



2024 Bulletin

Law Enforcement Section

Table of Contents

ALABAMA	3
ARKANSAS	6
FLORIDA	9
GEORGIA	32
KENTUCKY	36
LOUISIANA	40
MISSOURI	55
MISSISSIPPI	58
NORTH CAROLINA	61
OKLAHOMA	71
SOUTH CAROLINA	74
TENNESSEE	79
TEXAS	81
VIRGINIA	84
WEST VIRGINIA	90
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE SOUTHEAST REGION	93

ALABAMA

Michael M. Weathers, Colonel



AGENCY OVERVIEW

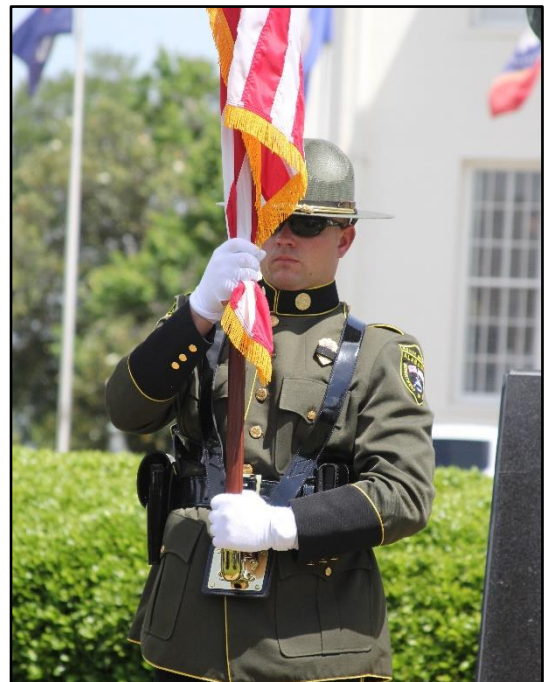
The Law Enforcement Section of the Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division aids in the protection and management of Alabama's wildlife resources and the safety of the public through a fair and balanced enforcement program.

TRAINING

2024 was a busy year for training with the Law Enforcement Section. The Alabama Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission mandated a De-escalation training course for all certified law enforcement officers within the state. In early 2024 our Section sent two officers to the state mandated De-escalation Instructor Trainer Course so they could return to the agency and certify all officers. In late 2024 each conservation enforcement officer attended the basic De-escalation Course.

With the prevalence of opioid abuse in our society, conservation officers are not immune from encountering dangerous drugs and those suffering from their effects. Thus, our Section obtained Narcan nasal spray, which is an opioid antagonist agent, for each conservation officer. In late 2024 our staff received training in its use and carry. Though the hope is this equipment is never needed, our officers are much safer now that they have it.

In early 2024, our Section sent five officers to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center Use of Force Instructor Course. The benefits of force-on-force training cannot be argued against, however, with a lack of proper instruction in how to safely conduct this style of training, accidents are possible. The Use of Force Instructor Course significantly enhanced our already robust force-on-force training program. Statewide 12-hour blocks of force-on-force scenario training events are scheduled for late 2024.



Alabama began a peer support program within our agency in 2018. This year we selected four new officers to attend the peer support instructor course. Loss of staff and mental health concerns are inevitable within large agencies. Since its inception our peer support program has greatly benefitted our staff. This program has been widely praised by those who have leaned on it for guidance and support.

In addition to the mandated de-escalation training, a new course designed to provide officers with tools in dealing with those that have sensory needs and/or invisible disabilities was required to be attended by all state sworn law enforcement officers this year by the Alabama Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission. This training, which was delivered in video format, was attended by all Conservation Enforcement Officers in mid-2024.

FUNDING AND STAFFING

The Law Enforcement Section brought nine new officers onboard this year. With the latest round of hiring, our Section is nearing its full staffing goal of 145 officers. Two conservation enforcement officers were promoted to the rank of sergeant in May. Additionally, one lieutenant was promoted in District I in early 2024. In July, retired Captain Michael East returned in a part-time capacity to act as a liaison between our Section and the Wildlife Section to assist in chronic wasting disease matters. R/C East was formerly our Captive Wildlife Unit coordinator and brings a wealth of specialized knowledge to his position.

Over the last two years, cost of living adjustments totaling 10% 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 continue to be a struggle.

An initiative began in mid-2023 for a “pay compression” within the Law Enforcement Section. As salaries have increased for other law enforcement job classifications with law enforcement agencies in Alabama, the competition to retain existing officers and to recruit new employees is fierce. Increasing the top end salary for our conservation enforcement officers was seen as something that couldn’t be done in a reasonable amount of time, but increasing each employee within their current pay range was attainable. This year our Section was able to raise our starting salary by four steps, effectively raising the starting pay to nearly \$46,000. Each existing officer was bumped up four steps within their current pay scale as well. This was effectively a 10% raise for all existing officers. This increase should assist in retaining our current staff and recruitment of future officers.

LAW ENFORCEMENT TRENDS

In October 2022, the Law Enforcement Section began the task of revamping and overhauling its policy manual. This project was undertaken to complete the long-term effort of reaching accredited status through the North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation program. Attaining accredited status would make our agency the first state law enforcement agency in Alabama to be nationally accredited.

During the initial phase of policy revision, the Section recognized it fell short of compliance expectations when comparing its policies to the law enforcement standards of NAWLEA and the U.S. Department of Justice. The Section quickly charged forward with policy revisions that helped address and reduce liability for the agency as well as increase the effectiveness in the delivery of its services.

The Section’s approval and review process for new and updated policies is very thorough and time consuming. Draft documents are reviewed by field supervision, command staff, subject matter experts, policy review committees, and legal staff. Once a final draft is compiled, legal staff gives the document a final stamp of approval. Upon final approval, the WFF Director completes the document with a signature.

In June of 2024, the Section disseminated the newly completed Section Manual to all LE Section personnel for review and digital signature via the newly acquired document management system called PowerDMS. This system ensures new and amended policies are reviewed and understood by all personnel within an allotted time. PowerDMS offers personnel instant accessibility to all policy and procedure documents anywhere in the field via an application. The pursuit of accreditation by the Section has already had positive impacts on the Section and its personnel in its early stages. New training has been developed, liability issues have been identified, and improvements in services to our constituency have begun. The Section is looking forward to reaching this milestone and building public trust along the way.

OTHER SPECIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES

In its second 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 four-hour course has the goal of reaching new constituents in the growing pool of first-time firearms owners. In 2021 alone, more than 13 million new gun owners were created. 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, four additional courses were developed: Handgun 102, Rifle 101, Shotgun 101 and Archery 101. Our Handgun 102 course is designed to take students who 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



four-hour format the Handgun 101 course uses. 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, Shotgun and Archery 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 their firearms equipped with night vision and thermal sights for a night of safe shooting. These nighttime events continue to be popular.

EQUIPMENT

Throughout 2024, the Law Enforcement Section undertook the process of selecting and purchasing new patrol trucks for issuance across the state as well as new SUVs for use by administrative staff. The Law Enforcement Section purchased 17 Ford F-150 patrol vehicles to replace aging trucks in each of our five districts. Additionally, two Dodge Ram 2500 series trucks were purchased and issued to our Law Enforcement Hunter Education Unit coordinators. The specialized tasks they perform require a heavier duty vehicle, in part due to the constant towing of shooting sports program trailers.



Two Ford Expedition SUVs were purchased to be issued to administrative staff assigned to the Montgomery Headquarters Office. All newly purchased vehicles were outfitted with new Kenwood NX-5700 VHF/UHF, 700-800 MHZ digital transceivers. This model of transceiver has the capability to connect with outside agencies using UHF/VHF analog frequencies, 700/800 MHZ digital frequencies or P25 systems that are emerging across our state.

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. Currently, the Vexus and SeaArk vessels that were selected and have been in use across the state for the majority of the year have been widely praised as the best suited patrol boats ever purchased.

With the massive popularity of the Section's Firearms 101 Course lineup (Handgun 101, Rifle 101, Shotgun 101 and Archery 101), new equipment was needed to be purchased to expand these programs. Recently, the Hunter Education Unit purchased 28 Smith and Wesson M&P .22 caliber compact pistols, 28 Ruger .22 caliber LCRX revolvers, 30 Smith and Wesson M&P 15/22 .22 caliber semi-automatic rifles and 17 Benelli M2 20-gauge semi-automatic shotguns for use in the 101 courses. Each regional coordinator has a fully equipped trailer that allows them to host any of the four 101 courses at any time with all necessary equipment always in hand.

AWARDS

Conservation enforcement officers in the Law Enforcement Section were chosen in 2024 for several awards presented by multiple associations. Conservation Enforcement Officer Chad Nalls was presented the Commissioner's Life Saver Award this year for his actions that saved the life of a drowning fisherman. This award was presented by Commissioner Chris Blankenship. Chief of Enforcement Michael Weathers was awarded the Guy Bradley Award by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. C.E.O. Senior Chas Moore was selected as the Shikar-Safari Officer of the Year. C.E.O. Senior Mark Jolly was selected as the National Wild Turkey Federation's Officer of the Year. C.E.O. Senior Brad Hasamear was chosen as the Mississippi Flyway Council Officer of the Year. Sergeant Joe Johnston was chosen as the Alabama Wildlife Federation Officer of the Year and C.E.O. Senior Johnny Johnson was chosen as Alabama's SEAFWA Officer of the Year.

ARKANSAS

Brad Young, Colonel

AGENCY OVERVIEW

The Enforcement Division continues to drive for advancement within the division's operations. The AXON ecosystem continues to develop with the deployment of Standards and Records. The Point Tracking portion will soon follow. This gives agency administration real-time information and tracking at the push of a button. AXON Standards keeps track of accidents involving enforcement vehicles, boats, and ATVs; citizen complaints; use of force situations; and pursuits. AXON Records will track incident reports, boating and hunting accidents, citations, and evidence seized. Point Tracking will go live early in 2025 with a new CAD system to hopefully follow in late 2025. We also worked with FARO for a digital diagramming tool integrated with AXON to assist our wardens with diagramming hunting and boating accidents. This system is capable of 3D diagramming an entire scene using advanced scanning units. A new online HULL application program will be built out and in use by the public in late fall to early winter. This is a much-needed advancement with an intent to cut down on paper shuffling and to make our staff more efficient.

We continue to work towards completing our fleet installs of dual mobile routers and Panasonic Toughbooks in preparation for CAD and eventually Ecite ticketing program to go live. Our wardens that currently have these products installed in their patrol trucks have given very positive feedback on the effects it is having on

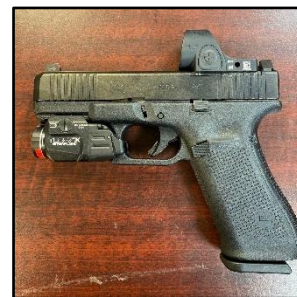


productivity and ease of completing tasks in the field. We continue to look for ways to make the cumbersome paperwork side of the job as efficient and effective as possible while keeping our wardens engaged in proactive enforcement efforts.

We worked to procure some new bay boats to add to our fleet. It was important to the division administration to present a professional appearance to the public while also keeping with the “rebranding” of the division. We worked very closely with the vendors selected to achieve this goal. AVID Boats in Mississippi won the bid for the aluminum hull bay-style boat (left), while Charger in Missouri won the bid for the fiberglass hull bay boat (right).



Enforcement staff also made the decision this year to eliminate the carry of 12-gauge shotguns and change from the Glock model 21 (45 cal.) sidearm to the Glock model 45 MOS (9mm) topped with a Trijicon SRO Red Dot sight and a Streamlight weapon mounter TLR7x light. This change has also involved changing our holster systems and leather duty gear.



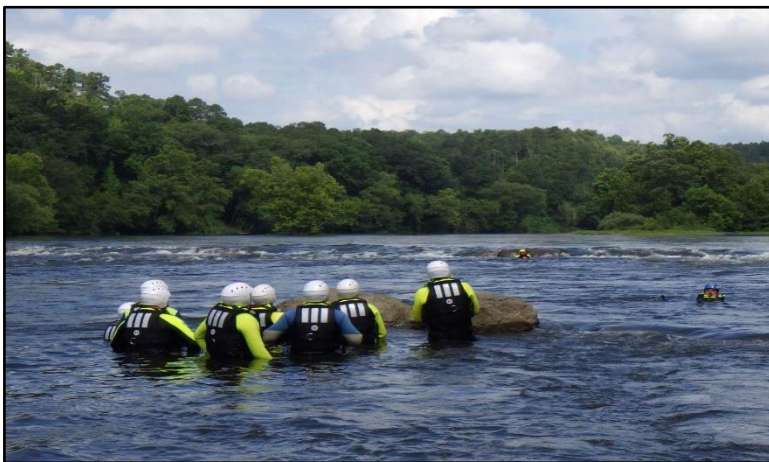
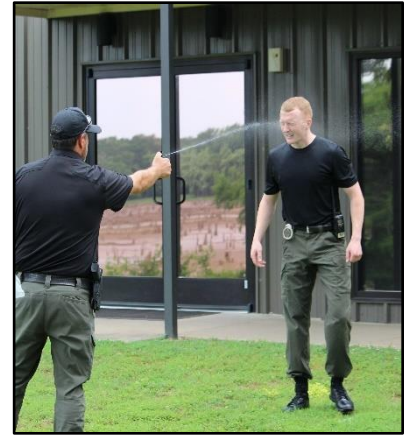
TRAINING

On May 13, 2024, Class E-1-24 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 16 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 seven warden cadets remaining. Graduation will take place on Sept. 13 in Conway, Arkansas. The seven 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.

We have continued to advance our officers' 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 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 intense and mentally challenging; Arkansas LEADER, an advanced supervision course for upper administrators; the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Va.; and a host of other courses offered by Arkansas and nationally.



OTHER SPECIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ISSUES

Arkansas, like most states, continues to struggle with recruiting new qualified applicants to apply for vacant warden positions. A ride-a-long program was created and implemented to give opportunities to individuals who

met minimum qualifications to ride with a game warden for a day to get an inside look at the job. A brief orientation is also offered following the ride-a-long to allow these potential applicants the opportunity to ask questions. We are also seeking agency approval to add a position for a full-time enforcement recruiter. Many of our competitors have full-time recruiters on staff placing us at a disadvantage. We have added updated recruiting materials and have started to venture outside state borders to some recruiting events but this is only done as time allows.

We are continuing to see the need for a digital forensics examiner as wildlife crimes continue to be captured on social media and digital devices. Wardens throughout the state made numerous cases this past year using these platforms to gain valuable evidence. Wardens were also able to use forensic labs across the country to analyze DNA and tool markings on shell casings to solve cases. As wildlife crimes continue to evolve with technology, we find ourselves trying to convince agency leaders of the need to advance, evolve and grow with the times. This has proven to be challenging and seems to be a constant internal battle as budgets and positions are limited.

FLORIDA

Brian G. Smith, Colonel

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Division of Law Enforcement consists of 890 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

A Year in Review

FWC officers are often the first to respond to natural disasters due to their extensive training, specialized equipment and high-level capabilities. When Hurricane Idalia made landfall as a category 3 storm along Florida's Big Bend Aug. 30, 2023, FWC officers were ready to demonstrate their readiness and effectiveness in disaster response. A week before landfall, FWC teams were preparing to deploy, staging swamp buggies, airboats, shallow draft vessels, UTVs, four-wheel drive patrol trucks and a Fat Truck. As soon as the hurricane force winds let up, FWC officers swiftly mobilized to assist residents. In coordination with the State Emergency Operations Center and partner agencies, the FWC conducted critical missions including lifesaving operations, supply distribution, damage assessment, debris clearing, and providing humanitarian aid, public safety and security services.



Colonel Brian G. Smith

The FWC also provided support for Operation Lone Star with 46 waves of FWC officers and mechanics deployed to Texas. We provided 700 FWC personnel, 715 four-wheel drive patrol trucks and 45 vessels to assist federal,

state, and local agency response efforts regarding border security, information gathering, humanitarian response, search and rescue, officer safety and assistance, and emergency medical services.

We were also proud to be awarded the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation's most prestigious achievement in Florida accreditation – Excelsior Status! This recognition is reserved for criminal justice agencies that have received accreditation five consecutive times. The FWC Division of Law Enforcement has been an accredited law enforcement agency since receiving its initial certification in 2009.

In addition, we're continuing our record of dedication to the FWC's conservation mission by being one of the first five agencies in the country to pursue accreditation through the North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation program. Florida is joining Alabama, Louisiana, South Carolina and Virginia in enhancing wildlife conservation law enforcement capabilities and professionalism by working to meet NAWLEA's 70 standards.

Another great honor was the National Wild Turkey Federation presenting its national Wildlife Officer of the Year Award to FWC Investigator Todd Hoyle. The award recognized Investigator Hoyle's lead role in bringing a habitual poacher to justice. His successful investigation into the illegal take of at least 150 wild turkeys spanned more than two years and involved multiple suspects.

TRAINING

FWC Training Center

In 2023-24, the FWC Law Enforcement Academy graduated two classes, Class 46 and 47, resulting in 38 new conservation law enforcement officers. Conducting back-to-back training academies, sometimes with a several-month overlap, creates a demanding pace for training staff. Additionally, Class 47 was unique. For one, it is the smallest FWC class that ever graduated, comprising of previously sworn members only. They spent the shortest time in the academy, only six weeks, learning what makes FWC the best law enforcement agency in the nation.

In-Service Training

In-service training remained a priority statewide, ensuring FWC officers were well-equipped to safeguard themselves, the public, and the environment. The training regimen encompassed various crucial aspects including firearm qualifications, proficiency drills, active assailant training simulations, and CPR/first aid protocols. Special emphasis was placed on active assailant training in compliance with Florida Department of Law Enforcement mandates requiring officers to undergo annual training to maintain proficiency.



Congratulations to the graduates of the Lieutenant to Captain Mentoring Program! The Training Section played a pivotal role in supporting 10 lieutenants selected for the Lieutenant to Captain Leadership Development Program. Over a six-month period, these lieutenants received mentorship from experienced captains, empowering them for career advancement within the FWC.

Participants benefitted from insights shared by both internal and external speakers and received guidance from area captains on a variety of topics including project management, leadership and delegation, office management, teambuilding and staff development, as well as budgeting, purchasing, and asset management.



Each lieutenant was tasked with undertaking a project aimed at implementing positive change within the agency. This project involved conducting research, writing a term paper, and presenting research results, conclusions, and solutions to command staff. "This program was a lot of fun and helped build my network," said Lieutenant Rino Doricchi, a 2024 graduate of the program. "And the feedback I received from the one-on-one mentoring helped sharpen my skills and broaden my perspectives about the agency as well as the role of our captains."

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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. In December 2023, FWC Recruiters participated in a joint career fair with several Florida state agencies.



BOATING AND WATERWAYS

Boating Safety and Education

The Boating Safety Unit (BSU) coordinates and administers Florida's Recreational Boating Safety Grant, manages Florida's boating accident reporting process, creates Florida's annual Boating Accident Statistical Report, issues Livery Operators Permits, and manages the Boater Safety Education programs. The BSU houses the Boating Law Administrator for the State of Florida who is also an appointed member of the National Boating Safety Advisory Committee. The FWC is committed to safe boating and developed and distributed radio, television, digital and print media promoting boating safety and educating 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 2023 were tremendous. Statewide, FWC officers made 616 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 Highlight

On the night of Aug. 5, 2023, a 30-foot vessel with four people onboard was traveling through Hillsboro Inlet in Broward County. The vessel and its occupants were returning from the Bahamas. The vessel was traveling at a high rate of speed in the dark when it struck the rock jetty. Based on the initial incident information, upon striking the jetty one of the occupants was ejected from the vessel and was reported as missing. After a search of the scene by responding units, the ejected individual was located on the rocks of the jetty.

All four people onboard the vessel sustained injuries because of the incident and were transported to a nearby medical facility. During the investigation officers discovered multiple alcohol containers onboard the vessel. The investigation also determined the vessel operator was under the influence of alcohol and medication at the time of the incident and had a blood alcohol content almost twice the legal limit in Florida. At the conclusion of the investigation, multiple charges were filed relating to violation of navigational rules, which resulted in a boating accident and boating under the influence.

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 2023-24, eight grant applicants were awarded more than \$5.2 million in state or federal funds for boating access projects. In addition, FWC received a special appropriation of \$1.6 million from the Legislature for a Monroe County project.

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 2023-24, the FWC Boating Access Unit completed the following projects.

Construction Projects Completed

- 19031 Palm Beach Co. – John Prince Memorial Park \$150,000 FBIP
 - Demolished existing structures and constructed two new boat ramps, three new ADA compliant floating docks with gangways and expanded parking.



- New Port Tampa Bay CDD – Westshore Marina District Transient Docks \$199,900 FBIP/\$318,120 BIGP
 - Dredged marina basin.
 - Designed, permitted and constructed 10 transient vessel slips with ADA compliant gangway.
 - Installed dock utilities at Dock G and side-tie dockage at Dock F.



- Monroe County BOCC – Regulatory and Informational Buoy Replacement \$22,087.50 FBIP
 - Replaced regulatory and informational buoys throughout the Florida Keys.

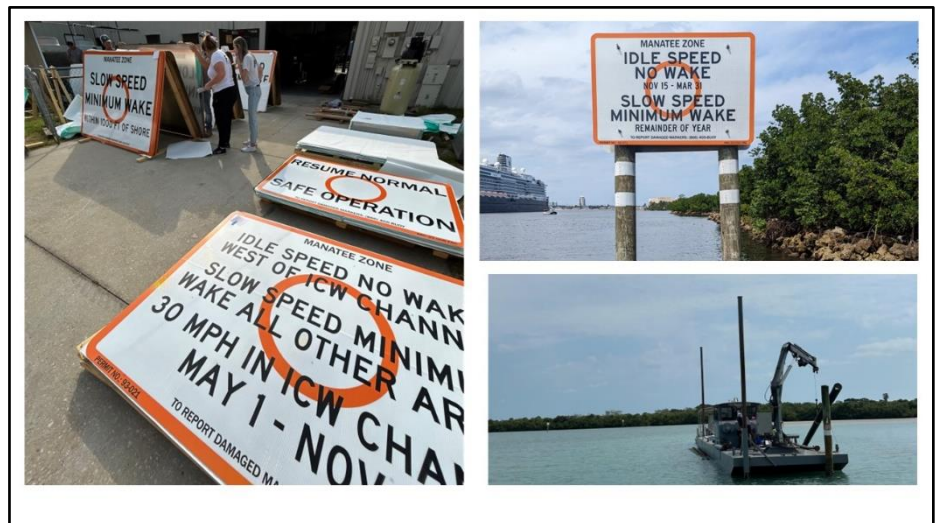


Nonconstruction Projects Completed

- DeSoto County – Liverpool Park Boat Ramp and Dock Replacement \$55,000 FBIP
 - Created plans and obtained permits to replace the existing single-lane boat ramp. County will demolish existing fixed dock and construct and install a new ADA wheelchair accessible fixed dock and gangway with an attached floating dock at Liverpool Park in DeSoto County.
- Santa Rosa County – Woodlawn Beach Boat Ramp Replacement \$12,500 FBIP
 - Created plans and obtained permits to replace the existing boat ramp.
- City of Sopchoppy – Myron B Hodge City Park Boat Ramp Upgrades \$20,023 FBIP
 - Created plans and obtained permits to construct a 240' square foot fixed ADA wheelchair accessible dock, an 8' x 20' accessible floating dock, and a 4' x 24' accessible aluminum gangway.
- Liberty County – Bristol Boat Ramp Improvements \$38,288 FBIP
 - Created plans and obtained permits to construct an asphalt parking area to include ADA wheelchair accessible parking, stormwater facilities, accessible boardwalk, gangway and floating dock.
- Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council – City of Clewiston Lakefront Master Plan \$169,684 FBIP
 - Procured contracted services to assess a parcel of land leased to the City of Clewiston by the South Florida Water Management District and developed a master plan to enhance safe boating access, education, and economic development in the surrounding area.
- Town of Branford – Ivey Memorial Park Boat Ramp Replacement \$42,300 FBIP
 - Designed and developed engineering plans for improvements to the Ivey Memorial Park Boat Ramp.
- Town of Fort Myers Beach – Expand Matanzas Pass Mooring Field \$130,515 FBIP
 - Constructed and installed (19) mooring slips of hard-shell buoys to accommodate vessels up to 80'0 in length and installed four shallow shoal markers and two mooring area markers.

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 system for identifying and correcting noncompliant waterway markers throughout Florida that may pose a threat to public safety. In 2023, the WMU recorded 253 incidents statewide. While that's 43% higher than the average yearly total, it's 6% less than last year's incident total of 268.



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, 545 derelict vessels were removed with \$10.25 million in funding. We are currently on pace to remove over 700 additional vessels this year. Also, in cooperation with Florida Division of Emergency Management, an additional 560 Hurricane Ian, Nicole and Idalia derelict vessels were removed or are in progress at this time. Our newly created Vessel Turn-in Program has also removed 83 at-risk vessels, potentially preventing those vessels from becoming derelict. Together this amounts to 1,188 derelict and at-risk vessels removed from the waters of the state in 2023.



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 boosted 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, VTIP has removed 93 at-risk vessels with 22 more currently in the removal and approval process.

Marine Debris Program



The Marine Debris Program oversees and coordinates statewide response; removal; research; and prevention projects, programs, and partnerships to reduce debris and associated impacts to Florida's resources. The program provides a mechanism for intra- and inter-agency coordination of marine debris management in Florida thereby furthering FWC's capacity to lead, serve as a resource, and partner in statewide and regional marine debris management.

Over the past year, the program has grown significantly in resources, capacity and partnerships. Program staff has also been heavily involved in hurricane marine debris work

including the completion of two large-scale grants targeting Hurricanes Irma and Michael as well as continued involvement in Hurricane Ian and Idalia efforts. Additional/expanding resources include:

- Marine Debris Drone Program and cameras for plane surveys
- In-water dive clean-up kits (regional) and expansion of land-based clean-up supplies
- Resource Advisor Expansion: Post hurricane resource protection coordination and planning
- Best Management Practices: Adapted and offered for contractors, translated into Spanish (along with DV documents), updated and expanding
- Continued coordination with state and federal emergency management

Hurricane Marine Debris by the Numbers

Post Hurricane Irma Marine Debris Removal and Mapping (NOAA Funded, FWC – Principal Investigator)
Completed

- Hot Spot Mapping: anthropogenic, natural, storm driven, model driven and cleanup data driven, aerial
- 5,447 traps removed
- 257,685 pounds of aquaculture gear collected (FDACS partnership)
- 18 'left in place' vessels reassessed and removed
- The new derelict vessel database
- Total footprint: 940,173.53 Acres (933,243 grids, 6,931 linear)
- 410,339.40 pounds of debris removed (not including vessels or aquaculture gear)



Florida Keys Highlights

- Marquesas (FWC Division of Law Enforcement, FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute and Florida Department of Environmental Protection): Four-day cruise, 26 dives conducted by six divers over 21 sites, 95% trap rope (almost 2 miles long) removed from the reef. Used state coral subject matter experts.
- Reef Tract Targets (National Marine Sanctuary Foundation Contract): Blue Star Dive operators removed over 16,500 pounds of marine debris from numerous target sites throughout the Keys.
- Key Haven Boat Ramp (Ocean Aid 360 Contract, plus multiple partners): High traffic boat ramp with adjacent mangrove shoreline and mooring field. Over 10,410 pounds of marine debris removed.



Post Hurricane Michael Marine Debris Removal in Northwest Florida (NFWF Funded, Florida Sea Grant – Principal Investigator, FWC- Co-PI)



Completed

- Targeted structural debris and vessels
- 44 vessels removed (land and in-water)
- 2,282,200 pounds of debris removed (including vessels)
- 280,100 pounds of material recycled (steel vessels)

In the Works

Program funding has currently been secured through 2030 for marine debris removal along the entire Gulf Coast targeting in-water and shore-based marine debris with an emphasis on debris posing entanglement and/or entrapment risks and aiding in the recovery of birds and sea turtles. With this funding, FWC-led marine debris removals will be expanded as will contracted removals and funding opportunities for partners for projects within identified hot spots. FWC's resources – information and expertise and a point of contact for supplies, materials, and equipment – continue to expand. The FWC Marine Debris Program continues to work with stakeholders and species experts and remains actively involved in hurricane marine debris efforts, working with our state and federal partners to improve communication, coordination, removal, recovery, and resource protection.

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.



Case Highlight

While onboard the FWC's OPV *Trident*, Officers Richards, Foell, Piekenbrock and Sturgeon conducted a fisheries inspection on a commercial shrimp vessel 16 nautical miles northeast of the Dry Tortugas National Park. Upon



approach, the OPV officers observed the subjects fishing from the stern of the vessel and numerous lane and yellowtail snapper on the deck. The officers also found multiple bags of snapper hidden beneath bags of shrimp in the below-deck freezer hold. They discovered 334 lane snapper, yellowtail snapper and mangrove snapper onboard with vessel occupants possessing 274 snappers over the allowable Gulf of Mexico, federal waters aggregate snapper limit. The officers also located 22 egg-bearing blue crabs and two spiny lobster tails in the closed season. The subjects onboard were cited accordingly for numerous state and federal fisheries violations.

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 and 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 Highlight

During the spring of 2020, FWC began investigating a subject who was allegedly exceeding the season bag limit for wild turkeys. The results of the investigation provided evidence the suspect and his then eight-year-old son had both exceeded the season bag limit for wild turkeys and had conservatively harvested 15 to 20 birds during the 2020 spring season. The investigation continued over the next two seasons and revealed the suspect and his juvenile son illegally killed an estimated 58 wild turkeys during the 2021 and 2022 spring turkey seasons. The investigation also revealed the suspect had harvested over 20 antlered deer during one general gun hunting season. In 2023, search warrants were executed and evidence gathered, which resulted in numerous charges

related to the taking of over-the-bag limit and out-of-season of wild turkey and deer as well as scheming to defraud, cheating, armed trespass and illegal use of a two-way communication device.



Case Highlight

A joint operation between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the FWC successfully cracked down on the illegal trapping, trade and sale of migratory birds in Florida. "Operation Ornerly Birds II," a three-year undercover investigation, culminated in the arrest and conviction of individuals involved in the illegal capture, barter and sale of protected migratory songbirds, which fetched exorbitant black-market prices. Investigators revealed the workings of sophisticated trapping operations maximizing migration periods to snare up to 25 wild songbirds per day using bait cages and nets. Captured birds were then subject to unorthodox training and cruel conditioning regimes to prepare them for sale as pets or singing competition performers. Many died from traumatic injuries or inadequate care or from being held in captivity. The probe also uncovered large-scale illegal backyard breeding programs to supply pet stores that lacked proper oversight and required licensing. The investigation revealed a network of individuals operating throughout Florida and around the United States. Individual birds could be sold from \$5 to \$5,000 depending on factors such as temperament, species, singing ability, fighting ability, and whether the bird was smuggled illegally into Florida. This operation resulted in 15 individuals being convicted with felony charges and sentenced for their involvement in the trafficking ring. These sentences include probation, fines, and in some cases, jail time.



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, U. S. 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 and 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 Wildlife Alert, 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 Southeastern U.S. 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.

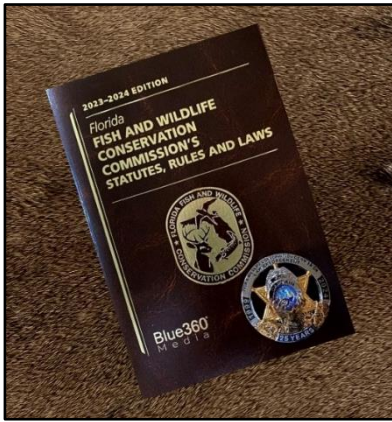
Marine Law Administrator

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

The MLA also serves as the agency representative for law enforcement with the Atlantic States and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Law Enforcement Committees, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Law Enforcement Advisory Panel and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Law Enforcement Technical Committee. Additionally, the position serves as the agency representative for the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference and federal fisheries subject matter expert. As a member of these organizations, there is an opportunity to sit on various advisory and technical groups and act as chair or co-chair as experience dictates.

Wildlife Law Administrator

The Wildlife Law Administrator (WLA) 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 Wildlife Alert and the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact. The Wildlife Alert Reward Program received a total of 6,122 reported violations in 2023. With the implementation of Tip411, almost a third of tips have been received through

text message. Additionally, Wildlife Alert is celebrating a record year for fundraising with a nearly 100% increase in donations totaling \$136,257. Wildlife Alert receives donations primarily through court orders from cases made by FWC officers and an outreach campaign focused on judicial circuits has already produced results. Cases include 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 totaled \$24,600. With increased revenues, Wildlife Alert continued its support of the FWC's Division of Law Enforcement through purchases that included thermal imaging, "robo" deer and an additional outreach trailer.



Port Investigations

Florida has over 8,400 miles of coastline, 15 public seaports, and 20 primary airports as well as more than 22.6 million residents and 140 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 ever-changing 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 2023 calendar year, FWC's Captive Wildlife Section conducted 4,386 inspections of facilities possessing wildlife. These inspections generated 1,078 citations and warnings. Additionally, investigators responded to 184 Wildlife Alert complaints, 53 escaped exotic wildlife complaints and seized 314 specimens of wildlife. In 2023, there were 4,190 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 Investigator Rick Brown was contacted by a conservation agency from another state regarding an investigation they conducted related to the unlawful importation of a macaque primate from Florida into their state. Their investigation led them to believe the macaque never left Florida and was located at an Orlando address.



Based on the intelligence provided by that state and two Facebook search warrants executed by the FWC Captive Wildlife Section, the Florida resident and the location were identified. Investigators conducted an inspection at the residence and observed the macaque owner with an infant macaque. The owner claimed he purchased the macaque from an unknown source, which trapped this feral primate in the Silver Springs area. The owner surrendered the macaque to the FWC. It was ultimately sent to an out-of-state facility that maintains several troops of macaques. The owner was convicted in court for possession of a class II primate without a license.

Case Highlight

FWC captive wildlife investigators responded to a report of two Kodiak bear cubs walking down a highway. The bears were seized and transported to a secure facility. The FWC's investigation found the bears were unlawfully imported into Florida and possessed without the



required FWC captive wildlife license.

The bears were not maintained in a safe condition, resulting in their escape and causing a potential threat to public safety. The bears were kept

in a residential chain-link style dog pen, which failed to meet the minimum strength and safety requirements necessary to house the bears. The investigation resulted in 11 misdemeanors and six warnings.



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 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 sport season.

Case Highlight

The Aviation Unit has flown more than 2,400 flight hours to support Operation Vigilant Sentry. Working with local, state and federal authorities, FWC pilots have assisted efforts to prevent illegal immigration in south Florida and the Florida Keys and possible human smuggling operations.



Case Highlight

Aviation Unit Lieutenant Cain supported the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation and Camp Blanding personnel in conducting a prescribed burn at the Camp Blanding Wildlife Management Area. Over 2,500 acres were burned using the delayed aerial ignition device (DAID) and two new operators were provided aviation safety and DAID machine training. FWC's helicopter and burn crew make quick work of large woodland burns, making it safer for ground fire crews. These controlled burns foster wildlife growth and reduce the risk of wildfires.



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 22 teams strategically placed throughout the state. Of those teams, 17 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 an innovative and comprehensive 400-hour K-9 academy instructed by in-house FWC K-9 training officers. In April 2024, the FWC welcomed seven new K-9 teams upon graduating from the K-9 training academy.

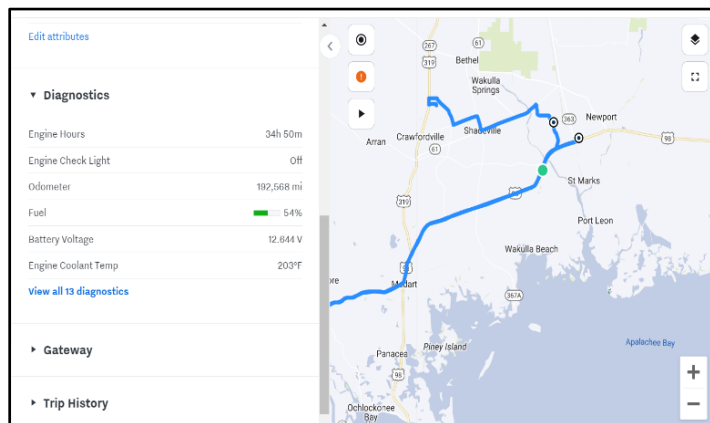


Technology and Communication Services

The Technology & Communications Services Unit (TACS) encompasses the statewide law enforcement radio system (SLERS), technology-based equipment, software programs and four regional communications centers.

The TACS unit coordinates with other divisions while maintaining statewide consistency, policy implementation, CAD administration, statistical data reporting, and computer hardware and software management. In addition, the TACS unit serves as a liaison for partnering agencies, maintaining statutory compliance and accreditation

standards, preserving member certifications and continued educational requirements. They work on conflict resolution, ongoing audits for quality assurance, records management, and staying abreast of emerging trends



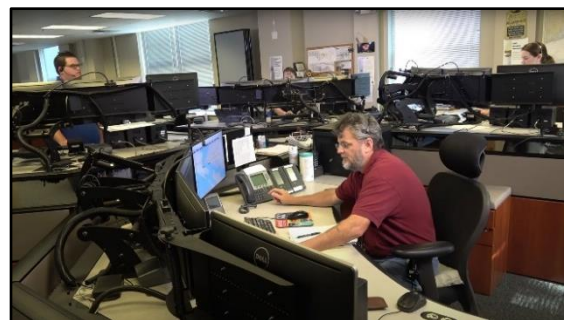
with technological advances. This unit also administers the process for fulfilling public records requests. In the last year, the FWC Division of Law Enforcement responded to over 4,000 public records requests.

The communication center's day-to-day operations include dispatching calls for emergency service and calls regarding law violations and public safety threats. Other routine operations include recruiting/hiring/training new staff members; achieving expert level status in a high stress environment; establishing professional

work relationships with field staff, executive members, other FWC divisions, partnering agencies, and the public; accessing criminal justice portals for investigative requests; using various resources to extract background information; memorizing codes for communicating and data entry; and documenting all interactions on the SLERS system and telephone system.

Last year the regional communications centers implemented new scheduling software to streamline the scheduling process for more fair and consistent scheduling practices in addition to user access from smartphones from any location. The regional communications centers will also gain the new and improved P2500 radio console design along with the latest version of streets and state managed lands in their CAD/mapping software.

Additionally, in September 2024 the regional communications centers implemented a new training software program to track standardized training and telecommunicator requirements for the Florida Public Safety Certification.



Looking Ahead

Work is underway to implement a new equipment use log, which will streamline the process for tracking usage and allow supervisors to monitor and evaluate equipment use in nearly real time.

Testing fleet management solutions is also underway. The goal is to implement new and advanced fleet tracking including removing the need for officers to complete equipment logs and activity reports. This would also streamline the process for supervisors in tracking equipment use, locating equipment, ease of pulling reports and more. Other items the section is testing include new body worn cameras, in-car video systems, advanced AI report writing, and better phone solutions for staff and officers.

Fleet Services

The Division of Law Enforcement Fleet Services has one main shop facility in Tallahassee, the North Florida Shop (NFS). This facility supports the division's fleet and maintenance needs. All new equipment is sent to the NFS for rigging. During 2023-2024, this section purchased and rigged 147 vehicles, primarily patrol F-150s, F-250s and a few Expeditions, and approximately 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 programming and issuing 950 handheld Harris radios around the state. They also assisted with Hurricane Idalia disaster response and deploying to support our law enforcement partners in Texas.



OTHER SPECIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATES

Officer of the Year – Officer Matthew Pietroburgo, North Central Region



Officer Matthew Pietroburgo began his FWC law enforcement career in 2019 after graduating with academy class 39. He embraces the big picture of the Division's mission and has become a leader among his peers. He made several major cases in 2023 including ones related to vessel title fraud, falsely reporting an antlered deer and violating antler point regulations and dumping over 6,000 pounds of litter at a wildlife management area. Due to his proficiency with complex investigations, he was selected to assist in a high-profile case involving a hit-and-run boating incident. Using digital evidence, he was able to pinpoint the incident location and time of the collision, which he used to obtain search warrants to identify electronic devices within a geofenced location. Additionally, Officer Pietroburgo was selected to enhance team patrol efforts

with an unmarked patrol vehicle, which included the responsibility of organizing plain clothes/unmarked vehicle details to target unlawful hunting, fishing, and trespassing activities. In 2023, he issued 68 uniform boating citations, and 155 resource citations. He also wrote 664 warnings and organized two targeted enforcement actions. Officer Pietroburgo also has had a positive influence through outreach and education efforts ranging from teaching at hunter safety classes and fishing clinics to developing positive relationships with local public land user groups, always providing exceptional law enforcement services.

Investigator of the Year – Investigator Gregory "Todd" Hoyle, North Central Region



Investigator Gregory "Todd" Hoyle, an FWC law enforcement officer since 1998, is an invaluable asset with an impressive track record for working complex protracted investigations involving cellular and social-media-based investigations. Last year, he was involved in producing successful outcomes for several major cases. He served as case agent for Class 1 Covert Operation Viper where he was responsible for handling evidence, case paperwork, and E&I funds; meeting with the statewide prosecutor and undercover agents; and preparing the case packets for take downs and prosecution. Investigator Hoyle was the lead investigator in a case involving the unlawful take of more than 100 wild turkeys, felony trespass, and unlawful use of a two-way communication device. He also provided his expertise in a case involving multiple state park burglaries

by obtaining information through the aid of geolocation search warrants and was able to link multiple burglaries back to the same group of violators. As Investigator Hoyle nears retirement, he has stepped up his efforts to mentor other officers and investigators, create advanced investigative training opportunities, and provide information to his colleagues about properly obtaining and preserving digital evidence. Throughout his career, he has won numerous awards including Officer of the Year, Investigator of the Year and most recently, NWTF Officer of the Year.

Boating Officer of the Year – Officer George Spirito, South Region A



Officer George Spirito became an FWC law enforcement officer in 2019 following 16 years of service as an officer for the Wellfleet Police Department in Massachusetts. His exceptional leadership and dedication have made a positive difference in South Region A where he's a valuable participant on the BUI Task Force Team and has conducted many exceptional BUI investigations. In addition, he's demonstrated a commitment to mentoring other officers about BUI detection and enforcement. His contributions have enhanced boating safety in the region through a significant increase in BUI arrests. Officer Spirito also serves as a field training officer, a regional coordinator for the standardized field sobriety tasks and advanced wet lab, member of the BERG Logistical Response Team and has participated in four Operation Vigilant Sentry deployments and

one Operation Lone Star deployment. Last year he was involved in major cases including apprehending three individuals associated with a lobster trap robbing case in Monroe County, which earned him a letter of commendation. In 2023, he issued 18 BUIs and had 15 assists, 32 UBC citations, and 32 resource citations (including one felony). He also participated in five water related search and rescues, wrote 194 warnings, organized one targeted enforcement action and spent 864 hours on water patrol.

Trainer of the Year – Senior Officer Randall Brooks, Northwest Region



Senior Officer Randall Brooks, a graduate of academy class 5, began his FWC law enforcement career in 2003 after serving as a U.S. Army infantryman in the 25th Infantry Division and later as a corrections officer for Holmes County Sheriff's Office and Florida Department of Corrections. He is a core member of the Northwest Region training team and the academy's defensive tactics and firearms teams. Senior Officer Brooks routinely volunteers to conduct training on a wide variety of topics for the region and local agencies. His broad knowledge, professional demeanor and ability to articulate the "why, what and how" enable him to instruct in a way that brings meaning to the training he conducts. In addition, Senior Officer Brooks is quick to recognize when someone is

struggling with a drill or task and will work with them one-on-one until they are able to demonstrate the required competency. As a tenured member of the Northwest Region SOG team, Senior Officer Brooks' knowledge and passion for high liability topics such as defensive tactics, use of force, firearms, land navigation and rural patrol techniques make him an even more valuable part of the team. He has assisted or coordinated many advanced training sessions for the Northwest Region SOG Team, which has enhanced their operational readiness.

Team of the Year – Northwest OPV Squad, Northwest Region



The Northwest OPV Squad members – Officer Tristan Hartzog, Officer Specialist Greg Matechik, Officer Specialist Thomas Nelson, Senior Officer Peter Rockwell, Senior Officer Matthew Land, Senior Officer Matthew Cushing, and Lieutenant Scott Smith – are seasoned professionals who share a passion and commitment to achieving the Division's mission. Each member of the team brings specialized skills and a positive attitude to the job. One of the many reasons they shine is their dedication to protecting the resource, especially during the summer when Alabama's red snapper season opens 21 days before Florida's and extra law enforcement presence is needed on state and federal waters. This team goes above and beyond working together to maintain and repair the platforms they use year-round in some of the toughest conditions Florida has to offer. When not conducting offshore patrol, they are always willing to help with field operations. In 2023, squad members were deployed to the Keys and Texas with several earning lifesaving awards. Additionally, they created specialized operational plans and targeted enforcement action plans with a focus on fall red snapper weekends, squirrel season violations and ATV violations in the state forest. They also participated in field training of new officers in the region. In 2023, they issued 383 FWC citations, 198 uniform boating citations, and 1,751 written warnings; made 71 federal cases; and logged 10,760 water patrol hours.

Duty Officer of the Year – Amber Lawson, Lake Worth Regional Communications Center



Duty Officer Amber Lawson, an FWC employee for 12 years, is recognized for her wealth of agency knowledge and deep commitment to officer safety. Her handling of stressful, high priority calls is described by her colleagues as efficient and professional. She demonstrated those qualities last year while handling a call regarding a major alligator bite incident. She quickly and calmly entered the call and contacted the nuisance alligator trapper, public information officer and regional leadership, enabling officers to be on the scene within minutes. In 2023, Duty Officer Lawson entered 3,639 CAD incidents and took 4,586 calls. In addition, Duty Officer Lawson embraces her role as a mentor. As a communications training officer, she assists in the formal training for newer duty officers and is always willing to help and support her colleagues. Her dedication to

officer safety was demonstrated when she voluntarily assumed responsibility for updating the radio aliases for the officers. This assures dispatch can identify the officer on the radio in the event of an emergency. Duty Officer

Lawson was nominated as the most knowledgeable for the 2023 LWRCC Public Safety Telecommunicators Week Superlatives.

Employee of the Year – John Roberts, Northeast and North Central Regions



John Roberts has been with the FWC for 22 years and serves as the master fleet equipment technician for the Northeast and North Central Regions. He is the only technician in his regions that programs radios and conducts radio training. His attention to detail and proficiency in programming radios and conducting radio training has been invaluable in ensuring the smooth operation of fleet communications systems. In addition, he goes above and beyond to support his colleagues by proactively offering to help other regions when they are backlogged. Furthermore, his dedication to training and mentoring new FWC employees highlights his commitment to cultivating a knowledgeable workforce and demonstrates his dedication to teamwork in accomplishing our mission. Despite the challenges of managing a large workload, John

consistently approaches each task with a positive attitude and professionalism, ensuring his co-workers' needs are met in a timely manner. Prior to this recognition, he received the Regional Employee of the Year award and the North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association Employee of the Year award.

Biologist of the Year – Rebecca Schneider, Southwest Region



Rebecca Schneider, an expert in avian ecology, began her career with the FWC in 2017 as the field research site leader for the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow Recovery Project at Three Lakes WMA. She's been in her current role as the Southwest Region species conservation biologist for four years and has done an outstanding job of supporting and coordinating with the Division of Law Enforcement on issues related to nongame species conservation including disturbance impacts to state-threatened burrowing owls, sandhill cranes, wading birds, bald eagles, and shorebirds. Becky and the six regional staff she supervises work closely with law enforcement officers to communicate information about rules related to take of threatened species, critical wildlife areas, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and other policies represented in Florida's Imperiled Species

Management Plan. She specializes in navigating stakeholder issues and aims to help the Division of Law Enforcement prevent wildlife violations before they occur. Becky has engaged in Skyway Fishing Pier rulemaking and implementation and Little Estero Island and Carlos Beach shorebird conservation and management. In addition, she has supported officer specialist training, participated in site visits and ride-alongs, and serves on groups including the Florida Bat Working Group and Hooked Pelican Working Group.

Prosecutor of the Year – Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Robert Miller, Northeast Region

Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Robert Miller of the Orlando office has shown a keen interest in the complexities of the FWC's resource related cases and has applied his 20 years of prosecutorial experience to bring violators to justice. He has coordinated with FWC to strengthen laws, including providing expert counsel regarding 2023 legislative action that changed the sale of venomous reptiles to an unlicensed person from a second-degree misdemeanor to a third-degree felony. Miller also assisted the FWC with presenting at the Statewide Prosecutor's Annual Conference in 2023 with Investigator Hoyle and Major Barrow on recent FWC cases. The presentation was well received with many prosecutors expressing interest in prosecuting FWC cases moving forward.



Miller has spent time training investigators on how to work with the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization Act associated with wildlife crimes. During 2023, Miller prosecuted or assisted in prosecution of several major FWC cases, including illegal take of wild turkey, illegal guide service, Operation Viper's captive wildlife violations, nine subjects who faced a range of charges in the illegal take of black bear, and a state park burglary ring. In addition, Miller's vast experience has enabled him to strategize potential issues with a case and anticipate and prepare to be several moves ahead.

NEVER FORGOTTEN

Memorial Marker Dedication Ceremonies Honor Fallen Wildlife Officers

As part of an ongoing commitment to remembering fallen officers, the FWC's Division of Law Enforcement hosted or participated in memorial marker dedication ceremonies that paid tribute to three brave wildlife officers who made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.

In honor of the late FWC Senior Investigator Kyle Lee Patterson's profound contributions to his community and his enduring legacy, a special dedication ceremony took place in 2023



featuring the unveiling of the marker designating a portion of Florida State Route 70 as Kyle Lee Patterson Memorial Way. Governor Ron DeSantis signed legislation in 2023 that named the portion of S.R. 70/Okeechobee Road in St. Lucie County after this extraordinary officer, who died June 9, 2022, from injuries sustained when a vehicle in the wrong lane struck his FWC patrol truck.



*Senior Investigator
Kyle Lee Patterson*

In addition, the FWC hosted memorial marker dedication ceremonies for Wildlife Officer Danese "Dan" B. Crowder, who was shot and killed May 3, 1974, while attempting to arrest a man for hunting deer out of season and Sergeant Jimmy Lee Cook, who drowned Dec. 8, 1972, after being thrown from his patrol vessel. The events included the unveiling of specially designed memorial markers in remembrance of their service and dedication to protecting Florida's natural resources.



Sergeant Jimmy Lee Cook



Wildlife Officer Danese "Dan" B. Crowder



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

PATROL, PROTECT, PRESERVE

GEORGIA

Colonel Mike England



GEORGIA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES



AGENCY OVERVIEW

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Law Enforcement Division, currently has 200 POST-certified game wardens with statewide authority and full arrest powers and 25 nonsworn 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 (six region supervisors, one training director, one pilot), six lieutenants (database management, special permits/captive wildlife and wild animals, boating law administrator and administrative support, investigations, and two pilots), and 182 field game wardens (sergeants, corporals, game wardens first class, and game wardens).

TRAINING

Game Warden Academy

The 38th Game Warden Academy began Sunday, Jan. 7 at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center in Forsyth, Georgia. Twenty cadets, who recently completed the 11-week Georgia POST Mandate course, and one cadet with prior POST certification began training. Five cadets voluntarily withdrew during the 15-week DNR course,



and one cadet was removed from the academy due to an injury but will return with the 39th class in January 2025. The remaining 15 cadets successfully completed training and graduated from the DNR Academy April 26. The recent graduates are currently in the field working on completing their field training requirements.

In-Service Training

Summer of 2023 saw the remainder of field staff transition from carrying the X2 to the Taser 7. At the same time, new firearms and optics were purchased. Firearms instructors attended training and then developed a two-day firearms optic transition course that was delivered to all game wardens across the state during annual qualification in September. The Special Operations Group (SOG) had multiday training in the fall and spring focused on ATVs and man tracking. Between November and February, 101 game wardens were trained in the use of gas masks in response to CS gas exposure, which completes that training for the whole Division.

Winter and spring remained busy. All game wardens attended regional Narcan refreshers. New field training documentation software was developed, and all field training officers and supervisors were oriented to the program, while 14 new field training officers (FTOs) were certified. The Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) continued their professional development in court preparation. Twenty-one game wardens attended Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement (ARIDE) training. In March, all game wardens attended two-day in-service training comprised of a day of firearms and a day of defensive tactics. Members of the sonar team were educated in the use of a new remote operated vehicle (ROV) that is used in recovery efforts. All corporals and sergeants attended Succession Training, which is a new initiative intended to build leadership skills in supervisors and future supervisors. Lastly, two new K-9s were added to the ranks. One has completed the three-month academy, and one is currently in training.

CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITY

Investigative Unit

The Investigative Unit (IU) is comprised of three full-time investigators, two detached investigators and one intelligence analyst. The IU is responsible for covert and overt investigations, as well as the Intelligence Unit, the Critical Incident Reconstruction Team (CIRT), the SONAR Unit, the Marine Theft Unit (MTU), the Drone Unit, and also provides 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 uses 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 651 investigations and calls for assistance from the field and from other agencies (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 15 CIRT investigators assigned throughout the state. CIRT investigates fatality and serious injury boating, hunting, and state-owned land incidents. Each investigator receives specialized training in investigating and presenting these cases. Last year, CIRT was activated to investigate seven fatality boating and hunting incidents.

SONAR Unit

The SONAR unit consists of 32 game wardens who 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 40 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 275 abandoned vessel/stolen boat requests from the public and field. MTU recovered eight stolen vessels in 2023.

DRONE Unit

Georgia has three certified drone operators and two drones. The Drone Unit assists 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 using 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) received 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 and dolphins and the tagging of manatee. Night missions for illegal shrimping activity were also conducted along the coastline as well as night law enforcement missions in north Georgia, using the helicopter mounted FLIR system. In addition to the WRD surveys, Lts. Buller and Miller flew multiple missions assisting the Game Management Section and the Wildlife Conservation Section with prescribed burns on the state WMAs from January through March 2024. Additionally, the Aviation Unit remained on standby for inclement weather and disaster response. This year, the Aviation Unit responded to and conducted rescue extractions of multiple victims at the Tallulah Gorge State Park and remained active in



training several new game warden tactical flight officers. 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 unit welcomed a new pilot this year (Lt. Miller) who completed POST Certification and Bell Training Academy. The Aviation Unit also assisted other state and federal law enforcement agencies using 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, 274 tips were received for various violations.

JEA

The Joint Enforcement Agreement #23 between Georgia DNR and NOAA Office of Law Enforcement called for GADNR enforcement personnel to provide a total of 1,100 hours of marine law enforcement or related work



under the agreement. Georgia has five Execution Priorities. Execution Priority 1 was Endangered Species Act. There were 190-human hours and 70 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 240-human hours and 70 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 the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. There were 150-human hours and 50 hours of at-sea vessel patrols dedicated to Priority 3. Execution Priority 4 was Marine Mammal Right Whale. There were 150-human hours and 50 hours 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 130 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 14 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, using funding from various sources. Forty-two new 4x4 Chevrolet patrol vehicles and four new 4x4 Fords were purchased for field personnel. The Harris radio transition, which began in 2023, was completed with over 600 radios deployed statewide. Game Wardens now have the capability to talk on multiple radio systems throughout the state to various other public safety organizations. Currently the Division is testing Smart Evidence, an evidence management system that works with the current Smart Cop CAD system they currently use. This evidence system will standardize evidence records procedures statewide. This system is expected to be fully in place by the end of the year.

KENTUCKY

Jeremy McQueary, Director of Law Enforcement

PERSONNEL

During the past year, Kentucky conservation officers received a title change that occurred through legislation during the 2024 Kentucky General Assembly. The new title is Kentucky game warden. This change derived as an internal initiative that came through the overwhelming request of Division staff. Game warden is the title the law





enforcement division began as in 1912 and the tradition and heritage of its association with law enforcement and Kentucky Fish and Wildlife is rich! The change in title had no impact on our mission or focus and the agency is excited to embrace and celebrate the tradition associated with the history of the Kentucky game warden.

In the past year the Law Enforcement Division underwent a complete structural realignment that increased our promotional opportunities, better aligned our district organizational structure by an increase of nine districts to ten and designated a specific branch to special operations. With the help of the entire division and support of agency leadership the transition went smoothly, and positive effects of the change were seen immediately.

The 17 game wardens who graduated Academy Class 27 in 2023 are in the field and excelling. This year the division is hiring for Academy Class 28, which will include 20 new recruits in the fall of 2024. A change in our recruitment strategy and strong dedication by our recruitment section led to a hiring process that received record numbers of employment applications. Academy Class 28 is scheduled to hit the field in the early fall of year 2025!



Our Law Enforcement Division is proud to announce the retirement of seven career game wardens that occurred in August of this year. Of those seven, 1 was a major, 2 were captains, 1 was a sergeant, and 3 were master game wardens. We are very grateful for their years of leadership, service, and commitment to the Agency and are excited for this new journey in their lives.



EQUIPMENT

The Law Enforcement Division placed 28 new patrol trucks in the field this year as well as 14 new patrol boats. We focused on increasing our off-road utility vehicle fleet and have begun steadily replacing our four-wheelers with side-by-sides.



We are in the process of transitioning to modular optic system duty pistols and recently completed the process of having all duty patrol rifles camouflage dipped. To continue to ensure the safety of our wardens, we are increasingly issuing handheld thermal imaging devices to field staff and have fully outfitted all game wardens with steel plate carriers. We increased our body worn camera ratio to a 2:1 across the state and updated to the Taser 7 system.

The Division K-9 program has continued to soar into success and the impact our canine teams have had in the field is amazing. All three of our Labrador retrievers are now two years of age and have really bonded with their handlers and the teams are very efficient. From article detection to narcotics detection, the Game Warden K-9 teams are regularly making headlines and deterring crime so outdoorsmen and women in the bluegrass state have a safe place to enjoy the outdoors. Though there have been many great cases, a most recent one occurred when canine Gambit and his handler were conducting fishing compliance checks that lead to a narcotics investigation and the seizure of \$13,000 in cash, methamphetamine and marijuana, and drug trafficking paraphernalia and multiple felony charges.



OUTREACH

The Life Jacket Loaner Station initiative is continuing to grow and be a used resource by boating recreators across the State. We currently have 16 designated stations throughout the Commonwealth, each being maintained by various civic groups and organizations.



In 2024, the Law Enforcement Division launched a campaign, in cooperation with other state and local law enforcement agencies, titled, "Don't be the 'U' in BUI/DUI". The campaign is focused on targeting impaired vessel and motor vehicle operation and is designed to educate, increase awareness of, and discourage impaired operation.

In 2024, our division committed to revitalizing our public information officer (PIO) program and sent 10 officers to the FBI LEEDEA public information officer training course. Our PIO team is doing great and we are expanding our public outreach daily and continue to build positive relationships with media statewide and across the country.



The Law Enforcement Division attended National Police Week in Washington, D.C. where we celebrated the lives of 4 Kentucky Game Wardens who made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty and were added to the National Memorial in 2024; Game Warden James Claxton, Game Warden Elijah Roberts, Conservation Officer Raymond Birdsong, and Conservation Officer James McClain. The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources has lost 10 officers in the line of duty since 1918.



LOUISIANA

Colonel Stephen A. Clark



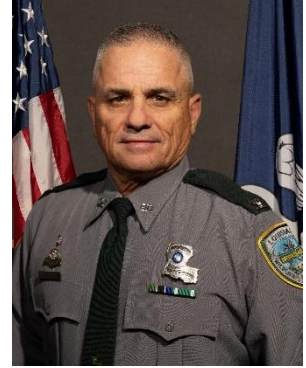
The LDWF Law Enforcement Division's (LDWF-LED) operating budget for 2023 was approximately \$43 million. Enforcement Division funding is derived from the Conservation Fund (LDWF self-generated revenue), Federal Boating Safety Funds, United States Coast Guard Grant funding, Homeland Security Grant funding, and the LDWF Enforcement Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) with NOAA for Federal Fisheries and various local grants.

LDWF-LED conducted 247,257 patrol hours 2023: 174,059 on land and 73,198 on water. Agents made 604,230 contacts with the public, the majority of whom were complying with state and federal wildlife and fisheries regulations. LDWF-LED agents issued 12,358 criminal citations and 6,962 warnings during this period.



ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE & PERSONNEL

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 the 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.



Colonel Stephen A. Clark

The LDWF Enforcement Division is currently headed by Colonel Stephen A. Clark. Clark was appointed as Superintendent of Wildlife & Fisheries Law Enforcement in June of 2024, replacing Col. Rachel Zechenelly, who retired after 24 years of service.

Clark started his law enforcement career as a game warden with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in 1994. For the past five months, Clark served as an advisor to LDWF Secretary Madison Sheahan as part of the executive staff as Deputy Secretary/Assistant Secretary of Wildlife. Clark has also served in multiple positions for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, including special agent in charge/Southeast Region, assistant special agent in charge/Southwest Region, resident agent in charge, and special agent. He has over 30 years of natural resource conservation experience.

In addition to his duties as a special agent, Clark was an airplane pilot for the government, where he was assigned to pilot different U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service airplanes on law enforcement operations across the country. Clark served as a special agent in charge with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement. In this position, he was responsible for all U.S. Fish and Wildlife law enforcement operations for the southeastern United States. Clark graduated from Southeastern Louisiana University in 1993 with a bachelor's degree in economics and a minor in management. While attending college, he enlisted in the Louisiana Army National Guard where he served for six years. As a veteran who served in Operation Desert Storm, he was awarded the Army Service Ribbon, Army Lapel Button, the National Defense Service Medal, the Louisiana War Cross and the Humanitarian Service Medal.

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, 12 administrative staff, seven communications officers, two pilots, one grant reviewer, one maintenance repair and one public information officer. The actual number of filled positions (as of July of 2024) is 243.

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 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 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 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. 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 monitoring commercial fisheries.

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 155,768 public contacts during 48,317 patrol hours dedicated to boating enforcement, education and accident investigation in 2023. Of those hours, 43,801 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 how boats are to be 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 2023, LDWF-LED agents issued 56 citations for careless and reckless operation of a vessel and 111 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 (NASBLA). 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 2023, 10,335 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 agents. Since the inception of the boating safety education course in 2003, LDWF has certified 164,769 students.



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

LDWF participated in the NASBLA Operation Dry Water Weekend July 1-3, 2023. 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 in 2023. 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 12th 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 AND 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.

LDWF Agents Rescue Couple from Southwest Pass in Vermilion Parish

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries enforcement agents rescued a husband and wife after their boat got stuck in Vermilion Parish. Agents were notified July 3 around 5:30 p.m. about two people who were fishing in a boat in the southwest pass when the tide went out, which subsequently stuck their boat in the mud. The husband and wife tried to get it unstuck but were unsuccessful.

Agents arrived on the scene immediately but could only get their boat within a few hundred yards of the stuck boat. Agents also learned that the wife was dealing with a medical issue that needed immediate attention. The agents had to construct a raft out of personal flotation devices to keep the wife out of the mud that was mixed with oyster shells. Agents were finally able to pull the wife to one of their vessels and then the husband was second.

Agents then transported the couple to the Intracoastal City boat dock where Acadian Ambulance was waiting. The couple were treated by Acadian Ambulance and released.



Senior Agent Joshua Segrest makes his way through the mud to reach the stranded boaters.

Agents participating in the rescue were Corporal Derek Logan and Senior Agent Joshua Segrest.

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 treestand accident in Natchitoches Parish on Jan. 14.

LDWF agents and NPSO deputies received a call around 3:25 p.m. about a stranded hunter who was injured after he fell from his treestand. 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. On April 24, 2024, LDWF graduated its 36th class of 19 cadets into the ranks of LDWF Enforcement Division agents at a ceremony in Baton Rouge.



- LDWF certified two agents in FLETC MLETP.
- LDWF sent six agents to the Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) course. The agents successfully passed the course. LDWF Currently has 24 certified DRE's.
- LDWF sent a NASBLA Instructor to Texas on four occasions to assist with Texas Parks and Wildlife classes.
- LDWF has completed three NASBLA Airboat Operator Courses and certified 33 agents as operators.
- LDWF certified 13 agents in NASBLA Boating Incident Investigation Level 1.
- LDWF provided two NASBLA Tactical Operators Courses (TOC) for LDWF Agents as well as other law enforcement partners. As a result, five LDWF agents were certified as Tactical Operators. Additionally, an agent was sent to teach a TOC class to additional law enforcement agency partners.
- LDWF certified one agent in NASBLA Pursuit and Stop.
- LDWF sent four agents to the NASBLA Conference.
- LDWF sent three NASBLA BOSAR Instructors to certify other agency partners.
- LDWF has five road SFST instructors and have 12 agents who are NASBLA credentialed instructors for the BUI seated SFST course.
- LDWF has 19 NASBLA Officer Water Survival credentialed instructors.



- LDWF certified six lifeguards bringing their total to 19 certified lifeguards. Lifeguarding with CPR with AED for professional rescuers. First Aid and administering emergency oxygen.
- LDWF sent two agents to the Complete Officer Survival Seminar.
- LDWF currently has 19 agents who are licensed through the FAA as remote pilots for our unmanned aircraft system (UAS) program.
- LDWF certified one agent as a POST Procedural Justice Instructor.
- LDWF certified four agents, who are members of the Agent's Crisis Team (ACT), in FLETC Critical Communication Skills. ACT currently has 17 members.

- LDWF sent one ACT member to a Suicide Awareness Seminar.
- LDWF sent two agents to Florida and they successfully completed their undercover operations training course.
- LDWF sent two agents to a Blood Warrant Workshop.
- LDWF sent an agent to the National Special Olympics Conference. LDWF and the Louisiana Wildlife Agents' Association are annual supporters of the Special Olympics.
- LDWF sent three ACT members to Basic Critical Incident Stress Management training, which was provided by the Southern Law Enforcement Foundation.
- LDWF sent two agents to a seminar titled Background Investigations for Police Applicants.
- LDWF certified 10 agents as Strategic Self-Defense & Gunfighting Tactics (SSGT) Instructors. LDWF also has 12 agents that are certified Monadnock Instructors.
- LDWF sent one agent to the Louisiana State University National Center for Biomedical Research and Training Instructor Development Class.
- LDWF sent nine agents to the State Fire Marshall's Wide Area Search Course and they successfully passed.

- LDWF sent two agents to Georgia who became certified in FLETC's Digital Photography for Law Enforcement Course.
- LDWF has sent two agents to the FLETC Mental Health Crisis Instructor Course who have successfully become instructors.
- One LDWF Dispatch successfully completed the Active Attack Integrated Response Course by ALERRT.
- LDWF 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.
- LDWF had three agents attend and successfully pass a Verbal De-Escalation course by the University of Tennessee Law Enforcement Innovation Center.
- LDWF had two agents attend and receive a Force Science Analysis certification in Texas.
- LDWF had two agents attend an Advanced BUI Train-the-Trainer Workshop in Kentucky.

In-Service

At the end of 2023, 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/CPR/AED
- 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

Six agents were certified as Drug Recognition Experts (DRE), bringing the LDWF-LED total to 24 DREs.

Marine Law Enforcement Training Program

At the end of 2023, 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, LDWF is 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 17 Crisis Intervention and Critical Incident members who 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.

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 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.



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 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 2023, MSRT members had completed their annual recertification of the Tactical Operators Course (TOC) in the NASBLA BOAT Program.

2023 ACQUISITIONS

- 10 - F250 Trucks
- 3 - Durango's
- 4 - 300 HP Suzuki Outboards
- 4 - Boat Trailers
- 1 - Kodiak Float Plane
- 4 - Honda ATV's
- 23 - Bullet Proof Vest
- 27 - Covert / Trail Cameras
- 1 - Drone
- 11 - Glock Pistols
- 43- Stag Rifles
- 36 - Truck Lightbars

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 2023 year, OGT paid out \$20,850 in rewards. In the 2023 year, the LOGT board reviewed 47 cases that led to 75 subjects getting cited or arrested and a total of 265 citations issued. From 1984 until the time of this report, the LOGT board has paid out a total of \$495,360 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 \$800,000 in 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 128 enforcement related press releases in 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 with some being posted on social media. 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 ENFORCEMENT NEWS

Former LDWF Enforcement Division Colonel Passed Away on March 2

Longtime Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Enforcement Division Colonel, Winton Vidrine, passed away on March 2 in St. Landry Parish.



Colonel Winton Vidrine

Vidrine, 80, a lifelong resident of Plaisance, worked as a LDWF Enforcement Division agent for 44 years including the last 25 years of his career as the colonel before retiring in 2013.

"The entire team at the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is saddened to hear about the passing of Winton Joseph Vidrine," said LDWF Secretary Madison Sheahan. "A longtime LDWF agent and colonel himself, Winton was instrumental in creating the Louisiana Wildlife Agents Association and building it into the organization that it is today. His work for the state of Louisiana will live on for generations. Winton will be deeply missed, and our prayers are with his friends and family."

Vidrine started his career with the LDWF Enforcement Division in 1970 working out of the Opelousas Office. In 1972, Vidrine was instrumental in creating the Louisiana Wildlife Agents Association to help organize agents statewide into a collective unit, which is still active today. Vidrine was

promoted to lieutenant in 1973 and in charge of covert operations.

Vidrine was promoted to captain in 1976 and was put in charge of over 20 agents within the Opelousas district. In 1978, Vidrine was promoted to major overseeing the Baton Rouge and Opelousas districts. Vidrine was again promoted to lieutenant colonel in 1980 working in New Orleans at the LDWF Headquarters. In 1982, LDWF moved their headquarters from New Orleans to its current home in Baton Rouge.

Vidrine then took over the top position for the LDWF Enforcement Division in 1988, which is a position he held for the last 25 years of his career. He worked under 16 different secretaries during that time.

Vidrine's top priority when taking over for enforcement was training. Beginning in 1990, he implemented a more tailored training program for LDWF Wildlife Cadets that included classes on the laws for fisheries and wildlife management, driving while intoxicated detection, migratory game bird and fish identification, boating, and search and rescue training. These changes increased the training a cadet receives from 12 weeks to over 20 weeks. In 2001, LDWF initiated their first fully accredited and peace officer standards and training (POST) certified LDWF Training Cadet Academy that was completely taught and ran by LDWF agents.

As colonel, Vidrine oversaw the search and rescue operation for the LDWF Enforcement Division following Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and surrounding areas. The search and rescue efforts were recognized by congress in Washington D.C. and led to the LDWF Enforcement Division being named the state's leading search and rescue agency by the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness.

During the BP Oil Spill in 2010, Col. Vidrine oversaw agents enforcing the emergency commercial and recreational fishing closures, reporting oil and oiled wildlife sightings, patrolling booming operations, providing security detail for VIPs and escorting media to the oil spill area.

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 on 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 Agent Awarded as Mississippi Flyway 2022-2023 Waterfowl Officer of the Year

A Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries enforcement agent was acknowledged as the 2022-23 Mississippi Flyway Council Waterfowl Enforcement Officer of the Year at the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission meeting on Sept. 7, 2023.



Corporal Joshua Harris received the Mississippi Flyway Council award at their meeting in Eureka Springs on Aug. 24. Corporal Harris is the first Louisiana enforcement agent to earn the council's top award for waterfowl enforcement.

"Winning this award for the first time as a Louisiana wildlife agent is very impressive and well earned," said Col. Rachel Zechenelly. "Corporal Harris has done a great job of enforcing waterfowl regulations and representing our department and state."

Major Rick Owens (retired) and Corporal Joshua Harris.

The Mississippi Flyway Council is comprised of 15 states and three Canadian provinces

including Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin, and the provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. Each year the council recognizes one law enforcement agent from each state and province for waterfowl enforcement. They then pick one law enforcement agent from those recipients for their top award.

Corporal Harris has been an LDWF agent for 10 years and is assigned to Union Parish. Corporal Harris patrols include the Mississippi River, the Ouachita River Basin, and eight parishes of flooded agriculture lands. He also patrols public lands including the Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), D'Arbonne NWR, Black Bayou NWR, Tensas NWR, Boeuf Wildlife Management Area WMA, and Russell Sage WMA.

Corporal Harris is an LDWF waterfowl identification and enforcement instructor for their cadet academies and he provides an annual waterfowl enforcement presentation to LDWF agents to keep them up to date on yearly regulation changes.

Corporal Harris led the state of Louisiana in waterfowl cases for the 2022-23 waterfowl season with 73 waterfowl specific citations. Investigations conducted by Corporal Harris included multiple over the limit of waterfowl citations, migratory game bird baiting violations, non-toxic shot violations, and unplugged gun violations.

LDWF Agent Named National Boating Officer of the Year

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

of Metairie and a 21-year veteran with the LDWF Enforcement Division, was honored with the national NASBLA award for his continuous dedication to enforcing boating safety laws and educating the public at NASBLA's annual conference on Sept. 21. Lt. Russo is the first agent from Louisiana to win this national boating officer award.

"Lt. Russo is very deserving of this national boating safety award. He has always done a great job of enforcing boating safety laws and teaching boating safety classes to the public," said Col. Rachel Zechenelly, head of the Enforcement Division. "Lt. Russo is also a leader in his region as he helps mentor younger agents especially when it comes to boating safety education and patrol."



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.

Lt. Russo was awarded with the NASBLA Southern Region Officer of the Year award this past June.

LDWF Enforcement Agent Recognized at November Commission Meeting

A Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Enforcement Division agent was honored at the Nov. 2 Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission meeting held in Baton Rouge. Shikar-Safari Club International



From left to right: Capt. Tim Fox, Shikar Safari Representative Lea Perez, Corporal Blaine Wagner and Colonel Rachel Zechenelly (retired).

presented their 2022 Conservation Officer of the Year award for Louisiana to LDWF Corporal Blaine Wagner. The Shikar-Safari award recognizes an agent from each state for outstanding efforts in conservation law enforcement.

Corporal Wagner has been an LDWF agent for over nine years and mainly patrols Plaquemine and St. Bernard parishes. He consistently is one of the leaders in cases in his region. His cases are primarily commercial and recreational fishing violations including oyster theft, closed season oyster fishing, illegal harvest of undersized crabs and immature female crabs and over the limit and undersized recreational fish.

Corporal Wagner is also a boating safety education instructor and a drone pilot for his region.

Gov. Jeff Landry Visits LDWF Headquarters and Meets Enforcement Division Agents

Governor Jeff Landry met with and spoke to more than 200 Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Enforcement Division agents at their statewide meeting on Feb. 7 at LDWF Headquarters in Baton Rouge.

LDWF Secretary Madison Sheahan, Deputy Secretary Stephen Clark and Col. Rachel Zechenelly also addressed the agents and met with Governor Landry and First Lady Sharon Landry.

"I grew up hunting and fishing and wanted to be a game warden when I was younger. I admire you and thank you for the work you do. I have hand-picked Secretary Sheahan and built an executive team here at Wildlife and Fisheries that has my unwavering support to make positive changes here at the agency," said Gov. Landry.



MISSOURI

Chief Randy Doman



TRAINING ISSUES

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) Conservation Agent Training Academy graduated a class of 16 on October 3, 2023. This was the 3rd consecutive class and the 4th academy within a five-year span. This addition brought branch staffing levels to full strength and slightly above with three temporary assignments. Ongoing retirements and other attrition will lead to another training academy starting March 2025. On average, MDC receives approximately 300 qualified applicants for each class while retaining the bachelor's degree requirement. A continuing challenge is training some of the new hires in the traditional hunting/fishing/trapping activities, so they are more knowledgeable and effective when engaging with consumptive resource users.

Additionally, Protection Branch continues a successful mentoring program at the start of each training academy. All conservation agent trainees select a mentor from an approved list of experienced field personnel from across the state. Trainees meet regularly with their mentors to ask questions, build rapport, and facilitate a more welcoming culture. This mentoring relationship is outside the traditional chain of command and is provided as a benefit to help trainees feel more connected, enhance officer wellness, and improve retention.

FUNDING AND STAFFING ISSUES

The operating budget for MDC represents less than one percent of the total state budget and receives no state general revenue. MDC gets a substantial part of its funding through the conservation sales tax. For every \$8 spent on taxable items, one penny goes to conservation. For FY23 the conservation sales tax equated to \$163 million, federal reimbursements at \$45 million, permit sales at \$42 million, with sales/rentals/other sources and interest at \$15 million. Total receipts for FY23 came to \$265 million. Total disbursements for FY23 equaled approximately \$258 million. For FY23 Protection Branch's approved budget was roughly \$2.2 million.

As an agency we prioritize relevancy and focus on recruiting/retaining staff who are more representative of the demographic makeup of Missouri. Protection Branch supports these efforts in several ways. One strategy is through our conservation agent preparation/intern program, which is designed to help recruit and develop well-qualified, non-traditional candidates. The paid internship provides experience and opportunities for interns to be more competitive in the application and interview process for the Conservation Agent Training Academy. Additionally, all Protection Branch interview panels are comprised of more representative panel members to ensure diverse perspectives are represented and to promote a culture of inclusivity. Interview questions are designed to assess an applicant's ability to be more inclusive and engage with a broader constituency.

Director Sara Parker Pauley, the ninth Director in MDC's 86-year history, announced her retirement effective July 1, 2024. Protection Branch Chief Randy Doman will also be retiring effective January 1, 2025. Both leaders have had remarkable careers, and we wish them the best in retirement!

MAJOR CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT TRENDS

Regulations to combat the spread of CWD continue in Missouri as deer hunting opportunities were extended to assist in CWD Management for the 2023-2024 season. Notable changes for the 2023-2024 deer season included

a new early antlerless portion of firearms deer season (October 6-8) in select counties, a new CWD portion of firearms deer season (November 22 -26) in CWD Management Zone counties, and an increase in the number of firearms antlerless permits in most counties throughout the state. An additional 162 positives were identified out of 37,000 samples taken from the 2023-2024 deer season and the cooperative targeted removal efforts. Continued efforts and season adjustments are being examined to assist in slowing the spread of CWD across the state. Conservation agents play a significant role in combatting the spread through landowner contacts, targeted deer removal, carcass transportation, firearms/safety training, venison distribution, and of course *Wildlife Code* enforcement.

UNIQUE CROSS BOUNDARY OR COOPERATIVE, ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

Operation Early Birds was a multi-state waterfowl enforcement effort in the Mississippi and Central flyways during the 2023-2024 waterfowl season. The collaborative patrol included a total of 47 officers from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (11), Missouri (18), Iowa (9), Kansas (3), and Nebraska (6). The multi-day patrol focused on public waterfowl areas and local duck clubs, resulting in 540 contacts, 215 resource violations, 20 other violations, 135 documented warnings, 62 arrests, 3 pink slips, and 36 private duck club interactions.

Additionally, Missouri Conservation Agents Chase Wright and Marc Bagley made a once-in-a-lifetime waterfowl poaching case in January 2024 by apprehending three subjects who killed 50 mallards on the Missouri River, in closed season, during a severe cold snap. Twenty mile an hour winds, frozen boat ramps, and minus 4-degree wind chills made for an eventful and dangerous investigation. Charges are pending.



NEW INNOVATIONS IN CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT

Protection Branch implemented a body-worn camera (BWC) program in February 2023 and have logged over 35,000 recordings of law enforcement contacts since program inception. BWCs benefit the agency by aiding in report-writing for conservation agents, capturing additional evidence for prosecution, facilitating better training, and investigating/resolving complaints more effectively and efficiently. We chose the Axon - Body 3 platform with its evidence.com cloud-based storage system. In combination with the automatic, wireless uploads through our vehicle Cradlepoint routers, the BWC program is as easy and efficient as possible for conservation agents.

MDC's K-9 Unit originated in 2021, and since then the canines and their handlers have provided over 496 programs, reaching over 27,000 people, and have been deployed more than 270 times. The teams have been successful in investigating numerous cases for trespassing, road-hunting, over limits, and closed-season hunting. In addition, they've been effective in finding missing persons and aiding in hunting incident investigations. MDC utilizes labrador retrievers and German shorthaired pointers trained as single purpose dogs in wildlife scent detection, article searches, and human tracking. Four additional handlers/dogs were added to the team in 2022 bringing us to full strength at nine canine teams dispersed across the state.

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

Open fields, private landowner rights, trail cameras, drones, and night vision/thermal imagery continue to be topics of discussion with the Missouri Legislature and the Conservation Commission. Regulations for utilizing drones and thermal imagery to aid in the recovery of mortally wounded big game have been proposed, and Missouri's night vision/thermal imagery season for coyotes entered its 3rd year, open from February 1 through March 31.

A favorable decision was received from the Supreme Court of Missouri in *Conservation Commission and Missouri Department of Conservation v. Andrew Bailey in his official capacity as Attorney General of Missouri, and Ken Zellers, in his official capacity as Commissioner of the Office of Administration*. The following was stated within the conclusion, "By adopting article IV, sections 40-44, the people of Missouri created the Conservation Commission within the executive branch and "constitutionally empowered" it to expend and use conservation funds for any of the enumerated purposes in the constitution "without interference" by the General Assembly." This is a historically significant ruling that reaffirmed the Missouri Conservation Commission's authority to use conservation funds generated from the 1/8th of 1% sales tax.

COST SAVINGS INITIATIVES

Protection Branch continues to utilize an active and successful volunteer program with approximately 100 volunteers spread across the state. In 2023, the program contributed roughly 3,500 hours of volunteer work to MDC. These volunteers assist conservation agents and other MDC staff with projects including surveillance during enforcement patrols, outreach and education programs, training scenarios, and wildlife surveys. The volunteer program also serves as a valuable recruitment tool as several volunteers ultimately work their way into the Conservation Agent Training Academy.

OTHER SPECIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ISSUES

Protection Branch utilizes an internal dashboard to monitor resource contact compliance rates, conviction rates, and a public "approval rating" across the state. These dashboards help drive decision-making, personnel allocations, and ultimately provide valuable feedback on our citizen engagement, education, and community policing efforts to increase voluntary compliance with the *Wildlife Code*. Missouri has also been an integral member of the SEAFWA states in establishing and implementing the North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation (NAWLEA) program. A systematic review of branch guidelines and Department policies has started as Missouri prepares for the accreditation process in 2025.

MISSISSIPPI

Colonel Jerry L. Carter



AGENCY OVERVIEW



Colonel Jerry L. Carter

The Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks Law Enforcement Bureau which currently consist of 194 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

Law Enforcement Bureau has completed the transition from 40 caliber handguns to the 9mm Glock model G45 MOS. Phase II began with the training and issuance of the Holosun Holographic optics for issued handgun with this year's cadet class and firearms instructors receiving the first roll out.

MDWFP opened the Conservation Officer/Cadet application process in January 2024. We took in 168 applications. We had 45 to submit background/health assessment packets and take the entry pt/swim test. In March and April we interviewed 45 applicants. In May, 22 Cadets started the MS Conservation Officers Training Academy (MCOTA). We currently have 19 of Cadets, 9 of which are continuing their academy training at MLEOTA (Mississippi Law Enforcement Officer's Training Academy) with the other 10 Cadets who are prior sworn and shadowing with Conservation Officers in the field. Upon completing MLEOTA in September, the 19 Cadets will return to MCOTA for 4 weeks. They will graduate Oct. 17, 2024, and start their career as a MDWFP Conservation officer.



MAJOR CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT TRENDS

Investigators attended the 2024 Southeastern States Investigations & Intelligence Conference in San Antonio, Texas. The conference was hosted by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at the Drury Plaza Hotel on the San Antonio Riverwalk. Fifty-eight (48) attendees from Fifteen (15) State Wildlife Agencies, the University of Florida Wildlife Forensic Lab and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service attended the conference. Investigators attending the conference presented case studies of current investigations and trends that occurred across the Southeastern United States. The conference provides Wildlife Investigators and Intelligence Analysts an opportunity to network with multiple state and federal partners.

The Investigations Unit recently entered into a Task Force Officer Agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Office of Law Enforcement by providing an Investigator to the USFWS Task Force Officer Program. In doing so, the MDWFP became the first Southeastern state to join the USFWS effort to create a Task Force Officer program to leverage the combined State & Federal expertise & investigative capabilities to develop highly effective wildlife investigations. Mississippi now joins only Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma & Washington as states that are participating in the USFWS TFO program.

STATE, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL ISSUES; LEGISLATION; AND 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 526

To authorize hunters to wear solid unbroken fluorescent pink as an alternative to fluorescent orange when hunting deer during any gun season on deer; to amend section 49-7-31.5, Mississippi code of 1972, to authorize hunters to wear solid unbroken fluorescent pink as an alternative to fluorescent orange when hunting wild hogs during any open gun season on deer; and for related purposes.

HB 1208

Stricter penalties prohibiting hunting on lands of others.

A male subject were charged and convicted after pleading guilty to violations of the Federal Lacey Act in South Mississippi of the importation of white-tailed deer.

Three male subjects were charged and convicted on violations of the Lacey Act on the illegal harvest of crappie in north Mississippi at Enid Lake.

INNOVATIONS IN CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT

Since the expansion of the department SRT Unit, the “Dive Team” has now begun the next phase of its program in completing all the required certifications. All dive team members have completed the following certifications: rescue diver certification, dry suit certification and public safety dive.



LEADERSHIP

The Law Enforcement Bureau is proud to announce the promotion of Officers Brandon Abel and Karri Fulton to the rank of Sergeant Major.

Sergeant Major Abel will now serve as the Boating and Hunter Ed. Coordinator in Southeastern part of the state. He began his career in July 2014 as a Conservation Officer assigned to Harrison County, then later assigned to Jackson County. Since his promotion, he has attended various training in the perspective field. These training and certification includes boating and hunter accident reconstruction, boat theft identification, NASBLA

Sergeant Major Fulton will now serve as our ESF- 9 Coordinator as she coordinates emergency service functions during natural events. She began her employment with the department as a license agent in 2009 and later in 2017 transitioned to the Law Enforcement Bureau as a Conservation Officer assigned to Smith County. Outside of her enforcement responsibilities for the past six years, she has been a certified TAC Officer during the agency's Cadet Academy Training, and she works on other special projects beneficial to our enforcement efforts.



Sergeant Major Brandon Abel



Sergeant Major Karri Fulton

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 244 sworn law enforcement officers. Command staff includes the Colonel, Major of Field Operations, Major of Support Operations, Captain of Support Services, Captain of Special Operations, Training Director Lieutenant, Professional Standards Lieutenant, Assistant Training Director Sergeant, Telecommunications Supervisor, eight telecommunicators, four administrative assistants and two warehouse operations staff.

PROMOTIONS

- Nathan Green – Captain - District 5
- Brandon Barbee – Sergeant - District 6 Area 3
- Jessie Weicker – Sergeant - District 8 Area 4
- Dustin Durham – Lieutenant - District 3
- Garrett Gooch – Sergeant - Assistant Training Director
- Kyle VanAlthuis – Captain - District 2
- Chad Arnold – Captain - Special Operations
- Brandon Coffey – Captain - District 3
- Micheal King – Lieutenant - District 5

60TH BASIC ACADEMY

On July 19, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission Law Enforcement Division swore in 18 new wildlife law enforcement officers graduating from the agency's 60th Basic Academy. The graduating officers are:

- Garrett L. Brown - Sault Ste Marie, MI
- Vincent G. Capano - Salem, MA
- Tyler H. Clark - Hertford, NC
- Joshua C.D. Collins - Marion, NC
- Adam L. Congdon - Little Falls, NY
- Justin C. Eckart - Cooleemee, NC
- Noah K. Gonser - Grand Blanc, MI
- Joshua C. Goodman - West Jefferson, NC
- Walter E. Hill - Macclesfield, NC
- Zachary A. Jurkovski - Big Lake, MN
- Austin J. Keever - Leicester, NC
- Hannah C. Kerrigan - Monmouth, MA
- Austin R. Lear - Salisbury, NC
- Chandler J. McClamrock - Salisbury, NC
- Jonathan B. McLawhorn - Vanceboro, NC

- Jonathan T. Montague - Midland, NC
- John C. Schlegel - Lexington, KY
- Brett L. Shreve - Pleasant Garden, NC



To graduate, 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, fish and game laws, and pursuit driving and boating. It's 7 ½ months of rigorous training that includes N.C. standard basic law enforcement training 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 drivers training, firearms, subject control/arrest techniques, conducting traffic stops, patrol techniques, and game warden tactics.

All wildlife law enforcement officer trainees are required to pass an extensive background, psychological and physical screening before entering an intensive accredited academy conducted by the Law Enforcement Division. Training is held at the N.C. Department of Public Safety Samarcand Training Academy in Jackson Springs.

AWARDS

Master Officer Chase Vaughan was recognized as the 2024 Mothers Against Drunk Driving Wildlife Officer of the Year. Officer Vaughan is an 11-year veteran and is currently assigned to Halifax County. He routinely patrols Gaston Lake, Roanoke Rapids Lake, Roanoke River, Meherrin River, and multiple millponds to detect and deter impaired boat operators.





Master Officer Sampson Parker was selected as the National Wild Turkey Federation Wildlife Officer of the year. Sampson was selected by the state NWTF board and will be recognized for the great work he has done. Sampson loves to share his passion for the wild turkey and has introduced many new hunters to the sport over the years.

Master Officer Eric Crouse was selected as the SEAFWA NC wildlife Officer of the year. Master Officer Crouse has effectively fulfilled the agency's mission in all aspects. He has worked with other Divisions of the NCWRC on numerous occasions, including helping the NCWRC Management Division with Chronic Wasting Disease enforcement, testing, and public education. He successfully guided a Becoming an Outdoors Woman participant on her first wild turkey harvest, volunteered at the National Archery in the Schools Program event, and participated in other educational programs. Officer Crouse has excelled at "game warden" work, utilizing an array of enforcement techniques. He served as a Field Training Officer and exposed his trainee to a variety of violations and unique situations. One example is when he rendered aid to a gunshot victim on the highway, kept calm, and instructed his trainee of proper safety procedures while continuing first-aid. He has shown that he is committed to effectively enforcing hunting laws by working with a community college on the development of a deer decoy that emits a heat signature. He is a leader in his patrol area, District, and within the community. Officer Crouse is a veteran of the United States Marine Corps and an eleven-year veteran of the NCWRC Law Enforcement Division.

On April 14, 2024, officers from District 5, along with members of Officer Bryan Scruggs' family, presented the first annual Bryan Scruggs Award at the Lee County Wildlife Club. The Bryan Scruggs Award has been established by the Lee County Wildlife Club in memory of Retired Wildlife Enforcement Officer, Bryan Scruggs. Officer Scruggs served Lee County for over 20 years and was passionate about the Youth Hunter Education Safety program. His impact on the community as well as the hunter education program in Lee County is still felt there today. The award was established in 2024 to recognize an exceptional high student who is a member of one of Lee County's hunter education teams. This year's recipient was Matthew Ryan Kidd. Matthew is a senior in high school, who has participated in the program for 9 years. Pictured from left to right: Sgt. Claude Smith, Officer John Sprowl, Kyle Scruggs, Carol Scruggs, Matthew Kidd, Cpt. Nathan Green, Bryan Ragland.



SPECIAL OLYMPICS TORCH RUN

Officers across the state participated in Torch Runs to support Special Olympics North Carolina. Notable runs include the run at the Samarcand Training Facility, Asheboro, and the Torch Run Final Leg held in Raleigh. So far, the agency has raised over ten thousand dollars for the Special Olympics in 2024.



ON THE ROAD/ON THE WATER

Over the Memorial Day weekend holiday, officers participated in the annual On the Road, On the Water campaign. Wildlife Officers work with other state and local agencies to discourage impaired driving and vessel operation. At the agency media kickoff held on May 23rd, the US Coast guard Auxiliary presented the NCWRC with a governor's proclamation proclaiming the week of May 18th - 24th as National Safe Boating Week.



Results from On the Road/On the Water campaign

# of Officers	158
# of Vessels Contacted	1403
# of Boaters Contacted	4749
# of Boating Citations	451
# of BUI's (Drug impairment)	4
# of BUI's (Alcohol Impairment)	39
Highest BUI	0.16
# of Boating Warnings	717
Media Contacts	42
Non-Boating Violations	236
# of Boating Incidents	18



OPERATION DRY WATER

Operation Dry Water is a national awareness and enforcement campaign focused on reducing the number of alcohol and drug related incidents and fatalities and fostering a stronger, more visible deterrent to alcohol and drug use on the water. The 2024 Operation Dry Water heightened awareness and enforcement weekend is taking place July 4 - 6, 2024. Launched in 2009 by NASBLA in partnership with the United States Coast Guard, Operation Dry Water has been a highly successful campaign, drawing public attention to the dangers of boating under the influence (BUI) of alcohol and drugs.



Results from the 2024 Operation Dry Water campaign:

# of Officers	153
# of Vessels Contacted	1332
# of Boaters Contacted	4967
# of Boating Citations	436
# of BUI's (Drug impairment)	1
# of BUI's (Alcohol Impairment)	36
Highest BUI	0.18

# of Boating Warnings	704
Media Contacts	47
Non-Boating Violations	82
# of Boating Incidents	6

FIELD ACTIVITY

On Tuesday, June 18, 2024, District Six Area officers assisted with the Catawba Waterway Clearing drill. The purpose of the drill was to demonstrate the ability to clear the waterway in the event of a release at the Catawba Nuclear Station. In addition to D6 officers, D8 officers were part of this. There was a total of 5 law enforcement agencies and one fire department involved in the drill. The agencies include NCWRC, Charlotte Mecklenburg Police, Gaston County Police, York County Sheriff's Office, SCDNR, and Shepperd's Cove Fire Department. The drill was evaluated and graded by FEMA. NC Emergency Management assisted the FEMA evaluators and law enforcement agencies in completing this practical exercise.



On July 5, 2024, Officer Eric Burkhalter and Sergeant Brandon Lyon were performing routine boat patrol on Lake Norman. As they entered the mouth of McCrary Creek around 6:20pm, they were frantically waived down by a family with small children in a boat. As the boat approached the officers, they could see a mother holding a small child tightly in her arms. She told the officers her 3-year-old daughter had an open wound on her leg that was bleeding and would need a helicopter. Within seconds, Officer Burkhalter, who was trained in Tactical Combat Casualty Care while serving in the US military, jumped on the victim's boat and applied a tourniquet to the child's leg to stop the profuse bleeding. Because the family was unfamiliar with the boat or the area, Officer Burkhalter drove their boat to McCrary Creek access area as Sergeant Lyon



coordinated an emergency response to the ramp. As they were docking, Mooresville FD was pulling into the ramp. Realizing time was of the essence, Officer Burkhalter ran with the child laying in his arms up the dock and up the steep hill at the ramp to meet the medical first responders. Officer Burkhalter stayed with the child and assisted the medical team with obtaining vital signs. Because the lacerations were so deep, the 3-year-old was transported to a Level 1 trauma hospital in Charlotte. Officers spoke to the child's father the following day. He told them she was doing well, and the doctors expected her to make a full recovery.

Students from Camden County High School's Animal Science II Honors Food Animal class got hands-on instruction from Officer Jeffery Doran about processing poultry. Officer Doran used a wild turkey harvested during the hunting season to show the class how to pluck, field dress, and piece out a whole bird for cooking. The students then practiced their new skills on meat chickens raised as a class during the school year. The class also tried several recipes and cooking techniques and then enjoyed their field-to-table meal together.



Last November, officers in District 7 received a call that someone had shot a deer from the road on posted property. Master Officers Jones and Cronk patrolled to the scene and found a blood trail leading to where the suspects loaded the deer onto the vehicle. The Officers were able to use information from the scene to locate the owner of the vehicle in question. The owner had fresh blood in the bed of his truck. During the investigation, officers were able to collect DNA evidence from the scene of the offense and the suspect vehicle. Through this DNA evidence officers were able to obtain a search warrant for the suspect's residence. Officers conducted the warrant and recovered a 10-point euro mount from the deer in question. Officers were then able to charge both individuals with unlawful possession of the deer as well as charge the individual who shot the deer with taking deer from posted property. Both individuals were convicted on the charges in March.

Officer Eric Crouse recently had the opportunity to release a rehabilitated bald eagle back into the wild. The eagle was found in the Roaring River community of Wilkes County and appeared unable to fly. After being transported to the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Banner Elk, the eagle underwent an observation period and a treatment of electrolytes and trout dinners. A few days later, the eagle was cleared for release. The eagle was released by Crouse along the banks of the Yadkin River. It easily took flight and flew off to its new home close to where it was found.



Two Eastern North Carolina men recently plead guilty to charges sought against them after a night deer hunting investigation which began in November of 2023 by Officers from District 2 Area 4 and District 2 Area 5. A New Hanover County man plead guilty to 15 charges of night deer hunting, and 1 charge of taking wild game with the use and aid of motor vehicle; the man received a 10-year hunting license suspension and faces approximately \$1500 in fines. A Duplin County man plead guilty to 15 counts of night deer hunting, 1 count of spotlighting whitetail deer during unlawful hours, and 10 counts of unlawful possession of whitetail deer; this man received a 5-year hunting license suspension and faces approximately \$750 in fines. Together the two poachers are responsible for paying nearly \$10,000 in replacement costs and were forced to surrender multiple firearms.

From March 18 through March 21, 2024, 7 wildlife officers from across North Carolina converged in Oriental, North Carolina to partake in the NASBLA sanctioned Boat Crew Member course. Sergeants Barbee, Kennedy, Moss, and Howell taught the course. "It is the purpose of this course to establish basic understanding of maritime rescue operations and provide the skills necessary to execute missions safely. Secondly, and equally as important, it is the purpose of this course and the entire BOAT Program, to enhance the safety and response capabilities throughout the country, as graduates will be able to provide a true force-multiplier to the United States and the Coast Guard specifically." Congratulations to Officers Carter, Holbrook, Ingle, Long, Munson, Owenby, and Sprowl on successfully completing this course and showing their dedication to public safety in our State.



On the evening of Nov. 28, 2023, Officers Jacob Pattison and Jonathan Sprowl received a call regarding a gun shot that was fired from the road near a home at around 6:43 pm. The two officers immediately patrolled to the residence. The homeowner was able to provide the two officers with doorbell camera footage that captured the time the shot rang out, and a person of interest. The homeowner had also been contacted earlier by a known convicted felon about retrieving a deer from his property.



With careful observation the two officers were able to locate blood and followed it finding a nine-point buck. The two officers investigated the person of interest who was in fact a convicted felon with an ankle monitor. The suspect denied any involvement in the night deer hunting incident. The two officers later worked with Lee County probation and parole to retrieve data point coordinates of the suspect the night of the shot. The data showed that the suspect was at the exact location of the shot at the same time the doorbell camera captured the gun fire at 6:43:53 pm. This led to a search conducted on the suspect's residence with hopes of finding the firearm which he unlawfully possessed and used to harvest the deer. The suspect continued to deny any involvement in the case. Days after the search was conducted Officer Pattison

received a phone call from the suspect. The suspect gave a full confession to the events that occurred the night the deer was shot.

In February 2024, Sgt. Tim Godwin and Senior Officer Matt McGalliard had the privilege to meet with four-year-old Onslow County resident Lane Guyette and his mother as he recovered from a recent surgery at Duke Hospital. Lane has had numerous medical issues, and he gets through most of his days watching North Woods



Law, a television show about wildlife law enforcement officers in Maine. His father reached out to the NC Wildlife Resources Commission's Wildlife Law Enforcement Division to see if some officers could come by the hospital and help brighten his day.

Godwin and McGalliard spent two hours with Lane and his mother, talking about family life, showing hunting pictures and playing with new toys and items from a goodie basket that was put together by staff from the Wildlife Commission and Person County 911. Sgt. Godwin's wife even made Lane a "Junior Game Warden" t-shirt to commemorate the visit. It was truly an honor for these officers to spend time with this incredible young man, and we wish him a speedy recovery.

District 6 Area 4 officers worked with members of the Division of Inland Fisheries for the annual trout stocking at McAlpine Creek Park, Hornet's Nest Park, and Frank Liske Park. Officer Kristofer Blankenship is pictured below with a young angler after he caught his first trout and received an ice cream citation for Sonic.



Officer Rodney Prince, Officer Kristofer Blankenship, Capt. Chad Arnold, and Sergeant Laton investigated a tip of an individual that was in possession of an American Alligator. Initially, officers planned to interview the suspect at her residence and seize the alligator there. The suspect couldn't be located, and the original complainant reported that she was going to sell or trade the alligator for an exotic snake. Capt. Arnold coordinated a buy operation in which the alligator was seized and turned over to the Wildlife Management Division for training purposes.

In February 2024, District 9 Area 3 Officers assisted in searching for a missing 85-year-old man who said that he was going trout fishing in the Brevard area. His vehicle was last seen on Upward Road in Hendersonville. Officer Hunter Gray located the vehicle on our Green River Game Lands. A multi- agency search began, including officers from WRC. After a two-and-a-half-day search, the deceased man was found near a remote stream located deep in the game lands. The family was very appreciative of all the efforts to locate him.

SAMARCAND TRAINING FACILITY

The NCWRC continues to make progress on its 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 1600square foot mat room, gym, dual classrooms, and recreational areas. It will be located on the Samarcand Training Facility in Jackson Springs. There will be 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 October of 2024.



OKLAHOMA

Nathan Erdman, Colonel

The following report covers the period July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024, (FY2023) for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Law Enforcement Division.



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 114 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

Last year, our training challenges were primarily due to the limited availability of CLEET-accredited academies, which hindered the timely enrollment of new hires. However, we have made substantial strides in overcoming these obstacles by collaborating with the Department of Corrections. Our prospective game wardens will now participate in a 16-week paramilitary CLEET-accredited basic training academy. Additionally, we have been granted complimentary access to their lodging facilities for our 10-week Game Warden Academy. Consequently, we will commence our Game Warden Academy in Oklahoma City, thereby optimizing the use of these resources. Here are a few key points to highlight regarding this new partnership and training setup:

New Partnership

Collaborating with the Department of Corrections allows for a more efficient training process for our new hires, ensuring they receive the necessary CLEET accreditation in a timely manner.

Cost-Effective Lodging

Utilizing the free lodging facilities offered by the Department of Corrections during your 10-week Game Warden Academy will help reduce costs and streamline the training process.

Location Change

Moving the Game Warden Academy to Oklahoma City from Camp Gruber in Braggs, Oklahoma will likely enhance accessibility for recruits and improve logistical arrangements.

Improved Training Experience

This new arrangement not only addresses previous limitations but also fosters a collaborative environment that can enhance the overall training experience for new hires.

Overall, this partnership seems to be a strategic move that will benefit our training program and help ensure that new Game Wardens are well-prepared for their responsibilities.

FUNDING AND STAFFING ISSUES

The recent legislative session proved to be a tumultuous period, marked notably by the passage of the first license fee increase bill in over 23 years. Despite extensive lobbying efforts by the Game Warden Association aimed at securing appropriations for wardens' compensation, legislators instead prioritized the license bill, which is projected to generate approximately \$10 million in additional revenue. Regrettably, these funds were not allocated to implement the necessary raises for wardens; rather, the Department opted for an across-the-board 16% salary increase for all employees, leaving specific needs unaddressed.

In conjunction with this, the additional failure of a legislative bill aimed at reinstating a pension system for game wardens has precipitated a concerning trend within the department, resulting in multiple resignations. To date, we have experienced a 7% reduction in our field staff in 2024, with additional departures anticipated as numerous employees reportedly seek employment opportunities elsewhere. This situation underscores the urgent need to address the concerns of our workforce to prevent further attrition and ensure the effective management of our natural resources.

On another note, in May 2024, we proudly concluded our fourth Game Warden Academy, graduating five prospective game wardens (PGWs) after an intensive ten-week program. The curriculum featured enhanced

instruction in essential areas aimed at improving operational effectiveness, including the Law Block, Wildlife Enforcement Techniques, Advanced Trailer and Watercraft Acclimation Training, Defensive Tactics, and Simunitions. Additionally, new classes were introduced, covering Oklahoma Trespass Laws, First Aid Certification, and a refresher course in Standardized Field Sobriety Testing (SFST). Looking ahead, we are set to launch the next Game Warden Academy in February 2025, necessitating the hiring of over ten new game wardens to fill vacancies primarily arising from resignations.

Finally, we also acquired a fleet of 20 Ford four-wheel drive pickups and one Durango, each equipped with essential features such as LED light bars, locking double gun racks, front-end leveling kits, tinted windows, and grill guards. Additionally, we ordered 120 new Sig M400 rifles to bolster our capabilities.

MAJOR CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT TRENDS

The establishment of an Investigative Team dedicated to the commercial trade of reptiles and amphibians marks a significant response to the burgeoning issues within this industry in Oklahoma. Given the state's relatively lenient exotic animal laws, the industry has attracted criminal elements exploiting these regulatory gaps. Our newly formed team recognizes the necessity for enhanced training and education to effectively navigate this complex landscape. Currently, members are engaged in undercover operations at herpetological exhibitions, aiming to familiarize themselves with key stakeholders and deepen their understanding of the trade's dynamics.

UNIQUE CROSS-BOUNDARY OR COOPERATIVE ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

Investigator Long, our new Wildlife Investigative Specialist, has made significant contributions while serving as a joint task force officer with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Her pivotal role in the apprehension of individuals responsible for the unlawful killing of multiple whooping cranes last year garnered her the prestigious International Wildlife Crimestoppers Game Warden of the Year award at the IWC annual conference in Clearwater Beach, Florida, in June. Investigator Long's steadfast dedication to her responsibilities has not only produced notable results but has also fostered strong relationships that facilitate successful convictions. This has led to the expansion of the task force officer position across various agencies in the United States. The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation proudly recognizes Investigator Long's commitment and exemplary service as a steward of wildlife law enforcement.

NEW INNOVATIONS IN CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT

We are pleased to announce our recent subscription to PowerDMS and PowerReady. PowerDMS will streamline our management of procedures, facilitating the tracking of edits and warden accountability. Its functionalities include document assignment for signature, ensuring compliance through testing, and managing training records, certificates, and deadline reminders. Additionally, it will serve as a repository for online documents and personnel information for game wardens.

PowerReady, previously known as PowerFTO, will enhance our digital field training officer programs and employee evaluations, while also supporting career development training. Since the introduction of this platform for our latest recruit class in May, it has proven to be an invaluable resource for training and documentation.

STATE, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL ISSUES; LEGISLATION; AND 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 2023-2024 include the following:

- There are no fishing regulation changes for 2023/2024 fishing.

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:

- Extend squirrel season through Feb. 28
- Decrease the state hunter education course from eight hours to six
- Extend the closing time to one-half hour after official sunset on shooting ranges at ODWC managed properties
- Establish archery range rules for ODWC shooting ranges with archery facilities
- Open Holiday Antlerless Gun Season on Broken Bow WMA, Honobia WMA, Gains Creek WMA, Ouchita WMA — McCurtain & Tiak units, Three Rivers WMA

COST-SAVING INITIATIVES

To streamline operational efficiency and reduce unnecessary expenditures, we have reclassified new hires to designate the academy address as their official duty station. This adjustment eliminates the necessity for per diem payments during their training at the game warden academy. Additionally, we encourage officers to minimize driving during non-active periods, thereby promoting responsible resource management.

OTHER SPECIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ISSUES

The five recognized tribes of Oklahoma have reached a significant agreement to honor each other's citizenships for the purposes of hunting and fishing within their respective treaty lands. This accord was established independently of the state government, raising uncertainties regarding its implications for license sales and law enforcement efforts. As the details of this arrangement unfold, the potential impact on regulatory practices and intergovernmental relations remains to be seen.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Chisolm Frampton, Colonel

LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION MISSION

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

The following officers received promotions:

Region 1

- L/Cpl. John McCraw was promoted to Administrative Lieutenant.
- PFC Dillon Price was promoted to 1st Sergeant of Unit C.

Region 2

- 1st Sergeant Jason Plemmons was promoted to Administrative Lieutenant.
- L/Cpl. Jeff Vissage was promoted to 1st Sergeant of Unit A.
- L/Cpl. Brian Urquhart was promoted to 1st Sergeant of Unit E.

Region 3

- 1st Sergeant Eddie Lee was promoted to Administrative Lieutenant.
- L/Cpl. Kevin Collins was promoted to 1st Sergeant of Unit F.

Region 4

- LT Dennetta Dawson was promoted to Captain.
- 1st Sergeant Gregg Brown was promoted to Administrative Lieutenant.
- L/Cpl. Jason Dozier was promoted to 1st Sergeant of Unit B.

Staff Operations

- 1st Sergeant Jason Smith was promoted to Lieutenant over Body Worn Cameras/SmartCOP.
- SSGT Phillip Robertson was promoted to Lieutenant over Law Enforcement Education.
- L/CPL Rodney Paulk was promoted to 1st Sergeant over the Governor's Protection Detail.

AWARDS

- Lieutenant Amy Staton, Lieutenant Raquel Salter, and Lieutenant Brady Branham completed the Certified Public Manager Course.
- Lieutenant Daniel Baker, 1st SGT Michale Davis, 1st SGT Daniel Bridges, 1st SGT Frank Jordan, 1st SGT Ron Hedden, 1st SGT Steven Terry, 1st Stephen Bryant, and 1st SGT Ben Duncan completed the FBI-LEEDA Trilogy Training.

DIVISION PURPOSE

"The mission of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources is to serve as the principal 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.

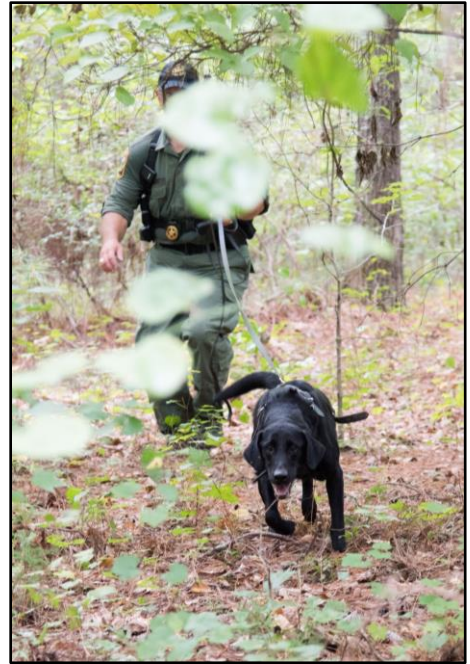


I am pleased to present the SEAFWA Annual Accomplishments Report for the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division for the year 2023-2024. As the Colonel of the division, I am proud to highlight the significant achievements of our officers across various areas of patrol and investigation. The following sections provide a comprehensive overview of our accomplishments during this reporting period:

PATROL & INVESTIGATION HOURS

Patrol Hours

- **Boating Hours:** Our dedicated officers spent a total of 43,891 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 30,394 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 3,218 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 8,946 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 3,025 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 4,901 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.



Investigation Hours

- **Hunting Accident Hours:** Our officers spent 1,258 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 5,269 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 6,724 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.
- **Fatality Investigations:** The Division investigated 23 boating fatalities and 2 hunting fatalities.

Enforcement Activities

- Officers wrote 9,030 summons and issued 25,215 written warnings, resulting in \$1,072,854 collected in fines. This demonstrates our commitment to enforcing regulations and ensuring compliance among the public.
- Federal Enforcement Actions: We issued 268 federal enforcement action reports for federal fisheries charges.
- Vessel Inspections: Officers conducted 58,234 vessel inspections, ensuring compliance with boating safety standards and regulations, and promoting responsible boating practices.
- Hunter and Fisherman Checks: Our officers conducted 61,355 hunter checks and 73,343 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 1,865 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 3,706 nuisance animal calls, aiding residents, and ensuring the well-being of both the public and wildlife.
- Warrants/Suspensions Served: Officers served 537 warrants and suspensions, ensuring compliance with legal requirements, and maintaining public safety.
- Depredation Permits: We issued 940 depredation permits, facilitating responsible management of wildlife-human interactions and minimizing negative impacts.
- Public Presentations: Our officers conducted 2,494 public presentations on hunting, fishing, and boating ethics, and safety, fostering public awareness and education about responsible outdoor practices.



TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

In 2015, the SC Legislature mandated that all agencies must have a Body Worn Camera program (SC Code Section 23-1-240). SCDNR first requested state funding and was exempted because we did not have money in the budget. In 2023, the SCDNR Law Enforcement Division received a grant through the Department of Public Safety. As a result, the Division purchased Body Worn Cameras through AXON for a full rollout to all officers. Officers were issued and trained on the use of Body Worn cameras during May of 2024 and were deployed full-time by the Memorial Day weekend. The benefits of Body Worn cameras include officer accountability, identifying training needs, and aid in the prosecution of cases. In addition to the use of Body Worn Cameras, officers are taking advantage of Evidence.com through AXON to store video footage, reports, and case files. This can then be electronically shared with other agencies or solicitor's offices for the prosecution of cases.

The Division has also continued with the implementation of the SmartCOP records management system. This 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.

The Division also continued with its full implementation of 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.

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 (now retired)



TRAINING

Thirteen new officers and six new commissioned managers were hired, and they were trained in firearms, ATV operation, defensive tactics, EVOC (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 290 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: Characteristics of Child Sex Abusers; Investigative Strategies for Child Abuse; and Watch Your Six: Mental Wellness Resiliency. In addition, BUI testing procedures/refresher training was conducted for commissioned personnel. All commissioned personnel were also required to gain certification on FEMA ICS-100 and FEMA ICS 700. Defensive tactics, firearm re-qualifications, public service hours and search warrant training were required training during this year's annual in-service training.

FUNDING AND STAFFING ISSUES

Following last year's incorporation of a newly adjusted pay package for Agency employees (wildlife officers were included), the pay package 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. This year each ranking officer was eligible for a step raise increase at 4.5 % and in addition were eligible for a 3.0 % cost of living raise, making this year's raise at 7.5%. The starting pay for a Wildlife Officer is now

\$61,488. Colonel Darren Rider after serving the Agency in law enforcement for over 38 years retired in September and has been replaced with Dale Grandstaff as the new Colonel for the Boating and Law Enforcement Division.

LAW ENFORCEMENT TRENDS

In July 2024, 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, Nashville Metro Police Department, Wilson County Sheriff's Office, United States Coast Guard, Smyrna Police Department, Tennessee Highway Safety Office, Tennessee District Attorney's General Conference, National Association of State Boating Law Administrators and Mothers Against Drunk Driving in the ODW campaign. These joint operations identified and removed impaired operators from Tennessee waters. ODW resulted in 173 officers participating; 3,580 total officer hours; 3,567 total vessels checked; 11,483 boaters contacted; 303 citations written, 315 warnings written, 33 BUI arrests and 58 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 Unit attended the Intelligence Summit this year.

INNOVATIONS IN CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT

The Law Enforcement Division continues to utilize Ready Ops, a platform where communication can be instant through text messaging. In addition, Ready Ops has the ability to create a form(s) for the capturing of any data that is needed, this captured data is real time and is very valuable to report to Director's, Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commissioners, 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-three-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 are 106 acres earmarked for the development of a new training academy.

STATE ISSUES/LEGISLATION AFFECTING LAW ENFORCEMENT

Likely to be some pullback of wetlands protections after the US Supreme Court Decision in Sackett v EPA (2023). Some TN Legislators have interpreted that to mean there should be NO STATE LEVEL protections and only the minimum EPA standards. Concern is for wetlands that don't have that intersect with federally navigable watersheds. Summer study on the issue and likely to be a big political issue in 2025.

Legislation from our NGO partners that requires that appointees to the fish and wildlife commission participate in activities regulated by the commission; requires the commission and wildlife resource agency to encourage hunting, angling, and trapping as preferred methods of wildlife management and conservation within Tennessee.

Restrictions on Eminent Domain: excludes recreational facilities, recreational purposes, and parks from the definition of "public use" as it applies to eminent domain.

Coyote and Bobcat only night-time seasons were established and approved by the Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commission.

SPECIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ISSUES

The opinion from the oral argument board regarding 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 has been submitted, resulting in:

- The statute that the Director may go upon lands without a warrant was upheld. We lost as the statute was applied to the plaintiff.
- Concerns that arose in the case are that "possessions" appears to be expanded beyond the traditional curtilage of a home such as there may not be much "wild and waste" lands in Tennessee any longer.
- Creates challenges relative to game protection.
- Legal Team is working with the Attorney General's Office for guidance and standards for staff and their interactions.

TEXAS

Chad Jones, Colonel (now retired)



TEXAS GAME WARDEN TRAINING CENTER UPDATES (TRAINING ISSUES)

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Law Enforcement (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 LE Division's Texas Game Warden Training Center (GWTC) Staff:

- The 66th Texas Game Warden Cadet class of 29 Game Wardens and 13 State Park Police Officers graduated on May 31, 2024. (The class began on October 1, 2023, with 35 Game Wardens and 16 State Park Police Officers.)
- The 66th cadet class completed the new state mandated active shooter training for all Basic Peace Officer Course (BPOC) providers to teach the ALERRT Level I -16hr.
- GWTC staff will have hosted multiple ALERRT LEVEL I – Train the Trainer courses by the end of the Summer 2024 and will roll out this training to all officers to meet the new state in-service mandate.
- The 66th cadet class took part in multiple expanded static scenarios training. These scenarios are set up with no role players and involve cadets going through different types of camp checks that are a test in observational skills and comprehension of the application of laws based only on what they can see in front of them. This allows the cadets to familiarize themselves with those camp checks and situations in preparation for doing camp checks with role players.
- The GWTC hosted an academy open house for all potential applicants and their families. This event was led by the recruiting section and allows potential applicants, and their families, to tour the facility and see what life looks like for cadets. This allows them the ability to engage with training staff and field officers and get answers to any questions they have.
- The 67th cadet class has been selected and will start with 36 Game Warden and 14 State Park Police Officers. The class will start October 1st of 2024.

LAW ENFORCEMENT STAFFING

Staffing Issues – We continue to encounter staffing issues with very specific positions within the Law Enforcement Division to include police communication officers (dispatchers) and aircraft pilots.

- The issues with staffing dispatchers are a combination of obtaining quality applicants due to salary, work schedule, shift times, and not having the flexibility to work from home. Additionally, applicants that are selected rarely make it through the required background investigation.
- Solutions include adding position classifications to increase salary and position steps. Identifying alternate communication centers to increase the applicant pool in other markets besides Austin.
 - Issues with staffing pilots is primarily due to the competition from commercial opportunities that offer better pay and schedules.
 - Solutions include adjusting minimum qualifications and establishing an internal program to train pilots. We recently selected an internal candidate to train as a pilot. The benefit is having a game warden who has already completed the training academy and served as an officer although training will take significant time and increase budgetary requirements for aviation.

Game warden applicant numbers have stayed consistent over the past two hiring processes between 700-800 applicants. Having a diverse pool of quality applicants continues to be a priority within our recruiting program to include the Career Development Program.

- The Career Development Program (CDP) is designed to increase opportunities for prospective applicants to see what we do firsthand and assist with recruitment and diversity measures. The CDP is a structured ride along program for interested college students and applicants to tag along with a field officer and see them interact in their daily duties with the public. This program has an electronic evaluation that is completed at the end of every ride along.

MAJOR CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT TRENDS

HB 3065 relating to the taking of wildlife by an employee of the Parks and Wildlife Department or by a person, or agent of the person, on the person's property.

- Provides exception to applicability of various statutes related to taking of wildlife for disease management/health purposes from public roadways and discharge of firearms from public roadways for authorized employees of the department (including biologists).
- Grants TPWD ability to authorize landowners/agents to take wildlife for disease diagnosis/management purposes irrespective of seasons/lawful means, etc.

Senate Bill 1236 – Prohibiting The Use of Certain Weapons In Or On The Bed Or Bank Of A Navigable Stream or River.

- Prohibit the discharge of firearms (other than shotgun with shot only) and archery equipment (exempts bow-fishing equipment) in or on the bed or bank of all navigable rivers and streams.
- A person who violates this statute commits an offense of a Class C PWC misdemeanor.

Statewide Changes to Spotted Seatrout Regulations to take effect March 26. The below changes to the regulations for spotted seatrout took effect on March 26 at 12:01 AM. The new statewide regulations are as follows:

- Three fish daily bag limit per angler.
- A minimum size of 15 inches and a maximum size limit of 20 inches.
- One oversized trout greater than 30 inches allowed as part of daily bag limit.

Additional Statewide Changes to Spotted Seatrout Regulations to be proposed at the March Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission Meeting

- TPWD staff will also be going back to the commission this week to propose additional changes relating to the harvesting of oversized spotted seatrout greater than 30 inches. The proposed change, which, if adopted would remove the allowance of fish over 30 inches or greater to be retained as part of the daily bag limit until a tag system is implemented in the next license year, beginning Sept. 1, 2024.

BORDER OPERATIONS

- Expanded Point of Entry (POE) operations across regions including the entire US/Mexico border. These operations include cooperative partnerships with USFW Inspectors, Border Patrol and Homeland Security. The operations focus on resources illegally being imported or exported to include commercial exploitation of aquatic products, pet trade, live animals, and animal parts.
- The TPWD LE Division has been involved full time in Operation Lone Star, which is a Governor requested border operation since Jan. 6, 2022. Our primary focus is marine patrols and public safety.
- Partner agencies include multiple state, federal, and local partners, to include Game Wardens from other states.

TPWD Border Enforcement initiative utilizes two strategies.

1. A Border/Coastal County wide enforcement approach that utilizes 209 Texas Game Wardens stationed fulltime along the US/Mexico Border Counties and Coastal Counties that perform the TPWD mission while considering border driven criminal activity and intelligence, to include Texas Coastal Waters. They also serve as a statewide law enforcement force multiplier during border events.
2. Operation Lonestar consists of approximately 30-60 Game Wardens pulled from around the state to perform a 9-day deployment in the Rio Grande Valley to maintain state water security 24/7 along an approximate 35-mile stretch of the Rio Grande. Personnel also serve as a quick response force as requested by our state and federal partners.

Texas Game Warden Operational Strategy

- Texas Game Wardens in conjunction with The Department of Public Safety, Texas Military Forces and U.S. Border Patrol are conducting a strategic operational surge in and around the McAllen and La Joya areas along the Rio Grande River. Efforts are marine based, and focused on the disruption, deterrence, and interdiction of Transnational Criminal Organizations, Drug trafficking Organizations and Human Smugglers.

Intelligence Driven Purpose

- The approximately 35 mile stretch of Rio Grande River has historically been an area that Transnational Criminal Organizations have utilized for its ability to traffic large quantities of people and contraband. The deeper water combined with easy vehicular access on both sides of the river provides a platform for criminal activity. In addition, the ability to have concealed vehicle access on the US side and quickly move people and contraband to nearby stash houses or within the City of McAllen has identified the need to disrupt, dismantle and deter Transnational Criminal Organizations, Drug trafficking Organizations and Human Smugglers from utilizing this stretch of river. Deterring criminal activity in this area moves the activity to areas that put law enforcement at a greater and safer advantage to apprehend the criminal element.

Texas Game Warden Operation/Enforcement Action

- TPWD strategically utilizes a multilayer approach to include 24hr Marine patrols, a small tactical team of land-based units that flank marine units, K-9 and UAS to deter and apprehend criminals utilizing the

approximate 35 mile stretch of the Rio Grande River. Transnational Criminal Organizations, Drug trafficking Organizations and Human Smugglers are constantly testing the enforcement infrastructure using scouts, drones, and decoys due to the high value of the area utilized for criminal activity. Game Wardens provide intelligence feedback to the unified command, refer UDAs to U.S. Border Patrol, deter criminal entry with high visibility patrol, seize narcotics, apprehend human smugglers, provide water safety, and serve as infrastructure on the water to deter criminal activity to areas that provide OLS law enforcement a distinct advantage.

NEW INNOVATIONS IN CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT

- The Division transitioned to Glock 45 9mm pistols equipped with the Acro red dot pistol mounted optic issued to all Game Wardens and Park Police Officers.
- The Department was awarded funding for two Grand Caravan fixed wing aircraft both fully equipped with high powered surveillance camera equipment and infrared systems.

VIRGINIA

John J. Cobb, Colonel



MESSAGE FROM THE COLONEL

This year, 2023, marks our 120th anniversary in this noble profession of being “Virginia’s Wildlife Protectors” since 1903. Our success has been nothing less than incredible. I remember, nearly 50 years ago, hunting with my father and being just thankful to see a deer hoof print or to catch a glimpse of a turkey in the distance. While many game species have greatly expanded, other species still need our focus and protection, often due to personal greed and commercialization.

Our public safety services have significantly increased over the years to include protecting our waterways. As we now connect more people to the outdoors, we are seen for our emergency response expertise by those in the woods and on the water. In just the last five years, our officers have been awarded 20 lifesaving medals and 3 meritorious service medals (risking the officer's life to save another). Our K9 Program is so well-respected that we trained West Virginia Natural Resources Police’s Inaugural K9 Program. Our specialized tracking team is exceptional and is often called upon by local jurisdictions to assist with search and rescue operations.

I generally do not spend much time looking back on initiatives successfully implemented and past accomplishments as I am more focused on the future (currently working on the implementation of the VCP Relevancy Plan). However, the purpose of the VCP 2023 Annual Report is to look at that specific year in retrospect, so here is a list gathered from our monthly Rollcall Newsletters:

- 1) Welcomed 28 recruits, our largest Basic Academy (12th), and in terms of diversity, this class had the greatest variety of work experiences that we have ever seen in one group.
- 2) Our K9 Team trained West Virginia Natural Resources Police’s Inaugural K9 Program.
- 3) Implement the new Outstanding Accomplishment Spot Recognition Program along with the 27 recipients for each one of those months since I have been promoted to Colonel.



- 4) Fifth Annual VCP Awards Ceremony combined with the Leadership Development Program Cohort 1 Graduation. An opportunity to formally recognize 40 officers and staff members.
- 5) Held Game Warden Experiences for trapping and waterfowl, focusing on traditional boots-on-the-ground techniques using hands-on approach on multiple days in the field.
- 6) Presented multiple sessions of the NASBLA Pursuit and Stop Course. These courses were held in partnership with the Port of Virginia and the US Coast Guard. We received the necessary funding for those courses through a Port Security Grant.
- 7) VCP had a prominent role in the Governor's Staff Event at Pocahontas State Park with a Conservation Police booth attended by the Governor and First Lady, including the secretaries of Natural & Historic Resources and Public Safety & Homeland Security
- 8) With the 12th Basic Class Graduation, 22 new officers headed to the field to assist with staffing concerns and we also completed the recruitment for the 13th class of 25 recruits.
- 9) Due to the outstanding work of the Special Operation Unit, specifically the covert agents, a Board Resolution was passed that directs the Agency to take specific steps to combat the illegal trade of reptiles and amphibians. One of the main deliverables of this resolution is the establishment of four New Regional Special Agent Investigator Positions.
- 10) Research and development was completed on the VCP Career Progression Program (CPP) which led to the full launch to include all sworn officers (Supervisors and Managers).
- 11) Transitioned from the establishment of the North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation (NAWLEA) Program to the operational stage of this vital national initiative, leading us to improved quality public service, networking, collaboration, and credibility.
- 12) Researched, developed, and implemented the VCP Relevancy Plan (see Overview)

As a vital part of this Public Safety Investment, with the support of our Executive Director and DWR Board, we are moving forward with the W3 (Woods*Wildlife*Water) DWR Training & Educational Center. This initiative began with selecting a W3 Project Manager who is committed to this complex ideal, which includes research, planning and development, marketing, fundraising (i.e., establishing public / private partnerships), etc.

You will certainly see some pictures and stories in this report that highlight those 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. As an organization that desires to be an "Employer of Choice", we spent this year wisely implementing new proactive initiatives and advocating for our dedicated and passionate employees.

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.



I will end my message and let this significant accomplishment of organizational team excellence, recognized on the national level, that started in 2018 at the Virginia State Capitol, speak for itself.

The Office of Professional Standards (O.P.S.) Advisory Council had been established in 2018; our professional standards vision of Quality Public Service/Employer of Choice/Pursuit of Excellence along with an associated CREED, which is the benchmark of this council's work.

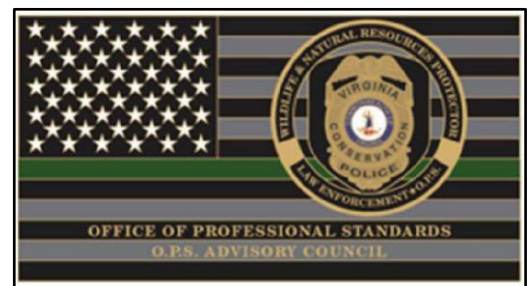
In the first five years, this council had seen 24 officers and staff at all levels within our statewide organization serve within this team. They have contributed directly to the research, development, and implementation of many comprehensive long-term team projects, including the Citizen Feedback System; Employee Suggestion Program with its 33 implemented group projects; VCP Recognition and Engagement Handbook; and Leadership Development Continuum.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) in 2023 at their 113th Annual Meeting held in Calgary, Alberta (Canada) recognized the O.P.S. Advisory Council, with the AFWA Conservation Law Enforcement Award for "outstanding national-level achievement in conservation law enforcement", which is their highest teamwork recognition award. Per the AFWA Press Release (dated October 3, 2023):

"The O.P.S. Advisory Council showcases remarkable dedication and significant contributions in enhancing the professionalism and advancement of conservation law enforcement in the Commonwealth of Virginia over the past five years. Through unwavering commitment and outstanding accomplishments of its membership and collaboration with officers and staff, the O.P.S. Advisory Council has exemplified the highest standards of excellence, making a lasting impact on the conservation and protection of our natural resources. The Virginia O.P.S. Advisory Council stands as a shining example of excellence in conservation law enforcement and embodies the very essence of this national-level recognition".

These proactive dedicated efforts of 24 team members over this five-year period, ultimately resulted in our first ever UNIT CITATION in 2024 for the Office of Professional Standards (O.P.S.) Advisory Council (This significant team honor will be featured in next year's annual report).

Colonel John J. Cobb, Chief of Law Enforcement





VCP RELEVANCY PLAN

Public Safety Investment



Purpose of VCP Relevancy Plan:

As we connect more people with the outdoors, the need for our specialized public safety services will only continue to grow statewide. Our situational report (other side) already shows some of the multiple challenges we are facing in staffing and meeting the needs of the public. This issue has been previously identified in the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) Fish and Wildlife Relevancy Roadmap (2019) under "Agency Capacity" and the associated barriers of lacking capacity (expertise, staffing, and resources) to serve the needs of broader constituencies. To be successful in having others value the outdoors, we will need to enhance our training and educational services.

Expertise = North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation NAWLEA

- o **VCP Quality Public Service:** Professional Standards (Governor's BEST IN CLASS)
- o Best practices, networking, collaboration, accountability, credibility, and public trust
- o For the insight to better forecast trends and find viable efficient solutions
- o Adopt programs and methods that are already working for other agencies

Staffing = Natural Resource Public Safety Response Services

- o **VCP Pursuit of Excellence:** As Protectors of Wildlife and Natural Resources and to respond effectively to those in the woods and on the water during their greatest time of need
- o **SNHR Objective 3:** Increase the outdoor experiences for all Virginians
- o Meet high increased demands for waterway usage, especially by **paddlecraft** users
- o Manage conflict among different outdoor user's groups to include private landowners.
- o Build upon our highly specialized skills and utilize these capabilities as first responders
- o Continue to offer training and partner with other first responders as a force multiplier
- o Expand upon our initiatives as **Ambassadors to Wildlife and Natural Resources**

Resources = Woods*Wildlife*Water "W3" Training and Educational Center

- o **VCP Employer of Choice:** Addressing "quality of life" police retention concerns
- o **SNHR Objective 4:** Recruitment/Retention of key state personnel capabilities
- o Developing Officers and Staff (Best Resource) to meet Challenges of Tomorrow
- o Utilize "Game Warden Experiences" to increase subject matter expertise
- o Build upon Leadership Development Continuum (LDC) for succession planning

VCP Relevancy Plan Activation (New General Funding Consistent Stream)

- o Need public safety general funding to directly address low officer staffing levels back toward their traditional numbers (request funding support for additional officers; up to 40 CPOs)
- o Allocate Officer Salary (\$51,000) and Benefits (49.1%) \$76,041 (total)+ Emergency Patrol Vehicle (\$60,000) and issued personal equipment (\$11,500); total of \$147,541 per officer

RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

Officer of the Year

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) announces that Conservation Police Master Officer William J. Harris is the department's 2023 Conservation Police Officer (CPO) of the Year.

Harris began his career with DWR in 2000 and during his 24-year tenure he's been proactive in seeking out and addressing illegal activities. This past year, he played a crucial role in locating homicide victims, spearheaded specialized training on side-scan sonar, initiated and led various projects to improve boating safety, and enhanced environmental protection in his area.

Master Officer Harris exemplifies excellence and dedication in his role within the agency, particularly in promoting teamwork and innovation as well as displaying a positive attitude," said Colonel John J. Cobb. "He is a mentor and leader within the agency, providing expert guidance and assistance to his colleagues. He is also a huge proponent of outreach, organizing numerous programs and events to benefit the public.

In addition to receiving the CPO of the Year Award, Master Office Harris, who's assigned area includes Grayson County, has been selected as the recipient of the 2024 North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association "Officer of the Year" Award. This award is given annually to the top Natural Resource Enforcement Officer and is evaluated based on law enforcement achievements, teamwork and public outreach, excellence and innovation, attitude, and leadership.



Boating Officer of the Year (NASBLA)

Conservation Police Officer First Class Adam Roberts has earned the Boating Officer of the Year award, reflecting his invaluable contributions, unwavering commitment to public service, and exceptional professionalism. Known for his positive attitude and dedication to teamwork, CPO Roberts epitomizes the ideal conservation police officer.

CPO Roberts's dedication was highlighted when he responded promptly to a fatal boating incident on Smith Mountain Lake, despite being off duty. His swift action in securing evidence and locating the victim's next of kin showcased his reliability and sense of duty.

His support of the agency's mission is evident through his work with the Special Operations Unit. He assisted in executing a search warrant on an unauthorized boat dealership, leading to charges against the owner, and played a key role in recovering a stolen jet ski, resulting in multiple felony charges against the suspect. As a Field Training Officer, he dedicated significant time during the busy boating season to prepare a new officer for success.

CPO Roberts is deeply involved in public outreach, actively promoting boating safety. He participated in 15 boating-related events, including the Smith Mountain Lake Association Water Safety Day, where he coordinated the Conservation Police Officer display. He also led a three-part kayaking exposition, training elementary children to safely operate paddle craft and accompanying them on a field trip to utilize their new skills.



Additionally, he coordinated the boating safety component at National Night Out, giving children the opportunity to board a patrol boat, and transformed a patrol boat into a float for a local parade.

During Operation Dry Water (ODY) weekend, CPO Roberts worked a total of 26 hours, inspected 30 vessels, contacted 114 boaters, and detected 12 violations, including one OUI arrest. His extraordinary efforts earned him the 2023 Operation Dry Water Officer of the Year award.

CPO Roberts's extraordinary efforts, dedication to public service, and commitment to boating safety have rightfully earned him the Boating Officer of the Year award. His contributions have not only enhanced the safety of Virginia's waterways but have also fostered a greater sense of community and public trust in the Department of Wildlife Resources.

Colonel's Leadership Award



The purpose of the Colonel's Leadership Award is to formally recognize those officers and staff members that set the standard regarding being a leader within the Law Enforcement Division. Furthermore, the Colonel has an opportunity each year to highlight an employee within the division who is demonstrating a best practices management model through their outstanding actions and deeds per the criteria identified below in our Professional Standards CREED. The recipient of the 2023 Colonel's Leadership Award is First Sgt. Steve Ferguson.



O.P.S. Professionalism Decree (Class of 2023)



The purpose of the O.P.S. Professionalism Decree (Innovation Award) is to establish a tradition to formally recognize those Sworn Officers and DWR Law Enforcement Staff who have gone above and beyond to promote the professionalism of Virginia Conservation Police through their commitment and dedication to this public service profession.



Master Officer Owen Heine



Master Officer Ray Solomen

Learn More By Reviewing the [2023 The Virginia Conservation Police Annual Report](#).

WEST VIRGINIA

Bobby L. Cales, Colonel

Chief, WV DNR Law Enforcement



OFFICER TRAINING

The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Section had an extremely extensive training year during FY24.

- The FY24 Quarter one training consisted of Body Worn Camera (BWC) Integration for all field personnel and Body Worn Camera (BWC) Integration for Supervisors. Quarter two firearms training was a review on Incapacitation Drills, the third Quarter Defensive Tactics training consisted of Water Survivability Tactics, and the fourth quarter training was a new patrol rifle transition course.
- During the statewide training/meeting held at Pipestem State Park, Natural Resources Police Officers received a block of instruction on De-escalation Techniques and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Color of Law Training.
- FY24, three West Virginia DNR Law Enforcement personnel attended the North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation (NAWLEA) Conference, and the section continues in the accreditation process.
- The WV Division of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Section sponsored a statewide PTSD and Suicide Prevention Seminar in Charleston, West Virginia. This training was well attended by numerous law enforcement agencies throughout West Virginia.
- FY24, WV DNR Law Enforcement command staff attended the West Virginia Law Enforcement Summit in Charleston, West Virginia. Six NRPOs completed the Instructor Development Course, and 10 Swift Water Rescue Instructors were IDW/ICE certified.
- Seven newly sworn Natural Resources Police Officers attended the mandatory eight (8) hour Seated Battery Transition Course for BUI enforcement.
- FY24, three NRPOs attended Criminal Investigations Using Cellular Devices training, six NRPOs completed training on Covert Online Investigations Using Online Undercover Profiles, and two NRP Sergeants completed Level One and Level Two Comprehensive Boating Incident Investigations, Analysis, and Reconstruction course. Six District Lieutenants received training on Evidence Room Basics and Unclaimed Property Reporting.
- FY24, 21 NRPOs completed a Glock Armorers Recertification course, 22 NRPOs completed a Remington 870 Armorers Course, and one NRP Sergeant was certified as a Law Enforcement Pistol Instructor.
- FY24, two NRPO District Captains attended the International Wildlife Crime Stoppers Conference, and six NRPOs attended the FBI National Academy Training Conference.
- During this training year, two NRPOs attended the Southeastern States Investigator's Conference, and four NRPO K9 handlers attended the West Virginia Police K9 Association Conference and two Professional Standards Unit NRPOs completed training on Body Worn Camera (BWC) Video Analysis for Internal Affairs.
- Supervisory In-Service in FY24 consisted of FBI UCR / LEPC and National Use of Force Meeting, technical sessions during national conferences, and various virtual trainings approved by West Virginia Law Enforcement Training Subcommittee.
- FY24, two NRP Sergeants became certified ALERRT (Exterior Response to Active Shooter) instructors, and three WV DNR LE Dive Team members completed Aquatic Investigations training.

- FY24, the WV DNR Law Enforcement Section developed and implemented the WV Natural Resources Police Dive Team. The ten-member statewide dive team will be a valued asset during the investigation of boating incidents, missing persons, and evidence recovery in an aquatic environment.
- The LE Section conducted tryouts for ten positions, and in October of 2023, the West Virginia Natural Resources Police partnered with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Law enforcement Divisions' Aquatic Investigations and Recovery Team. The South Carolina team of game warden divers have been in existence since 1977 and have assisted in the training of many law enforcement divers. With the assistance of the SC DNR Dive Team, West Virginia Natural Resources Police Officers completed a two-week course of basic scuba certification that included: equipment familiarization, open water training, and search methods and patterns. Currently, the West Virginia NRPO Dive Team has completed over 100 hours of training on a variety of methods, skills, and equipment, after the initial certification in South Carolina. The ten NRPO Dive Team members are stationed throughout the state to enhance our response capabilities and assist local and state agencies alike with any necessary needs for their investigations. It is a source of pride for our agency to be able to offer this service to the citizens of the State of West Virginia.
- 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 112 Natural Resources Police Officers (NRPO) actively working. During FY2024, 1 officer retired with 34 years of service, and 10 officers separated from service, 9 new officers were hired, and 10 officers were promoted. 2 civilian support personnel resigned, and 1 civilian support personnel was hired.

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. 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. 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 **National Safe Boating Week**, 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. 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 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.

The West Virginia DNR Law Enforcement Section increased BUI patrols on West Virginia waters from July 1, 2023, to September 29, 2023. These patrols resulted in 10 BUI arrests, and 504 other citations/warnings.

Natural Resources Police Officers participated in the nationwide program *Operation Dry Water* from July 1, 2023, to July 3, 2023, to reduce alcohol-related boating incidents. This operation resulted in 130 citations/warnings, and 2 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 reduce in-state travel.

During FY2024 we received 7 Police Tahoe's, 3 Police Trucks, and a Dive Team Van.

New Rifles were purchased for the entire section. New BDU uniforms purchased and distributed to officers. The Dive Team received a van, support gear to include surface to diver communications and dry suits. The Swiftwater team purchased zodiac style boats. Three Jet drive boats were purchased for district use. A Flir Drone was purchased. 2 Star Link units were purchased and positioned around the state for emergency response needs after communication failures during call outages.

WV DNR Law Enforcement Section is in the process of becoming an accredited agency with the North American Wildlife Enforcement Accreditation (NAWLEA). We are working on evidence vaults being fortified at each district.

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

LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

HB 4575, HB 4825, SB 580 "Protection of Property from Warrantless Searches Act"

These bills would have abolished the open fields doctrine in WV and required a search warrant to enter private property. These bills made it to the committees on the House and Senate sides but were killed after considerable effort from Law Enforcement groups. Expect it, or similar bill, to run again next year.

SB606

Relating to Natural Resources Police Officer Retirement System

Made changes permitting the employer contribution to be set by the board; clarifying payment upon death of member with less than 10 years of contributing service; and clarifying surviving spouse benefits when the member dies from duty related or non-duty related cause.

DNR Rules

- 58CSR67 – Updated to allow for the sale of nonresident lifetime license
- 58CSR11,12, and 23 – Updated to reflect changes in code reference the Intermediate Court of Appeals language.

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE SOUTHEAST REGION OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Region is pleased to present the FY 2024 annual report. This report reflects our commitment and efforts to bring justice to those who profit from the trafficking of wildlife; protecting our nation from wildlife-related diseases and injurious species by working in partnership with tribal, local, state, federal and international counterparts, and landscape conservation. This represents our dedication to facilitating the legal wildlife trade; highlights our operational performance as well as our progress toward achieving the goals we established in our Strategic Plan; as well as educating the public about the importance of our mission.

Our Strategic Goals 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 the legal trade
- Enhance management accountability

Overall, we are able to provide some statistics that reflect our hard work during this reporting period.

- New cases opened in FY 2024: 1,911
- Total # of cases currently active: 1,786

Wildlife inspection areas:

- Total Shipments: 40,769
- Declared Value: \$533,490,499
- Total # of inspections: 5,103 (to include full/partial inspections)
- Total seizures: 492

FY2024 ADJUDICATION STATISTICS – SOUTHEAST REGION

Criminal Fines/Penalties						
Fines Imposed	Fines Suspended	Restitution	Forfeiture of Collateral	Criminal Forfeiture	Property Forfeited	Other Directed Sanctions
\$ 232,865	\$ 0.00	\$ 439,067	\$ 77,870	\$ 0.00	\$ 17,780	\$ 11,930

Civil Penalties			
Property Forfeited	Negotiated Other Payments	Negotiated Agreement	Civil Penalty Assessments
\$ 8,864	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 18,600

Sentencing Summary						
Jail (months)	Suspended (months)	Probation (months)	Home Confinement (months)	Halfway House (months)	Community Service (hours)	Suspension/Revocation of Privileges (months)
82	5	1,026	0	0	550	624

FY2024 VIOLATIONS 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	7	2	9	Marine Mammal Act	MMA	17	6	23
Airborne Hunting Act	ABH	1	0	1	Migratory Bird / Stamp Act	MHS	3	1	4
Archeological Resources	ARA	0	2	2	Migratory Bird Treaty Act	MBT	66	53	119
Conspiracy	CON	2	18	20	National Wildlife Refuge	WRF	0	0	0
Document Smuggling	SFD	0	2	2	Obstruction Of Justice	OBJ	0	4	4
Eagle Protection Act	EPA	10	11	21	Other Federal Laws	FED	8	15	23
Endangered Species Act	ESA	1,584	451	2,035	Permit / License	PLI	0	0	0
False Statements	FSE	0	6	6	Rhino Tiger Act	RTA	1	2	3
FIFRA*	FIF	0	0	0	Smuggling	SMG	30	45	75
Foreign Laws	FOR	3	3	6	State Law	STL	4	25	29
Lacey Act	LAC	588	193	781	Undefined	XXX	2	0	2
Lacey Act - Wildlife	LAW	100	51	151	Wild Bird Conservation Act	WBA	41	12	23
Major Crime	MJC	0	0	0	Total Acts for all cases		2,468	902	3,370

*Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act

FY2024 PORT STATISTICS – SOUTHEAST REGION

Port of Entry	Total Shipments	Total Species	Avg. Number of Species per Shipment	Total Declared Value	Number of Inspections (by shipment)	Total Number of Seizures (by shipment)
AT - Atlanta	3,925	11,772	3	\$44,836,530	474	39
CR - Charleston	126	189	2	\$3,026,940	0	0
ER - Erlanger	1,187	2,088	2	\$3,874,414	229	75
FE - Fernandina Beach	1	1	1	\$596	0	0
FL - Fort Lauderdale	112	143	1	\$1,180,180	64	61
JX - Jacksonville	60	69	1	\$5,363,839	3	2
LO - Louisville	16,060	25,852	2	\$53,162,495	845	32
MB - Mobile	11	14	1	\$316,598	0	0
ME - Memphis	8,492	14,207	2	\$57,747,004	2,607	27
MI - Miami, FL	8,453	26,190	3	\$214,837,038	431	156
NO - New Orleans	385	797	2	\$101,105,489	224	3
OR - Orlando	152	717	5	\$527,509	44	14
PE - Port Everglades	281	473	2	\$7,641,837	1	1
SA - Savannah	606	1,615	3	\$18,943,888	0	0
SJ - San Juan	255	382	2	\$15,991,526	2	2
TP - Tampa	519	1,615	3	\$4,701,409	94	0
WI - Wilmington	2	2	1	\$15,431	0	0
WP - West Palm Beach	140	248	2	\$217,766	85	81
Total	40,769			\$533,490,499	5,103	492

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

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) – Wildlife Confiscations Network Stakeholder Meeting
During FY2024, members of the AZA Wildlife Confiscations Network (WCN) in partnership with the OLE Atlanta, GA SAC Office introduced the Southern California Confiscations Network pilot program to stakeholders at the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta, GA and Zoo Miami in South Florida. The main purpose of this new initiative, led through a cooperative agreement by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and AZA, is to establish a coalition of reputable and trusted animal care facilities to create a coordinated response for the care and welfare of confiscated wildlife at US ports of entry.



Credit: Amanda Fischer, AZA Wildlife Confiscations Coordinator

Royal Foundation - United for Wildlife – Combatting the Illegal Wildlife Trade in the Americas

Combatting the Illegal Wildlife Trade in the Americas brought together two United for Wildlife Chapters to develop solutions to the illegal wildlife trafficking, addressing the impact across the two regions. This event took place in South Florida and brought together key stakeholders from the financial and transport sectors, NGOs, law enforcement and government. It built on the efforts of both United for Wildlife’s North America and Latin America and Caribbean Chapters, rolling out an integrated approach across multiple sectors, sharing best practices in combatting illegal wildlife trafficking, while also establishing new partnerships to assist future efforts in the region.



Credit: USFWS



INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

Department of Interior – International Technical Assistance Program (DOI-ITAP) – *Costa Rica*

As part of an ongoing collaboration with the Department’s ITAP mission in Central America, Supervisory Wildlife Inspector (SWI) Sylvia Gaudio and Acting Regional SWI Sarita Valentin instructed a group of government officials in Puntarenas, Costa Rica. The workshop focused on the implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and was supported by the Secretariat’s legal team member, Juan Carlos Vazquez Murillo.



Credit: USFWS

International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) – *Wildlife Border Inspection Training Program*

Field Senior Wildlife Inspector Carlos Pages from the Port of Miami served as Team Leader at the July 2024 ILEA mission to Botswana for the “Wildlife Border Inspection Training Program” (WBITP). The purpose of this training

is to strengthen global law enforcement relationships through the sharing of information related to the inspection of wildlife trade to enhance the ability to combat worldwide illegal wildlife trafficking. The five-day curriculum focuses on inspection techniques, safety of officers, development of special operations, and the enforcement of international treaties and laws.



Credit: USFWS

ILEA – Wildlife Crime Scene Investigation

USFWS Special Agents spent a week in Gaborone, Botswana teaching "*Wildlife Crime Scene Investigation*" to members of the Botswanan wildlife law enforcement community. Students included prosecutors, intelligence officers, wildlife investigators, forensic officers, and anti-poaching operatives. The curriculum focused on crime scene processing, forensic techniques, and court preparation using current "best practices". The course covers crime scene management, photography, documentation, impression evidence, trace and biological evidence, wildlife poison evidence collection, firearms evidence, genetics evidence collection, latent print development, and evidence preservation and submissions.



Credit: USFWS



AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

US Department of Interior Valor Award Recipient

On May 7, 2024, Special Agent Israel Aledo, Bayamon, Puerto Rico Field Office, received the United States Department of Interior Valor Award for his actions in saving a small child from serious injury or death. While enjoying his day off at a remote beach in Puerto Rico, SA Aledo responded to the cries of help from a woman whose child was locked inside a vehicle as the outside temperatures reached above 95 degrees. SA Aledo broke the window of the car and cleared some of the glass of the window with his elbow, cutting his arm in the process. SA Aledo removed the child from the car and waited with the mother until paramedics arrived on the scene.



Credit: USFWS

OLE Puerto Rico Field Office – Honoring a Loyal Partner in Service



Credit: USFWS

July of 2024 marked the retirement of Samm, and we thank him for his years of dedication and unyielding loyalty that have made the OLE Puerto Rico Canine Team an invaluable asset to our force. Together with Wildlife Inspector/Canine Javier Pacheco, Samm tirelessly assisted the Service's mission in combatting illegal wildlife trafficking in Puerto Rico and the Southeast Region. In August, Samm moved into his new home where he will enjoy a well-deserved rest and the joys of retirement with his former work partner and now "dog dad", Javier. Congratulations!

WILDLIFE INSPECTION PROGRAM SIGNIFICANT SEIZURES

OLE Port of Cincinnati, OH/Erlanger, KY – Live Smuggled Tarantulas

In February of 2024, with assistance from U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Wildlife Inspectors at the DHL Global Hub in Cincinnati, OH intercepted and seized 12 live Red-knee tarantulas (*Brachypelma sp.* – CITES App II) that were smuggled inside a M&M toy. The shipment was transiting the U.S. from Mexico to Argentina. Inspectors transferred the tarantulas to the Cincinnati Zoo and another facility for long-term care. Now that the property has been forfeited, WIs are in the initial stages of coordinating with OLE management and Cincinnati Zoo staff to create signage for the displayed tarantulas, which will be used to highlight wildlife trafficking to the zoo's estimated 1.7 million annual visitors.



Credit: USFWS

OLE Port of Cincinnati, OH/Erlanger, KY – Operation Red Tail

Throughout FY2024, Wildlife Inspectors at the DHL Global Hub in Cincinnati, OH conducted an operation to intercept undeclared African grey parrot (*Psittacus erithacus* – CITES App I listed and Wild Bird Conservation Act protected) tail feathers. Inspectors proactively targeted and seized a total of 3,011 related feathers in 6 commercial imports from Nigeria and Mexico.



Credit: USFWS

OLE Port of Cincinnati, OH/Erlanger, KY – Shredded Shark Fins

In October of 2023, Wildlife Inspectors at the DHL Global Hub in Cincinnati, OH proactively targeted and seized 55 lbs. of shredded shark fins in a shipment transiting the U.S. from Ecuador to Hong Kong. The shipment was falsely labeled as “dried fish maws sample” and in violation of CITES. The National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory used DNA and confirmed the presence of Smooth hammerhead sharks (*Sphyrna zygaena*), Bigeye threshers (*Alopias superciliosus*), and Shortfin makos (*Isurus oxyrinchus*).



Credit: USFWS

OLE Port of Cincinnati, OH/Erlanger, KY – Caiman Meat



Credit: USFWS

Throughout FY2024, Wildlife Inspectors at the DHL Global Hub in Cincinnati, OH conducted targeting to intercept commercial quantities of dried caiman meat (Caiman sp. – CITES App II listed) that were either unlawfully imported or transiting the U.S. The shipments, all exported from Panama, were typically falsely labeled as “fish maw” and each in violation of CITES. In total, WIs seized over 650 lbs. of caiman meat in 4 shipments, re-exported several other shipments, and collaborated with Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) authorities on a related in-transit, which was seized upon arrival into Canada by ECCC.

OLE Port of Miami, FL – Live Smuggled Amazon Basin Emerald Tree Boas

In October of 2023, Wildlife Inspectors discovered twenty (20) Amazon basin emerald tree boas (*Corallus batesii*) smuggled within a false bottom of a container while conducting a proactive inspection of an in-transit commercial shipment of amphibians and reptiles going from Suriname to Japan. Wildlife Inspectors seized the smuggled boas along with 141 live Suriname toads (*Pipa pipa*) and 3 Many-colored Bush anoles (*Polychrus marmoratus*). The seized wildlife was forfeited to the Service. The estimated value for the smuggled Emerald tree boas was \$60,000 USD. Total estimated value for all the seized wildlife was \$64,600 USD.



Credit: USFWS



OLE Port of Miami, FL – Seizure of Live Coral Shipments from Indonesia

In November of 2023, Wildlife Inspectors at the Port of Miami inspected and seized 3 shipments containing live corals imported from Indonesia after receiving a call from a broker who wanted to alert OLE of a company importing live coral shipments over the authorized quantities allowed by CITES. After the 3 inspections a total of 375 pieces of live corals and live rock were seized by the Service. A civil penalty was issued and paid by the importer on the amount of \$18,600 USD.



Credit: USFWS



OLE Port of Memphis, TN – Falsely Labeled Shipment of Fossils

In July of 2024, Wildlife Inspectors at the Port of Memphis, TN (FedEx Hub) inspected a shipment of fossils declared as "Handicrafts" and found falsely labeled non-fossilized raw, unworked Organ pipe coral (*Tubipora musica*) in the shipment. A carrier abandonment was performed seizing the entire shipment due to the importer violating FedEx Terms of Service by false declaration. USFWS was able to repurpose these items for educational purpose.

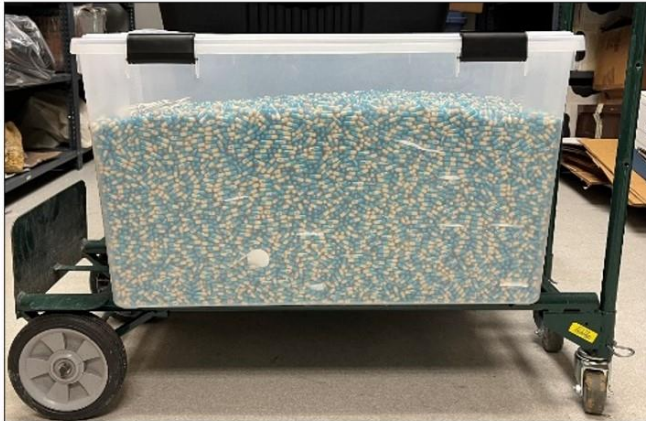


Credit: USFWS



OLE Port of Memphis, TN – Grey Shark Supplements

In February of 2024, Wildlife Inspectors at the Port of Memphis seized five shipments of one-hundred sixty bottles, containing Grey shark (*Carcharhinus* sp.) supplements. These shipments were in violation of ESA, CITES, and marking requirements. In July, Wildlife Inspectors seized an additional five-hundred and ten bottles of supplements. In total, the Port of Memphis pro-actively removed over 131,000 illegal medicinal pills from trade. Several additional large shipments were referred to FDA for law enforcement action.



Credit: USFWS



OLE Port of Louisville, KY – Babirusa Skulls Smuggling

In October of 2023, a personal shipment via United Parcel Service (UPS) described as “stone carving” was proactively inspected by Wildlife Inspectors at the Port of Louisville, KY and found to contain two (2) Babirusa skulls (*Babirusa babirusa*) (ESA: Endangered and CITES App I listed) imported from Indonesia. Babirusas have seen a decline due to habitat loss and illegal hunting as well as human-wildlife conflict. A week later, a second shipment declared as “accessories for home decoration” was intercepted by Wildlife Inspectors at the Port of Louisville, KY and found to contain one (1) Sulawesi crested macaque skull (*Macaca nigra* – CITES App II) and one (1) Babirusa (*Babirusa babirusa*) skull also from Indonesia via UPS.



Credit: USFWS



OLE Port of Louisville, KY – Sunda Clouded Leopard Skull Smuggling

In April of 2024, a personal shipment described as “accessories for home decoration” was proactively inspected by Wildlife Inspectors at the Port of Louisville and found to contain one (1) Sunda Clouded Leopard (*Neofelis diardi* – ESA: Endangered and CITES App I) from Indonesia via UPS. The Sunda clouded leopard was only identified to science in 2006, genetically separating the species from the mainland Clouded leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*). They are restricted to the islands of Borneo and Sumatra and are in decline due to habitat loss and poaching.



Credit: USFWS

OLE Port of Louisville, KY – Civil Penalty Assessment on Undeclared Imp/Exp Violations

Between February and August of 2023, EMINENT, INC. dba REVOLVE imported forty-one (41) shipments containing garments trimmed with Ostrich feathers (*Struthio camelus*), one (1) purse made with Cowry shells (*Cypraeidae sp.*), and seven (7) garments made with various shell buttons (*Mollusc sp.*) that had previously been exported from the US without declaration and in violation of the Endangered Species Act. Further investigation and a review of their five-year import/export history revealed that EMINENT had failed to file declarations for 29,910 shipments. On June 7, 2024, the Service entered a **\$3,155,505.00 USD** settlement agreement with Eminent, Inc. to address Revolve’s failure to comply with ESA’s requirements for the importation and exportation of 29,910 shipments.

SPECIAL AGENT PROGRAM SIGNIFICANT CASES

OLE Atlanta, GA RAC Office – Kansas Whitetail

Between November of 2023 and February of 2024, in the District of South Carolina, three Subjects were sentenced for wildlife trafficking offenses under the Lacey Act for their involvement in the interstate transportation of Mule deer and White-tailed deer taken, possessed, and sold in violation of Kansas law. Chad Seymore was sentenced to pay \$10,000 to the Lacey Act Reward Account, \$5,292 for restitution to the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) and serve three years of probation to include no hunting throughout the United States and a worldwide hunting ban. Sean Paschall was sentenced to pay \$ 5,000 to the Lacey Act Reward Account, \$ 3,000 for restitution to the KDWP and serve two years of probation to include no hunting throughout the United States and a worldwide hunting ban. Justin Lemaster was sentenced to pay \$ 1,200 to the Lacey Act Reward Account and serve one year of probation to include no hunting throughout the United States and a worldwide hunting ban.



Credit: USFWS



OLE Miami, FL RAC Office – Operation Greenback

In December of 2023, John Kreatsoulas, principal owner of Omni Reptiles, Inc., was indicted for conspiring to violate the Lacey Act and false labelling. Kreatsoulas is a long-term reptile dealer illegally taking endemic species from Florida, entering them into the criminal trade, where they ultimately are sold to buyers in Europe and Asia. In May of 2024, Kreatsoulas was sentenced to serve a year and a day in prison, three years of supervised release, and ordered to pay a \$10,000 fine. He was also barred by the court from engaging in any commercial activity involving wildlife. He had previously pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to traffic wildlife and nine counts of falsifying records in violation of the Lacey Act.



Credit: USFWS



OLE Lacombe, LA RAC Office – Tisdale Site

In March of 2024, in the Western District of Arkansas (Conway, AR), a defendant plead guilty to one (1) count violation of the Archaeological Resources Protection Act. This criminal information guilty plea was due to an investigation by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Office of Law Enforcement. The defendant received 5 years supervised probation, 5-year ban from federal public lands, and restitution in the amount of \$4,554.07.

OLE Miami, FL RAC Office – Manatee Relocation

In December of 2023, OLE Florida RAC District personnel assisted biologists from USFWS Ecological Services, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC), and SeaWorld in relocating three aging manatees. The manatees were inhabitants of the Miami Seaquarium in South Florida. The facility was unable to properly care for the animals or provide adequate habitats. Two of the manatees were transported to Zoo Tampa and the third went to SeaWorld in Orlando, FL. Thanks to the combined effort of all involved, all three manatees made the trip in good condition and acclimated their new habitats.



Credit: USFWS



OLE Lacombe, LA RAC Office – Operation Mistletoe

Two Louisiana men pled guilty to a misdemeanor charge of conspiring to transport a live white-tailed deer from the state of Louisiana to the state of Mississippi in violation of state and federal laws. On December 12, 2023, in the Southern District of Mississippi the first subject was sentenced and ordered to pay a fine of \$5,000.00, placed on four (4) years' supervised probation, ordered to pay \$59,808.19 to the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) Law Enforcement Deer Enclosure Fund, ordered to implement a four (4) year Chronic Wasting Disease sampling and testing plan to include sampling forty (40) white-tailed deer per year from the said enclosure. The second subject of this investigation was sentenced on April 23, 2024, and ordered to pay a \$5,000 fine and complete a four-year term of probation after pleading guilty to conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act.

OLE Lacombe, LA RAC Office – Operation Limb Hanger

In March of 2024, in the Northern District of Alabama (AL) two defendants plead guilty (one count each) for the trafficking of eastern wild turkey into the state of AL from Georgia (GA). The defendants who sold the turkey were ordered to pay jointly a \$40,000 fine, (\$5,000 to the Lacey Act Rewards Account, \$10,000 to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division, and \$25,000 to the Alabama Conservation and Natural Resources Foundation). The two defendants were also placed on six (6) months of federal probation. This was a joint investigation conducted by the United States Fish and Wildlife (Service) Office of Law Enforcement Office, the Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Special Investigations Unit, and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Investigative Unit.

OLE Nashville, TN RAC Office – Operation Muddy Waters - Charles Hopkins

In December of 2023, Charles Hopkins was sentenced to one (1) felony violation of the Lacey Act, in the Western District of Kentucky (Paducah, KY). Hopkins was part of a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR) investigation into the commercialization of illegally harvested Shovelnose sturgeon (*Scaphirhynchus platyrhynchus* – ESA: Threatened and CITES App II listed) for their roe. He violated multiple state laws including fishing in areas closed to commercial fishing and using illegal mesh size nets. Hopkins was sentenced to five (5) years of supervised probation, fifty (50) hours of community service each year during probation, ordered to pay \$20,000.00 to the Lacey Act Reward Account, ordered to pay \$348,613.00 in restitution to KDFWR, and \$100.00 special assessment.



Credit: USFWS

In total *Operation Muddy Waters* resulted in one year, six months, and one day of prison time, ten years of prohibition on fishing, thirteen years of supervised probation, two years of a Veterans Court Rehabilitation Program, \$40,000.00 was sent to the Lacey Act Reward Account in fines, and \$358,613.00 was awarded to the KDFWR for restitution for the illegally harvested shovelnose sturgeon and paddlefish.



Credit: USFWS



OLE Lacombe, LA RAC Office – James Smith

In July of 2024, James Smith plead guilty in the Western District of Louisiana, Alexandria, to one (1) count violation of the Lacey Act. While hunting in Tennessee, in November 2019 Smith illegally took over the legal limit of white-tailed deer and then transported the deer back to Louisiana. This was a joint investigation by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Office of Law Enforcement and Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Smith received 1-year unsupervised probation with a 1 year no hunt order, 90 days imprisonment (suspended), and a fine amount of \$3,500 to be paid to the Lacey Act or Endangered Species Act reward fund.

OLE Atlanta, GA RAC Office – Clifford Smuggled Shipment

In April of 2024, an Augusta, GA man was sentenced after pleading guilty to a felony Lacey Act charge involving the sale and exportation of Eastern box turtles (*Terrapene carolina carolina* – ESA: Endangered and CITES App I). Charles Clifford was sentenced to serve three (3) years of supervised release, pay a \$5,000.00 fine, and complete 40 hours of community service.



Credit: USFWS



OLE Jackson, LA RAC Office – Alston Ervin Gilbert et. al.

In April of 2024, in the Northern District of Mississippi, the United States Attorney charged Mason Lee Holt and Alston Ervin Gilbert each with a two (2) count Bill of Information violation for knowingly transporting three white-tailed deer taken unlawfully from a National Wildlife Refuge in Missouri to Mississippi for the purpose of interstate commerce. On May 16, 2024, Holt and Gilbert appeared before the Honorable David Sanders for initial appearance and sentencing. Holt and Gilbert both pled "Guilty" to the indictment. Judge Sanders sentenced Gilbert to pay a fine in the amount of \$1,000.00 and to pay restitution in the amount of \$3,000.00, made payable to Missouri Department of Conservation – Special Investigations Unit. Holt was sentenced to pay a fine in the amount of \$250.00 and pay restitution in the amount of \$750.00, made payable to Missouri Department of Conservation – Special Investigations Unit. The seized trophy antlers were forfeited by the Court. This case was investigated by the USFWS- Office of Law Enforcement, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, and the Missouri Department of Conservation.