several years of hard hits from hurricanes, the zoo fell into disrepair and conditions became derelict for the wildlife. In addition to multiple endangered species and migratory birds, SAs have helped facilitate the transfer of one African elephant, one Northern White Rhinoceros, two Hippopotamuses, two Plain Zebras, one Sandhill Crane, and several other wildlife species from the Puerto Rico Zoo to the Aguadilla Airport.