



# 2025 Bulletin

**Law Enforcement Section**

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# Alabama

***Michael M. Weathers, Colonel***



## Agency Overview

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

## Training

In 2025, all Conservation Enforcement Officers received training on the most common wildlife diseases, the health risks involved, and the protocols related to human-wildlife conflict management. With Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) on the rise in Alabama, it took center stage in the wildlife disease discussions. Instructors educated officers on the history and clinical signs of the disease, and sampling efforts that the agency is involved in. Other commonly encountered diseases were also covered such as avian, herpetological, mammal, and zoonotic diseases. During the course, instructors stressed the importance of taking safety protocols when handling all wildlife during service calls and how to safeguard against disease exposure when performing necessary job duties. Armed with this knowledge, the hope is our officers will be safer and better protected against the potential spread of wildlife diseases.

Seven years ago, Alabama began a peer support program within the agency to assist Conservation Enforcement Officers in dealing with the stresses associated with working in today's law enforcement environment. This program has and continues to greatly benefit our staff and receive praise from those leaning on it for guidance and support. In 2025, Dr. Tim P. Faulk, Clinical Director of the Alabama Enforcement Alliance for Peer Support, presented a 4-hour training seminar to all Conservation Enforcement Officers called Body Armor: Prepared for the Invisible Enemy. The seminar offered essential insights for managing job-related stress and strengthening personal and family relationships. The end goal of this training was to help our officers learn to recognize stress triggers and develop effective coping strategies to enhance both their personal well-being and professional performance.

With the massive popularity of the Section's Firearm's 101 Course lineup (Handgun 101, Rifle 101, Shotgun 101 and Archery 101), the Shooting Sports Unit developed a Shotgun 101 training course designed to educate officers in the duties they assume when acting as a line instructor. The course purpose was to teach Conservation Enforcement Officers the relevance of recreational shooting and to show the appropriate instructional techniques to use with participants. Topics covered during the course were firearms safety rules, range safety protocol, assembly/disassembly of the Benelli M2 20-gauge shotguns, loading/unloading, and proper shooting fundamentals. The hope is this course makes a safer and more learning conducive environment for participants and increases the total number of shooters statewide.

In June 2025, the Section sent seven officers to the American Canoe Association's Kayak Instructor Course. As kayaking becomes more and more popular across the country, our officers encounter more kayakers while on patrol. Our agency issues a small number of kayaks for duty use to reach areas inaccessible to many other styles of boat. Our officers assist with kayaking classes through the Becoming an Outdoors Woman program and various other local workshops. The American

Canoe Association's Kayak Instructor Course is designed as a program that develops an instructor level proficiency and emphasizes safety, enjoyment and skill acquisition for entry level individuals. This instructor workshop will assist our staff in the various ways they interact with kayakers.



## Funding And Staffing

The Law Enforcement Section brought 3 new officers onboard this year. With the latest round of hiring, our Section is nearing its full staffing goal of 145 officers.

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 continues to be a struggle currently.

## 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.

In June of 2024, the Section disseminated the newly completed Section Policy 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.

In May of 2025, the Section completed its first ever mock assessment with NAWLEA. Overall, it was a resounding success. After a thorough file review and interview session at the WFF Headquarters, Section personnel conducted a static display of agency equipment for the NAWLEA assessment team. At the display, Section personnel exhibited various items of equipment and answered numerous questions concerning agency policies and procedures. Upon conclusion of the mock assessment, the NAWLEA assessment team discussed their findings and made recommendations to the Section on how to prepare for the formal assessment. The formal assessment has been scheduled for late September and early October of 2025.

## Other Special Law Enforcement Activities

In its third year, the Shooting Sports Unit 's "Handgun 101" course has been wildly successful. Hosted at our State Shooting Ranges, this program takes first-time firearms owners and teaches them the fundamentals of safety, marksmanship, and public range etiquette. This 4-hour course has the goal of reaching new constituents in the ever-growing pool of first-time firearms owners, more than 13 million new gun owners were created in 2021 alone. Each course ends with a short talk explaining the Pittman-Robertson Act and how the funds generated by target shooters conserve the natural resource wealth of our nation. On the heels of the success of the Handgun 101 course, four additional courses were developed: Handgun 102, Rifle 101, Shotgun 101 and Archery 101. Our Handgun 102 course is designed to take students that have successfully completed the 101 course and expand on that base of knowledge. It covers safe storage, cleaning, and a host of additional subjects that students of the 101-course requested. The Rifle 101 and Shotgun 101 courses follow the exact 4-hour format that the Handgun 101 course follows. Both are "first step" courses designed to impart the same level of knowledge and familiarity with rifle and shotguns. Each of the additional courses have been very successful. In addition to the Handgun, Rifle, 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 out their firearms equipped with night vision and thermal sights for a night of safe shooting. These nighttime events continue to be very popular.



## Equipment

Throughout 2025, the Law Enforcement Section undertook the process of selecting and purchasing new patrol trucks for issuance to field personnel as well as one new SUV for use by administrative staff. The Section purchased 16 Ford F-150 patrol vehicles to replace aging trucks in each of our five districts. One Ford Expedition was 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 utilizing UHF/VHF analog frequencies, 700/800 MHZ digital frequencies or P25 systems that are emerging across our state.

The Section recently purchased two Can Am UTVs with trailers to be used during outreach programs and educational events. UTVs are safer than traditional ATVs in many cases and deliver the ability to carry more people and equipment during the various events that the vehicles have been deployed to. Both were uniformly marked with very recognizable Law Enforcement markings and emergency lights.



With the massive popularity of the Section's Firearm's 101 Course lineup (Handgun 101, Rifle 101, Shotgun 101 and Archery 101), new equipment needed to be purchased to meet the expansion of these programs. Recently, the Shooting Sports 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 of the Law Enforcement Section were chosen in 2025 for several awards presented by multiple associations. C.E.O. Senior Shawn Nixon was selected as the Shikar-Safari Officer of the Year. C.E.O. Senior Brett Makemson was selected as the National Wild Turkey Federation's Officer of the Year. C.E.O. Senior Thomas Bobo was chosen as the Mississippi Flyway Council Officer of the Year. C.E.O. Senior Chas Moore was chosen as the Alabama Wildlife Federation Officer of the Year and C.E.O. Senior Nick Cochran was chosen as Alabama's S.E.A.F.W.A. Officer of the Year.



***Brad Young, Colonel***



## Agency Overview

During 2025 the Enforcement Division met several milestones with the technological upgrade intuitively started in 2022. The final computer upgrades for officers were completed, and all Game Wardens now have CF-33 Toughbook computers in their vehicles. Additionally, August of 2024 saw the launch of the Axon Records Management System (RMS), allowing a much-needed update to the



AGFC reporting system. The new RMS provides for an improved workflow for report approvals and revisions. The launch of the new RMS also brought the new property module that tracks all evidence statewide. August also brought the upgrade from Axon Body 3 cameras to Axon Body 4 cameras to all officers in the state. Additionally, 2025 saw the completion of Cradlepoint modem installations in all enforcement vehicles. Now, all officers have a Cradlepoint modem in their vehicle with AT&T and Verizon connectivity. Started in December of 2024 and completed in February 2025 was the installation of 10 Cradlepoint modems in boats in the A1, B1, and C1 Districts. For 2025, the Enforcement Division will get a new citation and points tracking system built by Axon, which launched in July.

This year, a new CAD dispatch system will be implemented in October to streamline operations. This system will equip officers with Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) in their vehicles, enabling real-time ACIC/NCIC queries and access to the dispatch CAD log. Wardens will be able to directly interface with dispatch through the MDT and phone app.

The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's Office of Boating Law Administration launched its new Hull Identification Number (HIN) Assignment Database on March 17, 2025. This database greatly improves processes for the boating administration staff by allowing the functionality of storing documents and photographs related to an account in a single location, which eliminates the need to hard file and store documents separately, and addresses storage concerns and reduces paper waste. It also introduces online communication between applicants and staff via email, which expedites the application processing and HIN assignments for customers who have email capability.

## Training

Throughout the year, we have prioritized the ongoing development of our officers through two in-service training courses. Furthermore, our wardens benefited from diverse training opportunities, including ALERRT's E.R.A.S.E, SFST refreshers, OCT quarterly training, handcuffing refreshers, TASER recertification, and quarterly firearms training. Additional training covered topics such as Racial Profiling, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, and Anti-Bias for Law Enforcement, along with various online courses provided by the Arkansas Criminal Justice Institute.

To meet the everchanging needs of the enforcement division Colonel Young approved a K-9 Coordinator and Game Warden Recruiter position. This position will oversee the acquisition, training and certification of enforcement division's 10 K-9 units and handlers and will also coordinate game warden recruitment statewide.

Colonel Young established a Digital Forensic Analyst position within the enforcement division to process wardens' Requests for Information (RFIs). These requests encompass, but are not limited to, AGFC Citation History, AGFC License History, Clear Reports, Social Media Platforms, Driving

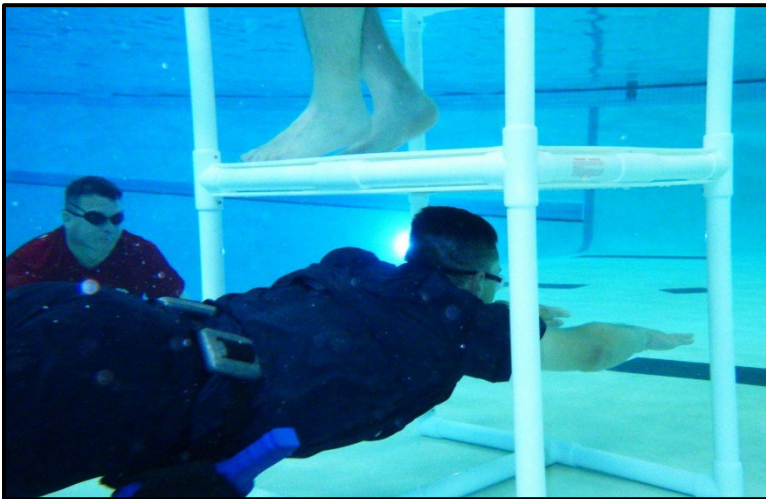


History, and Criminal History. Submissions and returns of these forms will be facilitated via a secure file-sharing program.

The Digital Forensic Analyst will provide the following technical support:

- Conducting investigations using digital evidence.
- Providing and maintaining technology and equipment for the preservation, collection, and storage of digital evidence.
- Assisting AGFC Game Wardens with technical information and drafting documents such as search warrants, affidavits, and preservation letters.

The hiring process for game warden cadet class E-1-25 was modified to improve communication of cadet school expectations to applicants. These modifications included a functional fitness evaluation comprising a 250-meter row, 50-yard sled push (100 lbs), 50-yard sled pull (100 lbs), 10 sandbag up and overs, 100-yard farmer's carry, and a 200-yard shuttle run. The swim evaluation was also changed to a 100-meter swim, a 5-minute tread, and a brick recovery in 12 FOW.



Candidates who passed the swim test received 12-week dietary and workout recommendations.

Prior to the academy's start, training administrators offered six voluntary Saturday workouts for those receiving job offers. Class E-1-25 currently has 15 game warden cadets undertaking 836 hours of diverse law enforcement training. The AGFC Enforcement Division has achieved an 83% cadet retention rate by amending the game warden hiring process, all while maintaining its rigorous training standards.

Boating Law Administrator, Corporal Sydney Grant, successfully passed the Certified Recreational Boating Professional (CRBP) exam and earned her CRBP certification. The National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) is proud to recognize Corporal Grant as one of the latest professionals to attain this prestigious credential. The CRBP certification, developed by NASBLA, is a voluntary credential designed for recreational boating professionals. It reflects knowledge, performance, and career accomplishments across specific program domains.

An emphasis was placed on providing all frontline supervisors with professional development training in personal motivation, successful leadership development, and officer personal and family wellness. The Department of Public Safety customized a course for AGFC Sergeants which provided opportunities for reflection on positive and negative leadership experiences while providing a roadmap for professional leadership development. Instructors focused on the 15 foundational traits of effective leadership and 11 leadership principles. The course equips learners to make a positive difference in the workplace and in their teams by intentionally creating a cultural environment of success that begins with the leader. AGFC Lieutenants attended the FBI-LEEDA Supervisor Leadership Institute. The FBI-LEEDA Supervisor Leadership Institute is a program built especially for supervisors and middle managers with the goal of enhancing their leadership competencies.



Attendees will be engaged in personality diagnostics, leadership case studies, mentoring, developing your people, performance management, risk management and credibility.

## Other Special Law Enforcement Issues

The 2025 legislative session presented significant challenges, requiring substantial collaboration between the enforcement division and the legislature to uphold AGFC regulations under Amendment 35. Act 597, the Arkansas Privacy Act, now restricts image's capture by AGFC UAS, with exceptions for valid search warrants, immediate pursuit based on reasonable suspicion of a violation, search and rescue, boat accident investigations, surveying catastrophic events or states of emergency, and documenting crime scenes where game wardens have reasonable suspicion of a violation. House Bill 1867, which aimed to prohibit game wardens from entering private property, was withdrawn after extensive discussions with its sponsor. To proactively address concerns about suspicionless entry and prevent future legislation, an SOP was developed. This SOP offers clear guidelines to game wardens on entering private property and the use of cameras and unmanned surveillance systems.

## 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***

In 2024, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Division of Law Enforcement continued to demonstrate its vital role in public safety, natural disaster response, and conservation law enforcement. FWC officers responded to three hurricanes—Debby, Helene and Milton—deploying specialized assets including swamp buggies, airboats, shallow draft vessels, UTVs, four-wheel drive patrol trucks and a Fat Truck. Officers conducted lifesaving operations, supply distribution, damage assessment, debris clearing, wellness checks and provided humanitarian aid, public safety and security services. These coordinated deployments, executed alongside the



Colonel Brian G. Smith

State Emergency Operations Center and partner agencies, highlight the FWC's ability to rapidly respond and serve Floridians during critical times of need.

This year, the Division achieved two major milestones in professional excellence. In March, the FWC became the first agency in the nation to receive accreditation from the North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation Program (NAWLEA), meeting nearly 70 rigorous standards. In addition, the Division was awarded Excelsior Status by the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation, a distinction reserved for agencies that have received accreditation five consecutive times over 15 years. These honors reflect our ongoing commitment to transparency, accountability, and best practices.

FWC officers also made significant progress in tackling the ongoing issue of derelict vessels. In partnership with state and local agencies, 1,136 derelict and at-risk vessels were removed from Florida's waterways last year, improving navigation safety and protecting the environment. This annual total includes 479 vessels associated with Hurricanes Helene and Milton, as well as 83 removals through the innovative Vessel Turn-In Program, which helps prevent vessels from becoming derelict in the first place. Since VTIP began in September 2022, 190 at-risk vessels have been removed.

Florida's waterways also saw strong enforcement of boating safety laws. In 2024, FWC officers removed over 400 impaired operators, reducing risks in the state known as the "Boating Capital of the World." With over a million registered vessels, FWC's proactive enforcement plays a critical role in preventing alcohol-related boating incidents and saving lives.

These achievements underscore the dedication and professionalism of FWC officers and staff who remain committed to protecting Florida's people, natural resources, and communities.

## Training

### *FWC Training Center*

In 2024-25, the FWC Law Enforcement Academy graduated three classes, Class 48, 49, and 51, resulting in 54 new conservation law enforcement officers. The training staff continues with the demanding pace of running back-to-back training sessions and overlapping classes. We currently have two academy classes in training, with a total of 37 recruits between the two classes.

Additionally, Class 51 was unique in that it included an official from the Bahamian Wildlife

Enforcement Network (BahWEN), adding an international dimension to our training.



*While the FWC administers a program using contracted nuisance alligator trappers to remove nuisance alligators, recruits learn how to handle alligators so they are prepared to safely respond when immediate action or assistance is needed.*



## ***In-Service Training***

In-service training continued to be a top priority across the state, making sure FWC officers stay ready to protect themselves, the public, and Florida's natural resources. The training lineup covered all the essentials — firearm qualifications, proficiency drills, active assailant simulations, advanced shooter school, defensive tactics, and CPR/first aid. This year, there was a big focus on taking previous trainings to the next level with more reality-based scenarios. These were designed to put officers in realistic, high-pressure situations that closely reflect what they might face out in the field.



## ***Inaugural FWC Leadership Academy Program***

The FWC Training Section played a big role in the inaugural Leadership Academy, where 14 new supervisors participated in an in-depth leadership program held at several locations throughout Florida, including the Ocala Youth Camp, the historic Wakulla Springs State Park, and wrapping up at the Everglades Youth Camp.

During the program, the students received guidance and insight from senior command staff, experienced lieutenants, and outside speakers, all focused on helping them grow into strong leaders within the agency. The academy covered a variety of key skills such as project management, leadership and delegation, office operations, team building, staff development, budgeting, purchasing, and asset management.

Area captains and other section supervisors remained closely involved throughout the program, sharing practical advice and real-world experience to help the group better understand what leadership looks like within FWC. Their input brought valuable perspective to the training and helped round out the learning experience. By the end of the academy, each graduate walked away

with stronger leadership skills—ready to bring what they learned back to their teams.

Congratulations to the members of the FWC Leadership Academy Cohort 1: Lt. Richard Doricchi, Lt. Susanna McCallister, GOC Lindsey Mann, DOS Rebekah Vachon, Lt. Richard Gilmore, Lt. Peter Knutson, SMA Christine Simmons, Lt. Alberto



Canamero, Lt. Kyle Pekerol, Lt. Taylor Tison, Lt. Brennan Starling, Lt. Adam Brown, Lt. Charles Bradshaw, and Lt. William Thompson.

## **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 Operator 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 2024 were tremendous. Statewide, FWC officers made 412 BUI cases, removing impaired operators from the waters of the state. Continuing the importance of boating safety education, FWC issued more than 74,000 boating safety identification cards to individuals.

### **Case Highlight**

On the evening of March 21, 2024, FWC officers responded to a reported boating accident at the Sanibel Causeway in Lee County. Officers located a 24-foot vessel on the rocks under the bridge completely out of the water. While on scene, officers were informed by witnesses that the operator was observed leaving a resort earlier and was described as falling and acting aggressively to resort staff. Witnesses also stated the operator was ejected from the vessel after it struck the rocks and was taken to the hospital. The subsequent investigation revealed surveillance footage showing the operator ordering drinks at the resort, which supported the witness accounts of the operator possibly being intoxicated. The investigation also discovered GPS data from the vessel and the operator's court ordered GPS tracking device, which showed the two devices traveling along the same path from the operator's residence, to the resort, and finally to the vessel accident location. After a subpoena of the blood work from the hospital, it was discovered the operator had a BAC of nearly four times the .08 limit. Charges were submitted for 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 2024-25, nine grant applicants were awarded more than \$2.8 million in state funds for boating access projects. No federal projects were awarded this fiscal year.

The FWC staffs a full-time crew to handle construction and repair of more than 300 ramps statewide, owned and operated by the FWC or maintained by the FWC through cooperator agreements. This unit also aids with waterway markers, which includes inventories and

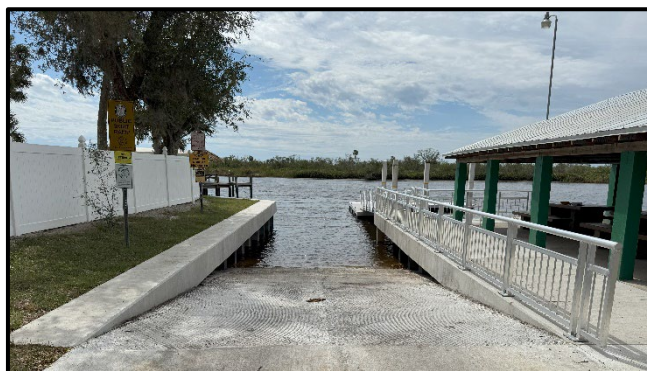


assessments; installations; inspections of contractor installations; and flipping waterway marker signs during manatee seasons.

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 2024-25, the FWC Boating Access Unit completed the following projects:

#### **Construction Projects Completed**

- 19030 Martin County BOCC – Manatee Pocket Mooring Field \$500,000 FBIP
  - Constructed a mooring field at the confluence of the St. Lucie River/Okeechobee Waterway, the Indian River Lagoon/Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway and the St. Lucie Inlet, within Port Salerno and replaced the previous timber pier with an ADA accessible floating dinghy dock.
- 21111 Broward County – Hollywood North Beach Park Mooring Fields \$199,998 FBIP
  - Dredging the cove to the west of A1A and to the north of Sheridan Street on the Intracoastal Waterway in the City of Hollywood.
- 23096 Citrus County – Floral City Information Signs & Piling Replacement \$60,473 FBIP
  - Waterway marker replacement within the Floral City Pool of the Tsala Apopka Chain of Lakes.
- 23099 DeSoto County BOCC – Liverpool Park Boat Ramp and Dock Improvements \$750,085 FBIP
  - Replaced the single-lane boat ramp and constructed and installed a new ADA wheelchair accessible fixed dock and gangway with an attached floating dock at Liverpool Park in DeSoto County.



#### **Nonconstruction Projects Completed**

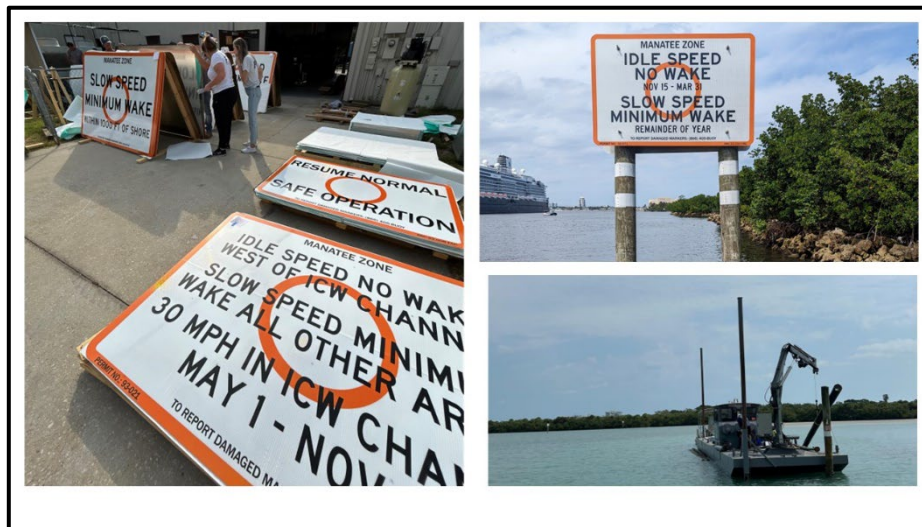
- 21103 Levy County BOCC – Shell Mound Boat Ramp Channel Improvements \$86,034.59 FBIP
  - Created plans and obtained permitting to remove approximately 9,300 cubic yards of material from the channel.
- 21104 Martin County BOCC – Boat Ramp Renovations to the J&S Boat Ramp \$35,000 FBIP
  - Created final plans and obtained permits to replace the boat ramp.
- 21109 Martin County BOCC – Boat Ramp Renovations to the Jensen Beach Causeway \$50,000 FBIP
  - Designed and engineered plans and obtained permits for renovations to the Jensen Beach Causeway Boat Ramp.
- 21110 Martin County BOCC – Boat Ramp Renovations to Charlie Leighton Park \$40,000 FBIP

- Design and permit plans for ramp surface, dock, piling, lighting, shoreline, and ADA renovations to the Charlie Leighton Park Boat Ramp.
- 22026 City of St Pete Beach – Don CeSar Boat Ramp Improvements \$128,344 FBIP
  - Complete studies of two sites and various siting options to determine the best site and position for the redesigned Don CeSar Boat Ramp and provide conceptual plans of the chosen site.

## ***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. To support

public safety, the WMU operates an On-Call Response Program that identifies and addresses noncompliant or damaged markers. In 2024, the WMU recorded 290 incidents statewide. This reflects an 89.5% increase over the average annual total and a 14.62% increase from the 253 incidents recorded in 2023.



## ***Derelict Vessel Prevention and Removal***

Derelict and abandoned vessels that litter the state pose environmental and navigational hazards. FWC law enforcement officers and partner agencies are continuously working to reduce the risk these vessels present. Last year, 574 derelict vessels were removed. We are currently anticipating the removal of over 800 additional vessels this year. Also, in cooperation with the Florida Division of Emergency Management, an additional 479 derelict vessels resulting from Hurricanes Helene and Milton were removed or are in progress at this time. Our newly created Vessel Turn-in Program also removed 83 at-risk vessels last year, potentially preventing those vessels from becoming derelict. Together, this amounts to 1,136 derelict and at-risk vessels removed from state waters in 2024.



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 has assisted 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. VTIP has removed 190 at-risk vessels since the program began with 40 more currently in the removal and approval process.

### ***Marine Debris Program***

The Marine Debris Program oversees and coordinates statewide and regional response, removal, research, and prevention projects, programs, and partnerships to reduce debris and the associated impacts to Florida's resources. Since its inception in 2019, the program has been heavily involved in disaster response and recovery. This work began with staff serving as natural resource advisors and principal investigators or co-principal investigators for marine debris removal and hot spot mapping following Hurricanes Irma and Michael. In recent years, with unprecedented storm seasons and evolving response structures, the FWC Marine Debris Program has taken a more active role in all aspects of hurricane marine debris including serving on the Debris Task Force. This work, in coordination with state and federal partners, includes preparation and planning; initial response, assessments, and



*Marquesas Reef Trap Rope Removal*



*L-R: Wakulla County Derelict Traps, Aerial Debris Surveys with Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services*

debris mapping; contractor and emergency management training for marine debris removal and best management practices; coordination of governmental partners; removal and compliance monitoring; and restoration planning. As we navigate the 2026 hurricane season and beyond, the FWC Marine Debris Program will be working with Florida Division of Emergency Management and other partners to expand the state's hurricane marine debris resources.

Another aspect of the program's disaster response includes managing two largescale projects (Florida and regionwide) related to the Deepwater Horizon Gulf Spill Restoration Plans to reduce marine debris and its impacts on sea turtles and birds along Florida's Gulf Coast. This work began with dive cleanups of the Marquesas Reefs in coordination with FWC Coral, Information, Science and Management, Lobster Management, and Finfish research teams as well as Florida Department of Environmental Protection Florida Keys and SE Aquatic Preserves staff. Over a 4-day period, this project resulted in the removal of almost 8,000 pounds (four tons) of marine debris from Florida's coral reefs, including almost two



*Marquesas Dive Team a Day's Haul*



miles of trap rope. Most of the debris recovered from this previously unassessed remote region of the Keys was from trap fisheries (traps, trap parts, trap lines and buoys). This reef-focused work is an annual project with marine debris removal work also expanding throughout the Key West National Wildlife Refuge mangrove islands in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Over the past year, these Gulf Coast focused projects have addressed (and continue to address) Florida's coral reefs and remote mangrove islands in the Keys as well as areas throughout Southwest Florida and the Big Bend impacted by hurricanes Ian, Idalia, Helene and Milton. Targets have primarily included derelict traps and aquaculture gear as well as household and structural hurricane debris in sensitive environments and locations that are more remote or challenging to access such as marshes, mudflats, and mangrove rookeries. Below are several project highlights:

- Key Haven Boat Ramp Cleanup: 1 mile shoreline, 5 days, 174 participants, 16,467 pounds (8.23 tons) of consumer and fishing debris
- Levy County Clam Cover Net Cleanup: 1 day, 37 participants, 8,260 pounds (4.13 tons) of clam cover netting and misc. hurricane debris
- Levy and Manatee County Clam Bags: 2 days, 63 participants, 10,325 pounds (5.16 tons), 7,587 clam bags (exceeded the 4,285 goal)
- Wakulla County: 1 day, 24 participants, over a thousand pounds (0.5 tons), 48 derelict traps plus misc. hurricane debris



***Top Row Left to Right***  
Key Haven Boat Ramp  
Volunteer; Marquesas  
Dive Team; Levy County  
Derelict Clam Bags.

***Bottom Row Left to  
Right*** Marquesas  
Mangrove Islands Trap  
Rope Removal; Levy  
County Clam Cover Nets

### **In the Works**

Throughout 2025 and 2026, the FWC Marine Debris Program will continue to expand work and collaborations in numerous areas including hurricane, aquaculture, and trap fishery debris; work in mangrove islands, marshes and coral reef habitats; and debris mapping, restoration planning, recovery plan implementation and research related to debris transport and wildlife impacts.

## **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 Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of America, covering hundreds of miles. The crews perform resource 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 fisheries inspections.



### **Case Highlight**

Officers with the FWC OPV Gulf Sentry crew as well as a NOAA enforcement officer and deputies from the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office boarded a food shrimping vessel entering Tampa Bay. The fisheries inspection revealed the vessel had approximately 300 bags of shrimp on board. The vessel captain was not able to produce a current federal permit nor a valid SPL decal. It was also documented that the vessel had multiple turtle excluder device (TED) violations. FWC officers documented the violations and the case was referred to NOAA for prosecution.



### **Awards**

Two FWC OPV teams were selected to receive Team of the Year awards.

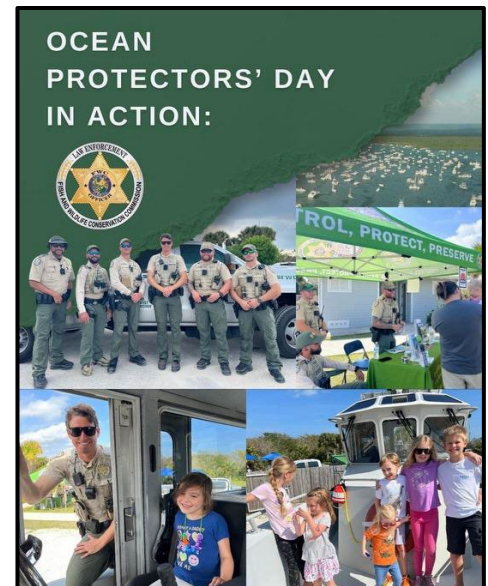




The FWC OPV Trident crew, Senior Officers Jason Richards and Jeremy Foell, were named The Gulf Council 2024 Law Enforcement Team of the year. Based out of Key West, Senior Officers Richards and Foell patrol some of the most remote waters in the region including Dry Tortugas National Park and Pulley Ridge Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC). These officers logged over 334 patrol hours and their enforcement efforts resulted in the seizure of over 330 illegally harvested snapper and out-of-season lobster and crabs from a commercial vessel near Dry Tortugas National Park. Their participation in NOAA's TED Operational Plan helped identify six critical

violations that posed threats to sea turtle populations. Additionally, their patrols assisted in documenting illegal fishing activity within protected Ecological Reserves.

Senior Lt. Edwin Harp, Senior Officer David Moss, Officer Specialists Casey Schroer and Alexander Bruder and Officer Zachary Dudas were named the South Atlantic Council Law Enforcement Team of the Year. This team operates two OPV vessels out of FWC's South A Region: the Atlantic Defender and Warsaw. This team had a total of 411 JEA patrol hours and 44 fishery cases. The cases resulted in 40 federal citations and 34 state misdemeanors. The cases consisted of Bahamas violations (Lacey Act), St. Lucie Humps Marine Protected Area violations as well as red snapper and golden tilefish closed season violations. The team also put together two details: a Bahamas detail that resulted in three federal cases and Operation Chasin Tails, which resulted in one federal case, 14 state fishery violations, and 15 state fishery warnings. The OPV team also assisted other officers with 18 Bahamas-related federal cases, helping them with developing case packets and contacting NOAA special agents and officers.



## ***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**

The FWC entered into a cooperating agreement with the Florida Attorney General's Office of the Statewide Prosecutor. The primary objective of this cooperative agreement is to facilitate a joint investigation and prosecution unit to identify, investigate, apprehend, and successfully prosecute one or more persons and/or businesses participating in the unlawful taking, commercial trading, and/or trafficking of fish and wildlife. In the Fall of 2022, ranger stations at numerous state parks in North Florida were periodically burglarized for money, equipment and merchandise. In addition to



the burglaries, many state parks suffered vandalism and theft of money from the honor boxes located near the entrances to various parks where visitors deposit their daily fee. Investigators began looking into suspects and gathering digital evidence in connection to the crimes. Investigators were able to uncover a theft ring spanning Florida and Georgia. Working with the Statewide Prosecutors Office, four individuals were charged with felonies including racketeering, conspiracy to commit racketeering, armed burglary, and the illegal use of a two-way communication device. The collaborative efforts between these two law enforcement agencies have

been instrumental in bringing these individuals to justice and mitigating further threats to public property and visitor safety within state parks.

### **Case Highlight**

A successful joint operation between the FWC Division of Law Enforcement and National Marine Fisheries Service Office of Law Enforcement resulted in the arrest of a longtime licensed charter and commercial fishing captain for killing bottlenose dolphins in the Gulf of America off the coast of Florida. Dolphins are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and Florida State Statute. The state and federal investigation revealed the subject, reportedly frustrated with dolphins eating red snapper from the lines of his charter fishing clients, poisoned the protected marine mammals with a toxic pesticide placed inside baitfish multiple times from 2022 to 2023. During this same period, he also shot dolphins with a shotgun while clients were onboard, including children.

Thanks to the close working relationship between the FWC and U.S. Department of Justice's Environmental Crimes Section and U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Florida, the perpetrator was held accountable for these cruel and unnecessary deaths. The subject was sentenced by a federal judge to 30 days imprisonment and ordered to pay a \$51,000 fine for three counts of poisoning and shooting dolphins in violation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act. The subject's prison sentence will be followed by a 1-year term of supervised release.



Seized evidence, a shotgun and pesticide used by the subject to kill dolphins. Image courtesy of NOAA Fisheries.

## Intelligence

Intelligence analysts deliver critical support to officers and investigators in the field, as well as to state and federal agencies, enhancing situational awareness and operational effectiveness. They assist in investigations by using data and intelligence to help prevent and solve crimes. Analysts also serve as interagency Fusion Liaisons within the Florida Fusion Center located at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, to facilitate information flow between agencies. Working directly with the Fusion Center provides the Intelligence Unit the ability to access both 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 (RIOs) across the state continued to play a vital role in coordinating with municipal, state, and federal law enforcement agencies on matters related to law enforcement intelligence and domestic security. These officers maintain close working relationships with federal partners, including the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force, United States Coast Guard Intelligence, the Department of Homeland Security, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. This collaboration ensures timely information sharing and a unified response to emerging threats. In 2024, FWC intelligence analysts responded to over 1,700 requests for information. These requests included comprehensive workups on individuals and companies to support ongoing investigations and threat assessments. They also processed 344 Field Intelligence Reports submitted by officers/investigators in the regions, which contributed valuable intelligence to

ongoing operations. Additionally, FWC analysts completed 28 photo lineups for the FWC and other agencies and 24 photo/video enhancements to assist investigative efforts. FWC intelligence analysts prepared and disseminated 54 internal and external bulletins, ensuring agency personnel and partners received timely updates on relevant threats, trends, and operational information. The unit also processed 308 public tips received via social media and Wildlife Alert. Furthermore, analysts assisted with 116 background investigations for sworn and nonsworn FWC employment candidates. The Intelligence Unit also has a derelict vessel analyst who completed over 170 requests related to derelict vessel investigations. Throughout the past year, the Intel Unit has increasingly deployed to the field to deliver hands-on, on-site support. The Intelligence Unit also has a LE-specific GIS and mapping component to support mapping requests that include completing maps for court presentations; cell phone mapping; dashboards; and producing monthly, quarterly, and annual statistical reports for regions. The Intelligence Unit maintains access to a broad spectrum of law enforcement and intelligence databases and is working towards a Real-Time Crime Center concept.

### ***Technical Operations***

The FWC Technical Operations Unit is a statewide investigative support team composed of two lieutenants and four investigators. The unit's mission is to equip FWC officers with cutting-edge technology, expert training, and proven techniques to gather reliable evidence in the protection of Florida's natural resources.



Despite its small size, the team brings over 60 years of combined law enforcement experience and holds specialized certifications in areas such as digital forensics, electronic surveillance, and cellular data analysis. Technical Operations provides vital support to law enforcement operations across the state, offering expertise in forensic data recovery, electronic surveillance, internet-based investigations, and assistance with financial crimes.

Key capabilities include remote covert camera deployments, electronic tracking, cell phone record analysis, and the forensic extraction of data from mobile devices, computers, watercraft, and GPS units. In many resource-related investigations, digital

evidence is often overlooked or underutilized—limiting the full scope of the case. The Technical Operations Unit works to bridge this critical gap, living up to its motto: "Bringing the big picture into focus."

### ***Internet Crimes Unit***

FWC's Internet Crimes Unit consists of investigators strategically placed throughout the state and coordinated by the Statewide Investigations Section. These investigators are specially trained to identify and document evidence originating from internet-based platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, Marketplace, and other social media or classified ad services.

They conduct undercover operations targeting the illegal online sale of wildlife and work closely with the Wildlife Alert Program to investigate high-profile complaints involving internet-based violations. The unit plays a key role in preserving digital evidence and ensuring that offenders exploiting online platforms are held accountable under Florida's conservation laws.



## ***Fish and Wildlife Forensics***

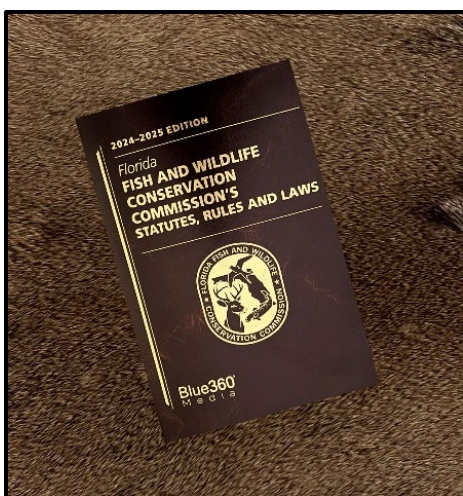
The FWC Forensic Sciences Laboratory at the University of Florida is a collaborative partnership between the FWC's Division of Law Enforcement and the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine. Through this partnership, the FWC Forensic Sciences Laboratory has become a premier wildlife forensics 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. Recently, these services proved crucial in FWC's response to a fatal wildlife/human incident, confirming the animal involved was identified, which provided closure to the victim's family and put the community at ease.

## ***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 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.

### ***Wildlife Alert Reward Association***

The WLA also provides statewide coordination of Wildlife Alert.

FWC and the Wildlife Alert Reward Association hosted the 2024 Wildlife Crimestoppers (IWC) Annual Conference and the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact Administrators.

Wildlife Alert serves primarily as a reward program but also supports FWC with its mission when appropriate. To provide this support, Wildlife Alert receives donations primarily through court orders from cases made by FWC officers. A recent outreach campaign focused on judicial circuits continues to produce results as Wildlife Alert received over \$141,000 in donations for calendar year 2024.

FWC received over 10,000 reported violations from concerned members of the public resulting in \$45,000 in rewards being distributed by Wildlife Alert. What is even more impressive is that many stakeholders do not ask for a reward.

Additionally, Wildlife Alert continued its support of FWC by purchasing outreach supplies, thermal imaging, night vision, and “robo” deer.



*Workout led by our Wildlife Law Administrator*

### ***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.

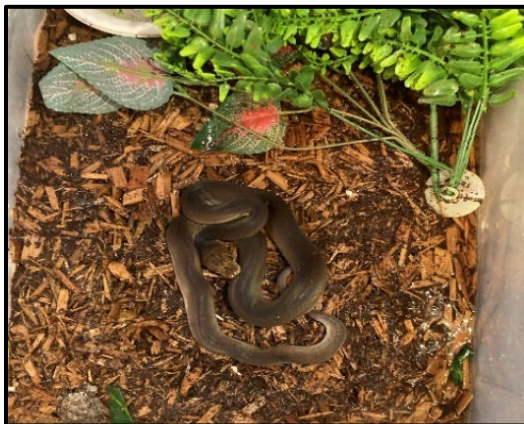
Created in 2011, the FWC’s Port Investigations Team was established as a specialized task force to regulate Florida’s major airports and seaports, commercial shipping facilities, highway agricultural inspection stations, and cold storage facilities while targeting the illegal wildlife trade. Initially



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.

### Case Highlight

This case began when an FWC Port Investigator and his K-9 partner intercepted a prohibited Burmese python that was shipped into the state inside an unlabeled box to a shipping center in Orlando. Port investigators decided to allow delivery of the snake to an address in Kissimmee and conducted a follow up investigation. The subject identified as the recipient was determined to have some captive wildlife licensing but lacked a prohibited species license. Additional targets were generated after the FWC Intelligence Unit completed a criminal intelligence report and was able to connect the recipient of the Burmese python to an individual and address in Orlando.



A joint captive wildlife inspection was conducted at the address in Orlando. Though the subject attempted to hide prohibited Burmese pythons and other prohibited species during the inspection, several were located and the subject was cited appropriately. Two Burmese pythons, one black and white tegu, and one green iguana were located during the inspection at the Orlando address. A total of five prohibited species were recovered during the investigation.



## ***Captive Wildlife***

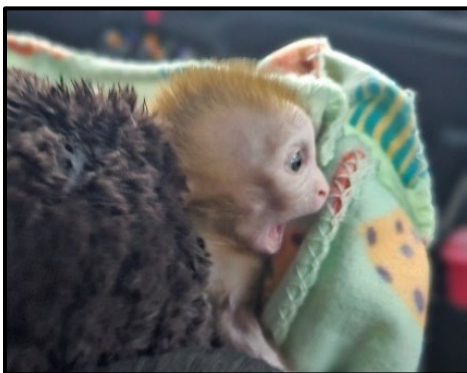
The FWC promotes responsible ownership of captive wildlife and it is our goal to develop the best regulations possible to provide for public safety, animal welfare, and the legitimate use of wildlife for educational, exhibition or personal purposes. Florida's captive wildlife regulations are among the 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 2024 calendar year, FWC's Captive Wildlife Section conducted 4,399 inspections of facilities possessing wildlife. These inspections generated 777 citations and warnings. Additionally, investigators responded to 248 Wildlife Alert complaints, 58 escaped exotic wildlife complaints and seized 184 specimens of wildlife. In 2024, there were approximately 7,000 captive wildlife applications processed with 5,700 permits issued, 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.

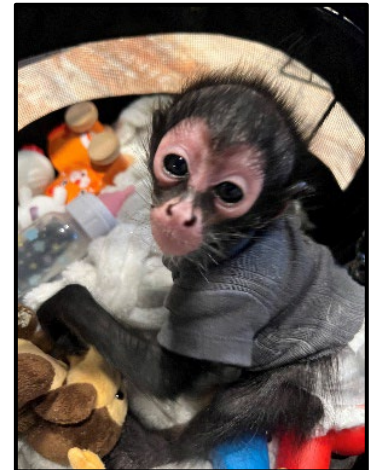


### **Case Highlight**

In February 2024, Captive Wildlife investigators responded to a traffic stop regarding the illegal possession of a Class II macaque. The operator was cited for unlawful possession of the monkey and the animal was seized and transported to a secure facility. The individual cited had previously received warnings for the unlawful possession of a Class II monkey. In June 2024, the subject was found to be in illegal possession of a third monkey, a Class III spider monkey. The monkey was seized and the individual was arrested and taken to jail. A search warrant was obtained to examine the subject's phone and identify



information about the transfer of wildlife. The subsequent investigation and analysis of the phone data revealed the seller of the macaque was in Florida and held an FWC license. The



seller provided a sworn statement stating the transfer occurred in a neighboring state, and the sale did not occur in Florida. However, the phone tracking data indicated the transfer did occur in Florida showing the FWC licensee unlawfully transferred the macaque to the unpermitted individual in



Florida. The licensee had his permits denied and was charged with unlawful transfer to an unlicensed person, providing a false written report to law enforcement and failing to collect the required taxes on the sale of the monkey.

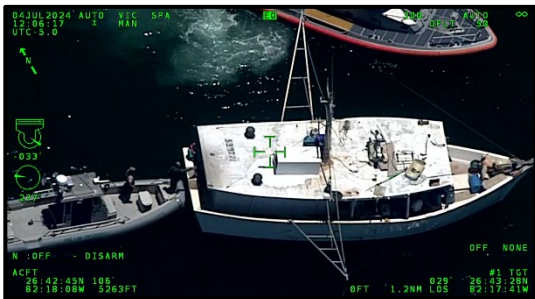
## Innovative Enforcement Programs

### *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 Highlights

While on patrol, the FWC Aviation Unit observed two personnel aboard a vessel oystering in a prohibited area in Little Trout Creek. The two subjects were recorded tonging oysters and placing them on a cull board. Their location was marked and relayed to water-patrol units. As the officers approached the vessel, the air crew was able to record the subjects clear their cull board of oysters, dump a bucket of oysters, and toss a bag of oysters into the water. The subjects were arrested and taken to the Levy County jail and charged with nine misdemeanors, five infractions and two warnings.



During an FWC Aviation Unit patrol near Tampa, the U.S. Coast Guard reported they had located an individual swimming miles offshore. The individual said that while aboard his commercial vessel, an altercation occurred among the crew and he was thrown overboard and left behind. FWC pilot and crew located the vessel 15 miles offshore inbound for Boca Grande Pass. The information on the vessel was forwarded to water units and intercepted by USCG and the FWC Southwest Region

Special Operations Group Team. The case is being handled by the USCG.

The FWC Aviation Unit participated in the "Take Your Child to Work Day." This is a great opportunity to allow youth to see FWC helicopters and other equipment, learn about FWC law enforcement careers and ask questions.

### *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

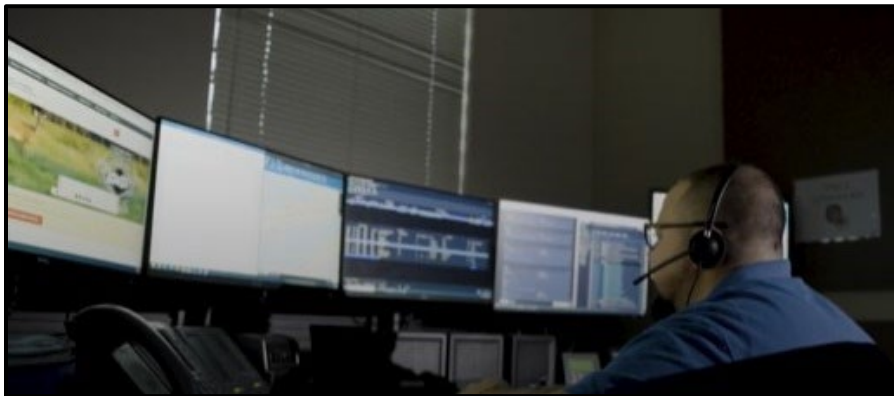


provide services enforcing import/export laws pertaining to exotic and protected species. Initial training for the traditional teams consists of an innovative and comprehensive 400-hour K-9 academy instructed by in-house FWC K-9 training officers. Initial training for the Port Investigative K-9 teams is provided by a private K-9 training vendor specializing in the unique training requirements needed for these teams.

### ***Technology and Communication Services***

The Technology and Communication Services Unit (TACS) supports the operational and technical needs of the Division, including managing the Statewide Law Enforcement Radio System (SLERS), agency-wide technology systems, and the oversight of four regional communications centers.

TACS collaborates across divisions to ensure consistent statewide operations, including implementing policies, CAD administration, data reporting, and managing hardware and software. The unit also acts as a liaison to partner agencies, ensuring statutory compliance and adherence to accreditation standards. It oversees member certifications and continuing education, facilitates conflict resolution, conducts quality assurance audits, manages records, and stays current with



emerging technologies.

Additionally, TACS oversees the processing of public records requests, having responded to more than 4,000 requests in the past year.

The regional communications centers handle the daily dispatch of emergency and law enforcement calls, including those involving threats to public safety and violations.

Their responsibilities also include:

- Recruiting, hiring, and training staff
- Operating in a high-stress, fast-paced environment with expert-level proficiency
- Building strong working relationships with field staff, executive leadership, other divisions, partner agencies, and the public
- Accessing criminal justice databases for investigative support
- Gathering background information through various platforms
- Memorizing and using codes for communication and data entry
- Documenting interactions through SLERS and the agency's telephone systems

In the past year, the centers introduced new scheduling software (PowerTime) that improved fairness and flexibility through mobile accessibility and streamlined processes. They also received upgrades to the P25 radio console design and CAD mapping software, incorporating the latest road and state-managed land data.

In September 2024, the centers adopted a new training software system (Power Ready) to track standardized training and ensure compliance with Florida Public Safety Telecommunicator certification requirements.



## Looking Ahead

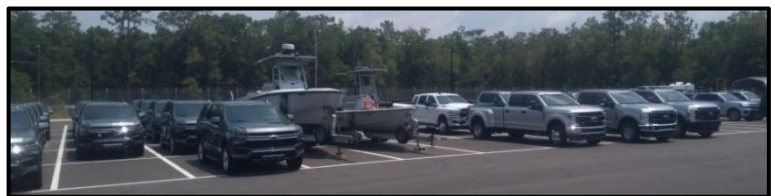
Several forward-looking initiatives are in progress:

- A new equipment usage log system is being developed to offer near real-time monitoring and streamlined tracking for supervisors.
- Fleet management testing is underway, with the goal of automating activity and equipment logs—eliminating manual entries by officers and providing supervisors with easier access to reporting, equipment location, and usage data.
- The section is also evaluating several new technologies, including:
  - Body-worn cameras
  - In-car video systems
  - AI-assisted report writing tools
  - Enhanced phone systems for staff and officers

These advancements aim to improve operational efficiency, data accuracy, and overall support for law enforcement personnel statewide.

## ***Fleet Services***

The Division of Law Enforcement Fleet Services has one main facility in Tallahassee, the North Florida Shop. This facility supports the division's fleet and maintenance needs. This crew handles repairs as well as the rigging of all new equipment. During 2024-2025, this section purchased and began rigging 105 vehicles, primarily patrol F-150s, as well as eight Chevrolet 1500 Trail Bosses, 11 UTVs, and 54 vessel packages. Among these vessels were 29' Safe Boats, Diamondback Airboats, and 20' and 24' Young vessels. FWC technicians also supported the Division of Law Enforcement with Hurricane Debby, Helene and Milton disaster responses.

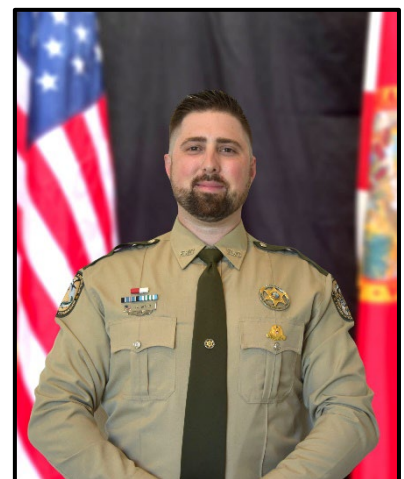


## **OTHER SPECIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATES**

### ***Awards***

#### ***Officer of the Year – Officer Jacob Wild, Northeast Region***

Officer Jacob Wild exemplifies leadership and commitment to conservation law enforcement and has demonstrated exceptional investigative skills. His major cases include the prosecution of a poacher for taking deer at night and out of season, catching an outfitter guiding wild turkey hunts over bait, and uncovering illegal hunting inside a state park. With 16 boating-under-the-influence arrests last year, Officer Wild has also shown a strong focus on boating safety. A leader by example, he spearheaded "Guardian of



the Springs" operation, which brought together multiple agencies to promote public safety and enforce regulations at a high-traffic state park. This initiative included training, meetings, and team-building efforts, culminating in creating a challenge coin to recognize participants.

Officer Wild also has participated in multiple Operation Lone Star deployments and hurricane recovery efforts. Beyond enforcement, Officer Wild actively engages in community service, participating in river cleanups and fostering partnerships with landowners and other agencies. He has played a key role in outreach programs with Future Farmers of America, schools, and homeowner associations, educating people about conservation. Officer Wild works diligently to develop relationships with FWC biologists and other staff on high-profile issues, mentors newer officers and serves as an advocate for the FWC at the clerk's office and state attorney's offices. Recognized for his dedication, Wild has received numerous awards, including the National Operation Dry Water Officer of the Year (2024), FWC State Park Officer of the Year (2022), Northeast Region Boating Officer of the Year (2021) and has been twice nominated for the MADD Florida Boating Officer of the Year.

### ***Investigator of the Year – Investigator Ryan Crane, North Central Region***

Investigator Ryan Crane, known for his outstanding leadership and investigative expertise, began his FWC career in 2003 as an OPS biologist. He transitioned to law enforcement in 2009, eventually becoming an investigator in 2021. Investigator Crane's subject matter expertise, thoroughness and commitment to excellence are demonstrated through his investigative work on complex cases, securing multiple convictions related to vessel theft, boating accidents, and hunting and commercial fishing violations. Notably, he was pivotal in a high-profile vessel theft case that led to a subject receiving a 16-month prison sentence and went above and beyond assisting officers with a gill net case in Dixie County.



Investigator Crane's dedication extends beyond his investigative work; he has mentored numerous officers, facilitated training, and participated in community outreach, including guiding youth hunts. As a member of the North Central Region's special operations group team, he deployed several times last year including three hurricanes, responding to various emergencies where he rescued 19 hurricane victims. In addition, Investigator Crane is the North Central Critical Incident and Stress Management (CISM) team leader and the North Central Forensic Liaison with the University of Florida Lab in Gainesville. His comprehensive skill set, mentorship and willingness to assist have resulted in numerous regional awards including North Central Area 3 Officer of the Year (2014), North Central Boating Safety Officer of the Year (2017), North Central Team of the Year (2021), and North Central Investigator of the Year (2022).

### ***Boating Officer of the Year – Officer Jody Criswell, Southwest Region***

Officer Jody Criswell has made a positive impact in ensuring public safety and the sustainability of Florida's ecosystems since she became an FWC officer in 2019. She understands the threats posed by derelict vessels and has developed expertise in testing effective means of propulsion and enforcing at-risk vessel laws as well as demonstrating exceptional investigative skills in resolving





complex derelict vessel cases. Her work at enforcing at-risk and derelict vessel laws has included training multiple local agencies, resulting in the successful handling of over 100 such cases in 2024. Officer Criswell has expertly handled serious boating accidents, securing crucial evidence and directing responding units and the collection of witness statements. Additionally, Officer Criswell applies her skills and knowledge to boating-under-the-influence violations, uncovering illegal livery operations and enforcing marine sanitation device regulations. She also has forged strong relationships with local law enforcement and the Pinellas County State Attorney's Office, making her a vital asset to the agency and her community.

Beyond enforcement, she is deeply involved in public outreach, educating communities about wildlife conservation, avoiding human-wildlife conflicts, and boating safety. Officer Criswell's professionalism, strong work ethic, and willingness to take on difficult tasks set her apart. Her contributions earned her the Audubon Officer of the Year (2022) and a commendation from the Pinellas County State Attorney's Office (2024).

### ***Trainer of the Year – Lieutenant Casey Anderson***

Lieutenant Casey Anderson, who began his FWC law enforcement career in 2011, has set a high standard for law enforcement instruction. He has served in multiple roles in the Division of Law Enforcement before joining the Training Section in 2021 where his commitment to training has significantly enhanced recruit and officer development. Lt. Anderson's dedication to the FWC mission is evident in his instructional approach, aligning his training with core missions such as conservation, public service and safety. He fosters a positive learning environment that keeps students engaged and motivates them to excel. He has led numerous training initiatives, including Defensive Tactics, First Aid/CPR, Water Safety Survival, and Statewide Vessel Operations. One of his key contributions to operational readiness has been his involvement with in-service training where he developed and led vessel operation training to enhance the skills of our nonsworn members from the other divisions. These sessions reinforced best practices in boat handling, safety procedures, and effective communication in field operations. Lt. Anderson also played a key role in developing the first FWC Vessel Operations Train-the-Trainer Instructor course, training over 30 nonsworn FWC instructors and 52 Florida State Guard members statewide.



A model of professionalism, Anderson remains composed and constructive, even in high-pressure situations such as responding to a medical emergency during a training session or providing candid feedback designed to improve a recruiting class's performance. Through his enthusiasm for training, integrity, and leadership, Lt. Anderson has made a lasting impact on the agency.

### ***Team of the Year – Division of Law Enforcement Budget Team***

The Budget Team, consisting of Lisa Phillips, Stacy Wilson, Deborah Furrow, Christine Simmons, Samantha Yuan, Sean Singletary, Richard Ulrich, Crystal Enfinger, and Lauren Colbert, plays a vital role in supporting the Division of Law Enforcement's mission. Their expertise and dedication ensure the Division's financial resources are effectively allocated and managed, particularly during critical situations such as natural disasters.



During Hurricanes Helene and Milton, the team provided behind-the-scenes support, ensuring administrative staff had the necessary resources for preparedness and recovery. They facilitated purchasing approvals, disseminated information from the governor's office, and worked closely with FEMA to maximize recovery efforts. Their quick response and commitment helped the regions navigate those challenging times.

Beyond crisis management, the budget team demonstrates excellence through innovation. They develop and maintain monthly budget spreadsheets that track spending on travel, utilities, vehicle repairs, and more. These tools provide clear financial insights, helping regional offices manage expenses efficiently. Their keen attention to detail and proactive approach make them indispensable to the agency and division's financial health.

The team's positive attitude and willingness to assist make them a trusted resource for all regions. They are approachable, responsive, and committed to ensuring each region stays within budget while having the resources needed to operate effectively.

### ***Duty Officer of the Year – Jennifer Rice, Lake Worth Regional Communications Center***

Since joining FWC in August 2021, Jennifer (Jenny) Rice has demonstrated outstanding dedication in her role as a duty officer and approaches her job with a positive and productive attitude. Her performance in 2024 was exceptional and Lake Worth Regional Communications Center supervision recognized her for going above and beyond with the most Wildlife Alerts entered into CAD and the highest number of phone calls answered (4,060). She also received recognition for handling the most incidents and tips from July 2023 to January 2024.

Beyond her job duties, Jenny is actively involved in her community, volunteering for manatee rescues and participating in the Jupiter Fishing with Military Veterans event each year.

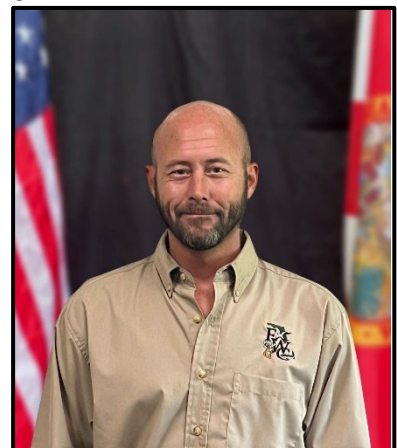


Jenny fosters a welcoming and supportive work environment by remembering birthdays, organizing special events, and surprising coworkers with thoughtful gestures. As a certified training officer (CTO), she has successfully trained five new duty officers in the last six months, setting a high standard for excellence. Jenny is the first duty officer specialist at LWRCC, having completed all required standards for the title. Her enthusiasm for making a positive impact and commitment to excellence have earned her multiple accolades and the respect of her peers.

### ***Employee of the Year – Zachary Fadeley, South Region A***

Zachary Fadeley has demonstrated exceptional dedication and skill in his role as a Division of Law Enforcement marine mechanic. Since joining the FWC in early 2024, he has consistently showcased his technical expertise, quickly diagnosing and resolving complex issues with efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Zach's professionalism and work ethic have earned him a reputation as an invaluable team player within the South Region.

Beyond his daily responsibilities, Zach has gone above and beyond by deploying three times over the past year. He deployed for Hurricanes





Debby and Helene in Florida and then traveled to North Carolina to support hurricane recovery efforts there through Operation Blue Ridge. He has also contributed to various tasks outside of his job description, such as helping with surplus equipment removal, regional meeting setup and cleanup, and regional work/clean-up days. His can-do attitude and willingness to assist in any capacity have made him an outstanding asset to the team.

### ***Biologist of the Year – Rhonda Latour, Southwest Region***

Since joining FWC in 2017, Rhonda Latour has played an important role in mitigating human-wildlife conflicts as a senior wildlife assistance biologist. She works to prevent issues before they escalate, providing biological insights to law enforcement officers and the public. Rhonda regularly communicates with the Division of Law Enforcement by attending captains' area meetings and conducting site visits with officers. She has played a pivotal role in resolving community wildlife disputes, such as coyote feeding at Golf Meadows Country Club and squirrel trapping complaints in Punta Gorda. Her efforts in Siesta Key helped address coyote-related pet attacks, reducing demand on law enforcement resources.

Rhonda enhanced wildlife conflict response procedures by working with Major Creech to refine a law enforcement tiered response quick reference guide, providing officers with valuable field resources. As a subject matter expert, she mentors officers on violations such as illegal trapping and feeding wildlife, enabling them to handle incidents more effectively. She also recognizes officers through internal praise programs and ensures law enforcement officers and duty officers receive timely information about wildlife concerns. When the Siesta Key coyote issue generated media and political backlash, Rhonda's public outreach, town hall meetings, and media engagement successfully shifted perceptions and improved community relations. Rhonda demonstrates what a positive working relationship between divisions should be by providing FWC officers with information, educating new recruits, and coordinating wildlife response workshops.



### ***Prosecutor of the Year – Assistant State Attorney Benjamin Laing, Southwest Region***

Prosecutor Benjamin Laing has demonstrated a strong commitment to prosecuting wildlife and boating violations. He has served as an Assistant State Attorney for the 6th Judicial Circuit for the past two years where his passion for Florida's natural resources and his legal expertise have made him an invaluable partner to FWC officers.

Laing prioritizes teamwork and communication, often working directly with officers in the field to ensure cases are thoroughly investigated and effectively prosecuted. His dedication was evident in a shorebird poaching case, where his collaboration led to felony animal cruelty charges and a well-coordinated arrest. His strategic and proactive approach has resulted in stronger legal actions against those who harm protected species, including manatees, gopher tortoises, and migratory birds.



Recognizing the need for better resource protection, Laing established a system in which violators would agree to donate financial penalties to the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida instead of to the counties where the violations occurred. This innovation generated approximately \$50,000 in 2024 to support wildlife conservation efforts in Florida. He also ensures boating under the influence (BUI) and vessel-related cases are prosecuted effectively, providing officers with guidance on case strategy and maintaining strong communication throughout legal proceedings.

A true advocate for wildlife justice, Laing doesn't hesitate to take on complex cases, including lengthy jury trials. His willingness to collaborate, strategize, and even join officers in the field during warrant services has earned him their trust and respect.

## Georgia

***Mike England, Colonel***



### Agency Overview

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Law Enforcement Division, currently has 192 POST-certified game wardens with statewide authority and full arrest powers and 24 non-sworn staff members. The primary duties of these game wardens are enforcement of all laws and regulations pertaining to hunting, fishing, commercial fishing, environmental violations, and recreational boating, as well as providing 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, lieutenant colonel, two majors, eight captains (6 region supervisors, 1 training director, 1 pilot), six lieutenants (database management, special permits/captive wildlife and wild animals, boating law administrator and administrative support, investigations, and 2 pilots), and 174 field game wardens (sergeants, corporals, game wardens first class, and game wardens).

### Game Warden Academy

The 39th Game Warden Academy officially began on Sunday, Jan. 12, 2025, at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center (GPSTC) in Forsyth, Georgia. The class included 15 cadets who had recently completed the 11-week Georgia POST Mandate Course, along with 4 cadets who already held POST certification. During the 15-week academy, 8 cadets voluntarily withdrew from training. The remaining 11 cadets successfully completed the program and graduated from the DNR Academy on April 25. These new game wardens are now working in the field as they complete their final phase of training through the Field Training Program.





## ***In-Service Training***

Over the past year, Georgia's game wardens have completed an extensive schedule of advanced training. In July 2024, all game wardens across the state completed Taser 7 recertification, paired with de-escalation and use-of-force training. In August, our Defensive Tactics Instructors completed re-certification training. The agency fulfilled its annual firearms requalification during the months of September and October, and in November, the special operations group (SOG) took part in specialized long-range patrol rifle training. In January, our defensive tactics instructors conducted refresher courses on Taser 7 deployment. In February, the 38th Game Warden Academy class completed advanced roadside impaired driving enforcement (ARIDE). March and April were dedicated to agency-wide firearms training to maintain their marksmanship and tactical proficiency. During this same time, SOG units underwent advanced firearms training. In May 2025, all game wardens completed standardized field sobriety training (SFST), along with CPR and first aid re-certification. By June, our specialized teams wrapped up their own advanced training. The critical incident response team (CIRT) completed sonar training for underwater recovery and search missions, while our K-9 unit finished its annual K-9 specific training.

## **Investigative Unit**

The Investigative Unit (IU) is a specialized team consisting of three full-time investigators, two detached investigators, and one Intelligence Analyst. The IU leads and supports overt and covert investigations, manages the agency's Intelligence Unit, and oversees several specialty teams: the Critical Incident Reconstruction Team (CIRT), SONAR Unit, Marine Theft Unit (MTU), Drone Unit, and Internal Affairs. The IU also provides critical support to the Special Permit Unit (SPU). The IU's primary mission is to support field Game Wardens with advanced investigative expertise, covert operations, and access to specialized tools and programs. It also serves as a statewide intelligence hub, facilitating interagency collaboration. The unit routinely employs cutting-edge technology including ZetX (cell phone mapping and Google search warrants), PENLINK (social media analysis), and CELLEBRITE (mobile device forensics). These resources are used daily by Georgia game wardens, prosecutors, and law enforcement partners at local, state, and federal levels—enhancing both operational effectiveness and public safety.

### ***Overt and Covert Investigations***

IU agents manage undercover operations when traditional enforcement methods are ineffective. In the past year, the unit handled 586 investigations and requests for support, including short- and long-term cases involving intelligence collection, buy/bust operations, and violations related to wildlife commercialization—cases often only solvable through covert means.

### ***Critical Incident Reconstruction Team (CIRT)***

CIRT investigators, strategically placed across the state, respond to fatal or serious injury incidents related to boating, hunting, or state-managed lands. In the past year, the team was activated for eight major investigations, including a catastrophic gangway collapse on Sapelo Island resulting in seven fatalities. CIRT conducted over 200 interviews and continues to collaborate with the Georgia Attorney General's Office on the case.

### ***SONAR Unit***

Comprising 32 trained Game Wardens, the SONAR Unit specializes in recovery of drowning victims and submerged evidence using advanced sonar technology (side scan, down scan, sector scan) and remotely operated vehicles (ROVs). The unit averages 40 deployments annually.

### ***Marine Theft Unit (MTU)***

The MTU assists field officers with investigations involving stolen vessels, fraudulent titles, and abandoned boats. Investigators utilize law enforcement and maritime databases (GO Outdoors, GCIC, NCIC, USCG VIS) to verify vessel status and guide enforcement. The unit also aids the public and marine industry professionals through the Abandoned Vessel Process. Last year, MTU processed 185 requests and recovered nine stolen vessels.

### ***Drone Unit***

With three certified operators and two drones, this unit supports CIRT scene reconstruction, SONAR search efforts, and Game Warden-led search and rescue operations, enhancing aerial intelligence and operational efficiency.

### ***Internal Affairs***

Two trained investigators manage internal investigations. One handles criminal internal matters for other Georgia DNR divisions, while the other oversees Law Enforcement Division investigations under the direction of the colonel.

### **Aviation**

The LED Aviation Support Unit provides service to all DNR Divisions and other state agencies utilizing three Bell 407GX/GXi helicopters. The Aviation Unit flew approximately 625 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, 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, utilizing the helicopter mounted FLIR system. In addition to the WRD surveys, LT Miller and LT Buller flew multiple missions assisting the Game Management Section and the Wildlife Conservation Section with prescribed burns on the State WMA's during the late winter months of January through March 2025. 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. In the last 12-month period, the DNR aviation unit recorded the most short haul rescue extractions in the unit's



history at 13 for the period. Rescue extractions were conducted from Fannin County, over to Rabun and Habersham counties. 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 assisted in disaster recovery from multiple hurricanes throughout the last year as well. The Aviation Unit also assisted other State and Federal law enforcement agencies utilizing the three Bell 407 Helicopters in support of various missions throughout the state.

## Special Permits Unit

The Georgia DNR Law Enforcement Division, Special Permits Unit issued and maintained 3,356 permits and collected approximately \$91,625.00.00 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/Hunt Regs*

The Division shifted the Ranger Hotline program to the Hunt Regs App in October 2024. This successful program provides a way for citizens to report anonymously through the phone number or through the app, potentially illegal wildlife and other conservation law violations. 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, 242 tips were received for various violations.

## Joint Enforcement Agreement

The Joint Enforcement Agreement #24 between Georgia DNR and NOAA office of Law Enforcement called for GADNR enforcement personnel to provide a total of 1279 hours of marine law enforcement or related work under the agreement. Georgia has 5 Execution Priorities. Execution Priority 1 was Endangered Species Act. There were 242-man hours and 107 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 264-man hours and 114 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 162-man hours and 54 hours of at-sea vessel patrols dedicated to Priority 3. Execution Priority 4 was Marine Mammal Right Whale. There were 198-man hours and 66 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 6 federal violations during these patrols and federal referrals were sent to NOAA Office of Law Enforcement for prosecution.



## Vehicles and Equipment

Throughout the year, the Law Enforcement Division acquired some new vehicles and equipment, utilizing funding from various sources. Twenty-four new 4x4 Chevrolet patrol vehicles were purchased and are currently being upfitted with emergency equipment. The department was also able to purchase nine patrol boats for inland and coastal water enforcement. Ericsson Dispatch software was rolled out statewide. The software allows DNR Incident Command to communicate statewide over the Southern Linc/Harris radio system from one location using an internet connection. The division is currently testing iOS devices for their compatibility with the current Smart Cop system. The department was also able to purchase AEDs for Game Wardens statewide.



# Kentucky

***Jeremy McQueary, Colonel***

## Personnel



In the past year, the Law Enforcement Division graduated 6 new recruits from Game Warden Academy Class 28. All 6 recruits are now patrolling the Commonwealth and are assigned across the State.

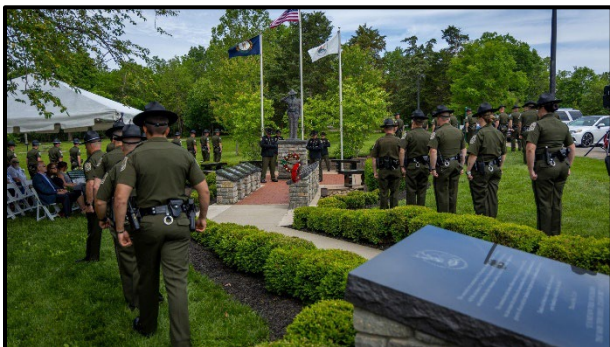
During the spring of 2025, the Law Enforcement Division Recruitment Section worked diligently to adjust and evolve our recruitment efforts. Their hard work and dedication paid huge dividends to our hiring process and attracted over 850 applicants who competed for 30 positions. Selections for Game



Warden Academy classes 29 and 30 were made in August for 30 new recruits to be added to our ranks. Academy classes 29 and 30 are scheduled to take to the field during the summer of 2026!



During May of this year, Game Wardens from across the state gathered to pay respect to and honor the lives of the 11 Wardens who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. Our memorial site is located on the Agency campus at our Headquarters building in our capital city, Frankfort. In June, Wardens throughout the State participated in our annual 5k Fallen Officer Memorial run to further honor and celebrate the lives of our fallen.







Our Law Enforcement Division is proud to announce the retirement of 9 career game wardens in August of this year. Of those nine, 2 were lieutenants, 6 were sergeants, and 1 was a master game warden. 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.

The Law Enforcement Division recently re-organized its Special Investigations Unit (SIU). This specialized group of game wardens work a variety of cases across the state but is mission-driven to

ensure the integrity of fish and wildlife resource commercialization. Their enforcement efforts and productivity have been phenomenal and as Game Warden personnel increases, it is the goal of the Law Enforcement Division to increase personnel numbers within this unit.

## Disaster Response

The Law Enforcement Division responded to two major weather events that impacted the Commonwealth during 2025. The flooding and tornado disasters that devastated east Kentucky required specialized response that was ready-made for the training and equipment our game wardens possess.

Unfortunately, these types of weather-related disasters are increasing within our state, and it is first responders who are prepared and ready to answer the call. Our wardens expertise and desire to protect and serve allows KDFWR to play a major role during natural disasters. It is the goal of the Law Enforcement Division to continue to broaden our response efforts.



## Equipment

The Law Enforcement Division recently added patrol boats and 20 patrol trucks to our fleet. The addition of these patrol vehicles will help aid in the adequacy of our ability to effectively protect and serve the Commonwealth.



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 three 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.

## Enforcement And Outreach

The Life Jacket Loaner Station initiative is continuing to grow and be a utilized resource by boating recreators across the State. Law Enforcement Division Boating Educator Marcus Bowling, who has overseen this project from its inception, recently was awarded National Boating Educator of the Year. Marcus is a retired Game Warden Sergeant and has done an excellent job creating a safer boating environment throughout the Commonwealth!

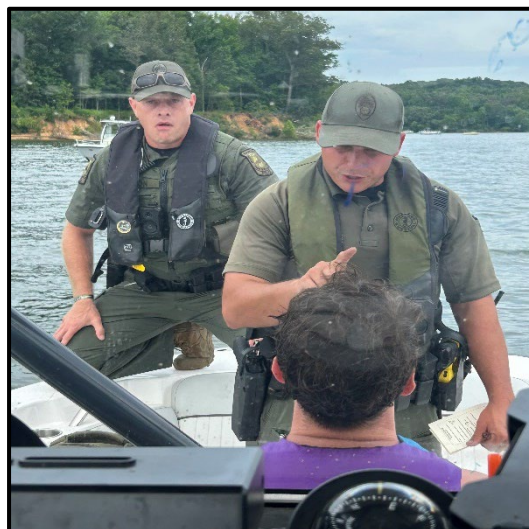


The Law Enforcement Division strives to provide a professional, well trained, and competent game wardens to serve the sportsmen and sportswomen that enjoy the resources of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Our wardens are often recognized for their efforts across the state by citizens that we have impacted in some way. Our wardens have a passion for conservation law



enforcement and interacting with the public and strive to maintain positive relationships with those we serve!

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 2025, we continued the campaign and have been very successful at deterring impaired boat operation and arresting those in violation.

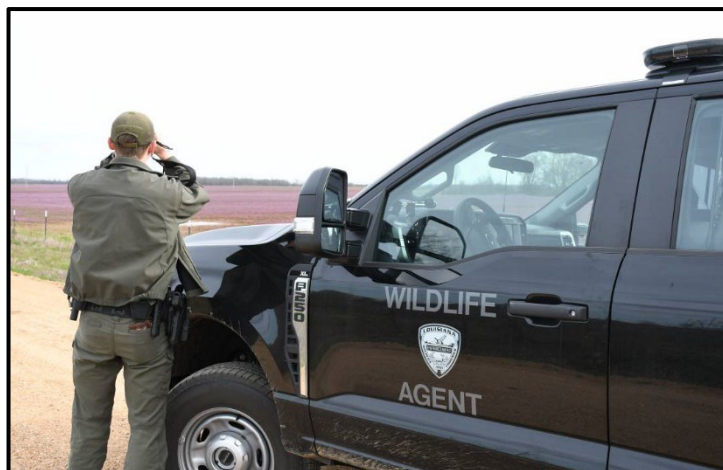


## Louisiana

### ***Stephen Clark, Colonel***

The LDWF Law Enforcement Division’s (LDWF-LED) operating budget for 2024 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 256,682 patrol hours in 2024: 183,033 on land and





73,649 on water. Agents made 606,524 contacts with the public, the majority of whom were in compliance with state and federal wildlife and fisheries regulations. LDWF-LED agents issued 10,285 criminal citations and 5,313 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 administration of the division. Reporting to the Colonel are two Lieutenant Colonels. One Lieutenant Colonel serves as Assistant Chief of Administration while the other Lieutenant Colonel serves as Assistant Chief of Patrol. The administration side includes budget, communications, emergency services, recreational boating safety and education, training, support, and public information. The patrol side includes all state regional field operations and the aviation section. The LDWF Enforcement Division is currently headed by Col. Stephen Clark. Clark was appointed to the rank of colonel in June of 2024.



Colonel Stephen Clark

Col. Clark started his law enforcement career as a game warden with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in 1994. Before being selected as the Colonel, he served as an advisor to former LDWF Secretary Madison Sheahan on the executive staff as Deputy Secretary/Assistant Secretary of Wildlife. Col. Clark has also served in multiple positions for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, including Assistant Special Agent in Charge, 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, Col. 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. He 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.

Col. 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 6 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 12-25 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 232 enforcement agents, 12 administrative staff, 8 communications officers, 2 pilots, 1 grant reviewer, 1 maintenance repair and 1 public information officer. The actual number of filled positions (as of July of 2025) is 232.

## ***Regional Enforcement Programs***

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

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



## ***Specialized Units***

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

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

The Maritime Special Response Team is a cooperative endeavor between LDWF-LED and the Louisiana State Police SWAT team to address maritime security and public safety threats within the state of Louisiana. The team provides a maritime tactical response capability at the state level in order to effectively provide public safety, officer safety, 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 the monitoring of commercial fisheries.

### ***Special Operations Group***

LDWF created the Special Operations Group (SOG), which plays a crucial role in supporting the patrol section of the Enforcement Division. The SOG is integral in working special details either specific to LDWF or in partnership with Louisiana State Police and/or other agencies. Agents assigned to the group are called upon to work with regional agents on specific operations involving boating safety, game, and fish enforcement or large scale public safety events. The SOG is also utilized in any situation requiring additional resources. Agents assigned to the SOG attend a 50

hour course in which they must show weapon proficiency, physical fitness, and a heightened level of situational awareness.

### **LDWF Agents Wrapped Up Patrols in New Orleans for Mardi Gras**

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) enforcement agents finished assisting Louisiana State Police (LSP) and New Orleans Police Department with Mardi Gras patrols in the French Quarter area of New Orleans.

LDWF agents provided these patrols to assist with crowd control, enforcement and public safety from Feb. 9 to Feb. 14, which included 17 LDWF agents and two LDWF biologists per day, resulting in a total of 1,240 man-hours worked.

“It’s great to see true teamwork with Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Louisiana State Police, and New Orleans Police Department working to make the city of New Orleans safe,” said Governor Jeff Landry.

Agents were specifically on the lookout for illegally possessed animals in the French Quarter area for the safety of the residents and tourists in the city. LDWF agents wrote citations for the illegal possession of five snakes and one opossum. Agents also cited a person for selling turtles without a reptile retail dealer’s license.

LDWF agents along with LDWF biologists seized a 14.5-foot reticulated python, a 10-foot reticulated python, a 3-foot ball python, and an opossum.



In addition to this, LDWF agents assisted LSP with making 76 arrests on illegal weapons and drug charges and helped LSP seize 57 illegal guns, two stolen motorcycles, and illegal drugs from the streets. Furthermore, LDWF agents worked with LSP in securing crime scenes, arresting a pickpocket thief, and breaking up numerous fights that occurred on Bourbon Street.

State charges for the illegal possession of the snakes and the possum bring up to a \$500 fine and 90 days in jail. Selling turtles without a reptile dealer’s license also carries up to a \$500 fine and 90 days in jail.



## 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 289,000 registered boats, Louisiana contains many geographic, demographic and economic features that pose special challenges for boating safety enforcement.

LDWF-LED agents made 139,131 public contacts during the course of 48,699 patrol hours dedicated to boating enforcement, education and accident investigation in 2024. Of those hours, 42,689 patrol hours were performed in vessels on the water.

The adoption of “Rules of the Road” regulations for boaters has enhanced the enforcement of boating safety regulations and boating under the influence laws. These regulations provide the boating public with clear rules for the manner in which boats are operated and are an important tool in determining fault in boating accidents. The “Rules of the Road” also enhance the ability of agents to address reckless and careless operation of motorboats. In 2024, LDWF-LED agents issued 61 citations for careless and reckless operation of a vessel and 93 citations for operating a vessel while intoxicated.

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

Agents hold monthly classes in each region for anyone who wishes or is required by Louisiana law to take them. In 2024, 10,809 citizens were certified in classroom and online classes. LDWF-LED continues to recruit and train additional volunteer instructors to complement and enhance the efforts of its own agents. Since the inception of the boating safety education course in 2003, LDWF has certified 177,652 students.

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



LDWF participated in the National Association of Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) Operation Dry Water Weekend from July 4-6 in 2024. During the Operation Dry Water weekend, LDWF agents arrested 25 people for DUI while operating a vessel.

LDWF participated in several national campaigns including "Wear your PFD to work Day" on May 17 and the "Safe Boating Week" in Louisiana from May 18-24 in 2024. 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 27, 2024. This was the 13<sup>th</sup> annual Lagniappe Day. LDWF certified 230 boaters at boating safety classes in eight different locations across the state and provided food and drinks, giveaways and door prizes.



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

## **Search & Rescue Operations**

LDWF-LED is responsible for providing and coordinating search and rescue response and maritime security activities for the state. This activity supports the state's goal of hurricane recovery and emergency preparedness by planning, training and coordinating local, state and federal response for search and rescue associated with natural or manmade disasters. Preparedness and efficient execution of search and rescue response events is essential to saving lives and swift recovery efforts. Providing maritime security on our state's waterways is essential to protection of critical infrastructure located in maritime environments throughout Louisiana.

### **LDWF Agents Successfully Rescue Lost Hunter in St. Landry Parish**

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) enforcement agents successfully rescued a missing hunter from the Thistlethwaite Wildlife Management Area (WMA) on Oct. 10 in St. Landry Parish.

LDWF Agents were notified about a missing person on Oct. 9 around 11 a.m. Agents learned that a 69 year old went squirrel hunting on the Thistlethwaite WMA on the morning of Oct. 8 and did not return.

LDWF agents immediately began searching the area and found the missing hunter's vehicle on Peckham Road inside the WMA. Agents searched the WMA overnight and into the morning.

An LDWF agent on an all-terrain vehicle found the missing hunter walking on a trail around 11 a.m.

on Oct. 10. The agent gave the missing hunter water and transported him by ATV to his vehicle.

Acadian Ambulance transported the missing hunter to the Mercy Regional Medical Center in Ville Platte to be treated for non-life threatening symptoms.

LDWF agents participating in the search were Agent Hayden Byrd, Sgt. Tyler Smith, Lt. Lance Devillier, Corporal Jason Sanchez, Captain Ryan Faul, Lt. Cullom Schexnyder and Sgt. David Boudreax. The St. Landry Parish Sheriff's Office deputies and their K9 unit also participated in the search.

#### **LDWF Agents Rescue Stranded Boater During Severe Thunderstorms in Lake Borgne**

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries enforcement agents successfully rescued a stranded boater in St. Bernard Parish on July 18.

Agents received a call around noon on July 18 about a stranded boater in Lake Borgne. Agents responded to the scene and located the boater around 2 p.m.

According to the stranded boater, he could not get his boat motor to start and he started drifting even with an anchor because of the wind and waves from the ongoing thunderstorms in the area. Agents found the boater about 19 miles from where he launched his boat.

Agents were able to safely get the boater and his boat across 12 miles of rough open water and back to the Rigolets Marina.

#### **LDWF Agents Successfully Rescue Four Boaters in Plaquemines Parish**

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries enforcement agents rescued four stranded boaters in Plaquemines Parish on July 16.

Agents received information around 2 a.m. on July 16 about four stranded boaters on an island in Bastian Bay. Agents responded to the scene and were able to locate the four boaters on the island around 4:30 a.m.

According the boaters, they beached their vessel to fish on the island and their boat drifted off into the darkness. The boaters notified authorities when they noticed their vessel was no longer beached on the island.

After rescuing the boaters, the agents were also able to locate the vessel and returned it to the boaters.

#### **Overdue Boater Successfully Rescued in Vermilion Parish**

Search and rescue teams from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF), St. Mary's Parish Sheriff's Office (SPSO), Iberia Parish Sheriff's Office (IPSO), Vermilion Parish Sheriff's Office (VPSO), Vermilion Parish Constable's Office, and the U.S. Coast Guard were alerted around 3:15 a.m. from family members on May 22 about an overdue boater in Vermilion Parish.

The teams immediately began searching the area with LDWF, SPSO, IPSO and the VPSO in vessels, the U.S. Coast Guard in a helicopter and airplane and the Vermilion Parish Constable's office in a vehicle.



Around 8:30 a.m. the U.S. Coast Guard observed a stranded vessel on the beach of Southwest Pass. LDWF agents arrived at the beach and observed a person standing on the beach with a swamped vessel nearby. LDWF agents coordinated with the U.S. Coast Guard and the Vermilion Parish Constable's Office to reach the individual.

The Vermilion Parish Constable's Office was able to reach the individual in a pickup truck on the beach. The U.S. Coast Guard then airlifted the person onto their helicopter and they transported him back to his vehicle at the Quintana Boat Launch.

No injuries have been reported from this incident.

According to the survivor, he went to go boating on May 20 and got disoriented and ran out of gas when his boat got swamped and beached at Southwest Pass. He also said his phone battery died.

#### **LDWF Agent Rescues Man from Sunken Vessel in Vermilion Bay**

A Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries agent successfully completed a search and rescue mission in Vermilion Parish on May 16.

Corporal Derek Logan, who was on shrimp patrol in Vermilion Bay, received a call about a sunken vessel nearby around 10:50 a.m. He immediately began searching the area and around 11:15 a.m. found a 56-year-old man without a personal flotation device clinging to a cooler and fuel tank from his 16-foot vessel.

Corporal Logan was able to retrieve the man from the water and bring him to shore to be checked out by local Emergency Medical Services, where he was released without injury.

According to the rescued man, his vessel began taking on water when the wind and waves picked up, which suddenly sunk his boat.

#### **LDWF Agents Participate in Rescuing Two Boaters from the Atchafalaya River**

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) enforcement agents participated in a successful search and rescue mission in Avoyelles Parish on March 11.

LDWF Corporal Douglas Anderson received a call around 4 p.m. about a capsized vessel in the Atchafalaya River at Simmesport with two boaters in the water. Corporal Anderson and Simmesport Volunteer fireman, Cody Jackson, immediately launched Corporal Anderson's vessel just south of the reported incident.

Around the same time, LDWF Corporal Tib Guillory was off duty and fishing in the area with his friend. Corporal Guillory learned about the capsized vessel and rushed to the scene.

Corporal Anderson and Corporal Guillory both arrived to the scene about the same time at around 4:10 p.m. and saw two men clinging to a floating piece of plywood in the river. Each agent pulled a man into their vessels and brought them to the nearest boat launch. The men refused care from Emergency Medical Services on scene and went home without injury.

According to the rescued boaters, they were on a homemade 20-foot vessel in the Atchafalaya

River when their vessel capsized around 3:50 p.m. The men were discharged into approximately 55-degree swift water without life jackets. A witness on the bank called 911.

LDWF agents will be the lead investigative agency for this boating incident. The capsized vessel sank in the river. The men were found in the river about a mile south from where their vessel capsized.

## LDWF TRAINING

### *Academy*

On April 24, 2024, LDWF graduated its 36th 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.



- LDWF certified two agents in FLETC MLETP.
- LDWF has completed three NASBLA Airboat Operator Courses and certified 22 agents as operators.
- LDWF trained 19 agents in Introduction to Boating Incident Investigations.
- LDWF certified 14 agents in NASBLA Boating Incident Investigation Level 1.
- LDWF hosted the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) Conference.
- LDWF sent one agent to the NASBLA Leadership Academy.
- LDWF sent one agent to Bismarck, North Dakota to train agencies in NASBLA BII Comprehensive Course.
- LDWF has five road SFST instructors and have 12 agents whom are NASBLA credentialed instructors for the BUI seated SFST course.
- LDWF has 19 NASBLA Officer Water Survival trainers.



- LDWF currently has 19 agents whom are licensed through the FAA as remote pilots for our unmanned aircraft (UAS) system.
- Nine agents were certified as Use of Force Instructors through FLETC.
- An LDWF agent successfully completed the DHS Leadership Academy.
- LDWF certified four agents in Force Science's Realistic De-Escalation.
- LDWF certified two agents as Drug Recognition Experts (DRE). LDWF currently has 23 DRE's.
- LDWF certified two agents in the FLETC Firearms Instructor Training Program.
- 24 LDWF agents completed VALOR Officer Resilience Training.
- Two LDWF agents completed the FLETC Digital Forensics Investigator Course
- LDWF sent three agents to the Command Presence - Transformational Trainer Course.
- One LDWF agent successfully completed the Northwestern University School of Police Staff and Command Class # 589.
- LDWF sent two agents to the IHEA Hunting Incident Investigation Instructor Course.
- LDWF conducted UAS Annual Training with 20 agents.
- For the first time in LDWF history, one LDWF agent successfully completed the FBI National Academy Class #292.
- LDWF certified four new firearms instructors through the Louisiana POST Firearms Instructor School.
- Two LDWF agents completed the SSGT Edged Weapons Instructor Course
- LDWF sent 10 female agents to the Louisiana State Police Women's Conference.
- LDWF sent five female agents to attend a Female Survival Tactics Course.
- Four agents successfully completed the Glock Armorer's School.

### ***In-Service***

At the end of 2024, 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***

- Strategic Self-Defense & Gunfighting Tactics (SSGT)
- Legal – Search & Seizure
- Firearms Proficiency Training

### ***DWI***

Two agents were certified as Drug Recognition Experts (DRE).

### ***Marine Law Enforcement Training Program***

At the end of 2024, all agents 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 16 Crisis Intervention and Critical Incident members whom are part of the Agents Crisis Team (ACT) and are trained in Crisis Intervention. The ACT team consists of agents who are specially trained as skilled listeners. The objective of ACT is to provide support for law enforcement personnel, and their immediate family, who have experienced a critical incident or traumatic event. A Critical Incident is defined as any incident, action, or event, which has the potential for producing significant emotional trauma that may adversely affect the psychological well-being of law enforcement personnel.

### ***Recruiting Section***

In 2017, LDWF established a Recruiting Section consisting of one full-time recruiter with the mission of attracting and retaining the best, brightest, and most talented candidates to become

LDWF agents. In 2021, the Enforcement Division added a second full-time recruiter and 16 regional agents tasked with the part-time duty of recruiting. The two full-time recruiters attended law enforcement recruiting courses from the Public Agency Training Council (PATC) and Law Enforcement Seminars (LES). These current best training practices were the foundation used to train region agents tasked with recruiting duties to maximize recruitment efforts and develop recruiting programs. Also in 2021, the recruiting section launched its Ride-Along Program. In 2022, the recruiting section



launched its Enforcement Internship Program. Both of these programs are designed to give prospective applicants the awareness and exposure needed to pursue a career in conservation law enforcement. In addition, LDWF revamped its website and produced multiple enforcement videos intended to recruit, inform, and retain future agents. Recently, the recruiting section was placed inside the training program to improve our ability to recruit, train and retain quality employees.

## Emergency Services

### *ESF-9*

LDWF participated in the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness statewide exercise "Cajun Kaleidoscope," a simulated hurricane making landfall on the coast of Louisiana.

### *Maritime Special Response Team*

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

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

- Close Quarter Battle Techniques (CQB)
- Firearms Training
- Security Zone Enforcement Procedures
- Underway Training
- Hostage scenarios
- Large Vessel Training
- Rural Operations and Tactical Tracking
- Water Survival

At the end of 2024, MSRT members had completed their annual recertification of the Tactical Operators Course (TOC) in the NASBLA BOAT Program.



## 2024 Acquisitions

- 40 - 2500 Dodge Ram
- 6 - Ford Expeditions
- 2 - Ford Transport Vans
- 1 - F350 Ford Truck
- 16 - Boat Trailers
- 48 - Bullet Proof Vest
- 1 - Drone
- 9 - Glock Pistols
- 8 - Lawrence GPS Units
- 11 - Light bars
- 2 - Gator Tail Outboards
- 17 - Suzuki Outboards
- 1 - Mobile Command Unit

Completed construction on a new LDWF Office that includes the Region 3 Enforcement Division Office and other LDWF divisions in Pineville.

## 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 2024 year, OGT paid out \$19,050 in rewards. In the 2024 year, the LOGT board reviewed 52 cases that led to 91 subjects getting cited or arrested and a total of 213 citations issued. From 1984 until the time of this report, the LOGT board has paid out a total of \$514,410 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 \$780,000 in 2024 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, social media questions, media requests including setting up interviews, and gathering enforcement related information. The public information section also creates videos for social media that highlight safe boating, training and enforcement efforts.

LDWF-LED issued 142 enforcement related press releases in 2024. 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

### *LDWF Agent Graduates from the FBI National Academy*



A Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) enforcement agent graduated from the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Virginia on Dec. 12.

LDWF Major Clay Marques was a part of a 257 member graduating class of the FBI National Academy, which included law enforcement officers from 27 countries, eight military organizations and five federal civilian organizations.

Internationally known for its academic excellence, the National Academy offers 11 weeks of advanced communication, leadership, and fitness training. Participants must have proven records as professionals within their agencies to attend. On average, these officers have 21 years of law enforcement experience and usually return to their agencies to serve in executive-level positions.

Major Marques is originally from Chalmette and joined the LDWF Enforcement Division in 2006. Major Marques is currently in charge of the LDWF agents that primarily work in the coastal parishes of the state and serves as the state's boating law administrator.

Major Marques graduated from the National Association of Boating Law Administrator's (NASBLA) Leadership Academy in 2021 and he currently serves on the NASBLA Finance and Grant Committee. He also was recently appointed to the National Boating Safety Advisory Council.

FBI Director Christopher Wray delivered remarks at the FBI graduating ceremony. Class

spokesperson Philip Hydron from the Arkansas State Police represented the graduating officers.

FBI Academy instructors, special agents, and other staff with advanced degrees provide the training; many instructors are recognized internationally in their fields. Since 1972, National Academy students have been able to earn undergraduate and graduate credits from the University of Virginia, which accredits all the National Academy courses offered.

A total of 55,797 graduates have completed the FBI National Academy since it began in 1935. The National Academy is held at the FBI Training Academy in Quantico, the same facility where the FBI trains its new special agents and intelligence analysts.

### ***LDWF Agent Earns the NASBLA Certified Recreational Boating Professional Certification***

A Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) enforcement agent recently earned a prestigious certification from the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA).

LDWF Capt. Jason, Russo, successfully passed NASBLA's Certified Recreational Boating Professional (CRBP) exam and earned his CRBP certification on Dec. 5. Capt. Russo is the first LDWF agent to earn this certificate.

The CRBP certification, developed by NASBLA, is a voluntary credential designed for recreational boating professionals. It reflects knowledge, performance, and career accomplishments across specific program domains.



Capt. Russo has been an LDWF agent for over 20 years and is currently the LDWF Enforcement Division's Emergency Services Manager and the Accredited Agency Program Manager for the NASBLA Boat Operations and Training (BOAT) program.

Capt. Russo also now serves as a national instructor for NASBLA's Level 1 and Level 2 Boating Incident Investigation and Analysis Courses. Additionally, he is LDWF's NASBLA Officer Water Survival Instructor.

In 2023, Capt. Russo received NASBLA's Butch Potts National Boating Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award.

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

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) honored two Louisiana college students who completed the agency's Enforcement Internship Program.



Chancellor Bordelon from Baton Rouge Community College and Joshua Browning from Baton Rouge Community College completed the LDWF Enforcement Division's Internship Program.

The students gave their final presentations on Dec. 5 at the LDWF HQ building in Baton Rouge to receive college credit from their universities. Their presentations highlighted the experiences they had working with enforcement agents and their interactions with the public.

The LDWF Enforcement Division started their internship program in 2021 with the goal of providing college students relevant experience in conservation law

enforcement and potentially a career as an LDWF Enforcement Agent.

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

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



## ***LDWF Sgt. Joshua Harris Honored at December Commission Meeting***

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries enforcement agent was honored at the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission meeting this morning, Dec. 4, in Baton Rouge.

Sgt. Joshua Harris, of Farmerville, was recognized as this year's National Association of State Boating Law Administrator's "Boating Law Enforcement Officer of the Year" award for Louisiana.



Sgt. Harris has been an agent for over 11 years and mainly patrols the waterways in northeastern Louisiana. Sgt. Harris was the lead investigator in eight separate boating incidents and assisted on four other boating incident investigations during the year.

Sgt. Harris is also responsible for coordinating several boating safety outreach programs such as kid's safety days, Boy Scout events and reading about boating safety to young kids at local libraries.

### ***LDWF Enforcement Division Receives NASBLA Award for Operation Dry Water Weekend Patrols and Outreach***

The National Association of Safe Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) presented the Southern Region Law Enforcement Award to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Enforcement Division on Sept. 19.

The LDWF Enforcement Division received the award for their efforts during the 2024 Operation Dry Water Weekend from July 4-6 when they arrested 25 boaters statewide for driving or operating a vessel while impaired (DWI). LDWF also administered

a public awareness campaign featuring press releases, interviews, and

social media outreach to emphasize the dangers of boating under the influence.

NASBLA's Operation Dry Water Weekend is a national safe boating campaign that Louisiana participates in by emphasizing patrols for impaired boat operators during the weekend.



### ***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 April 9 in Baton Rouge.

Senior Agent Heather Fitzgerald received the third 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.

Senior Agent Fitzgerald, of Metairie, primarily patrols the waterways in southeastern Louisiana and has been an agent for over two years. In 2023, Senior Agent Fitzgerald issued 11 citations for violating state charter guide regulations. She also participated with other agents on failing to comply with charter guide regulation cases, which meant she was involved with over half of the charter guide violation cases for the entire state.

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 provided Senior Agent Fitzgerald with a donation in her name to the charity of her choice, which was the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana (CRCL). This organization was established in 1988 and is dedicated to coastal restoration by working with all levels of government to ensure that restoring and protecting coastal Louisiana are top priorities for the state and nation.

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 Agents Transported 178 Essential Workers in Inclement Weather***

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Enforcement Division provided transportation for essential workers who were unable to travel to work due to unsafe driving conditions caused by icy and snowy roads in the northern part of the state.



Agents transported 178 essential workers to and from work beginning on Jan. 15 and ending Jan. 17.

LDWF agents provided this service for The Oaks Nursing and Rehabilitation Home in Monroe, Northeast Veterans Home in Monroe, Northwest Veterans Home in Bossier City and the Willis-Knighton Medical Center in Shreveport.



# Mississippi

**Jerry L. Carter, Colonel**



Colonel Jerry L. Carter

## Agency Overview

The Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks Law Enforcement Bureau which currently consists of 194 Sworn Conservation Officers that enforce the wildlife laws of hunting and fishing and recreational boating in the state. These 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

We have now started our 2025 Cadet Class which consists of 9 cadets. These cadets will endure 10 weeks of physical hands-on training and classroom testing in meeting the requirements of becoming a Conservation Officer. Prior to their graduation from



MCOTA, these cadets will attend the State basic law enforcement training academy MLEOTA (Mississippi Law Enforcement Officer's Training Academy). After their 10 weeks completion, they will resume their wildlife academy training at our facility.



MDWFP opened the Conservation Cadet application process in March 2025. A total of 271 applicants submitted their application seeking employment. Through this process, we had 43 applicants submit background/health assessment packets and take the entry pt/swim test in May. In the month of May we interviewed all 43 applicants. In July, 11 Cadets started the Mississippi Conservation Officers Training Academy (MCOTA) Graduation date is set for December 18, 2025, and then they will start their career as a Conservation Officer with MDWFP.





## **Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends**

During the 2025 legislative session an appropriations bill was introduced and approved a salary increase for all sworn personnel. With this increase, this brings our officers' salaries competitive with other cities, counties and state law enforcement agencies within our state. It also helps the agency with its recruitment and retention efforts.

Our Investigations Unit was issued an Express H190B vessel to assist our field officers in the detection of sport fishing guide regulations. This is our second year of this administrative rule passage, that require fishing guides to follow these regulations. Due to the high volume of complaints from other license guides, there are individuals operating guide practices but fail to purchase a guide license and other rules set forth. The new vessel will also assist with undercover waterfowl enforcement.

Our USFW Task Force Agent Officer is approaching completion of the onboard training for the Task Force Unit. This agent has received certification in the LEMUS system and has completed the certified investigator program at MELOTA.

## **State, Regional, and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement**

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

SB 2280/Turkey Stamp passed requiring all turkey hunters' residents and non-residents to purchase a wild turkey stamp while engaged in hunting. The cost of this stamp for residents will be \$10.00 and for nonresidents will be \$100.00 The purchase and cost of this stamp will assist with restoring, enhancing or protecting wild turkey populations or their habitats on public or private lands in Mississippi Funding scientific research, as conducted by qualified professionals, into the ecology or management of wild turkeys, their habitats or their predators. Increasing access to publicly available turkey hunting opportunities. Proceeds from stamps may be used as a matching fund or fiscal leverage to secure grants or other financial awards.

49-7-79 PROHIBITING HUNTING ON LANDS OF OTHERS. It shall be unlawful for any person to knowingly enter the lands of another without the permission of, or without being accompanied by, the landowner or the lessee of the land, or the agent of such landowner or lessee, to hunt, fish, shoot, or trap on the lands or leases of another.

In addition to any fine or penalty assessed due to a violation of this section, a person convicted of violating subsection (1) of this section shall also pay restitution to the state of not less than One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00), nor more than Five Hundred Dollars (\$500.00), for each wild animal, or wild birds or parts of wild parts of a wild animals or wild birds unlawfully taken or possessed. thereof, taken or possessed in violation of this section.

Restitution only applies to the landowner when the violator on the lands or leases of another unlawfully takes or possesses any fish caught from a private lake, private pond or other private waterbody shall pay in the amount of One Hundred Dollars for each fish taken or possessed.

The restitution assessment collected will be credited to MDWFP and deposited in the Fisheries and Wildlife Fund for the purposes of wildlife and sport fish restoration.

## Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

We are now in the transition phase of acquiring the short barrel PWS long stroke piston rifle. These rifles will be better equipped, which will allow our officers quicker entry and exit from their patrol vehicle while avoiding obstruction. They will replace our current duty rifle, the MP15 Smith and Wesson. On our 40 caliber Glock handguns we have added holosun sights.

### Leadership

The Law Enforcement Bureau is proud to announce the promotion of Officers Scottie Jones, Chris Reed, Kallum Herrington, Jody Mathey, Brent Madden, Steven Westerfield, and Larry Primeaux.

**Scottie Jones** will now serve as Deputy Director with the Executive Staff. This position will oversee and direct the agency's Technical Guidance bureaus, which include Law Enforcement, Wildlife, and Fisheries. Jones began his career in 1998 as a Conservation Officer assigned to Coahoma County. Not only worked within the Law Enforcement Bureau, but he also worked within the Wildlife Bureau where he oversaw the project development of Lake George, Muscadine Farms, and Sky Lake WMAs. Jones spent six years supervising operations and personnel on Delta WMAs.



In 2011, Jones was promoted to Captain. He was the lead on major Law Enforcement Projects. His first major project was the McHenry Shooting Facility, located in Perkinston, Mississippi. Other projects include the Mississippi Conservation Officers Training Academy, Turcotte Shooting Facility sporting clay trail, and the McIvor Shooting Facility in Sardis, Mississippi.

The hard work and dedication of these projects became a complete success of three state-of-the-art ranges constructed covering all regions within the state. When promoted to the rank of Major, Jones became the Central Regional Administrator overseeing the day-to-day operations of officers within twenty-five counties along with a command staff. In 2021, Jones was promoted to the rank of Lt. Colonel and served as the Assistant Chief of Law Enforcement where his law enforcement and supervisory skills were very effective for the elevation of the bureau. He has also served as a Law Enforcement representative of the Mississippi Flyway Council

**Chris Reed** has been promoted to the rank of Lt. Colonel and will serve as the Assistant Chief of Law Enforcement. LTC. Reed began his career as a Conservation Officer assigned to Bolivar County. After his tour of duty as a field officer, he was assigned to the TAC Officers position and served as the Training Coordinator. There, he was instrumental with the upgrading of the agency's training academy and designing the training manual of the cadet classes. On the national level, he put together the department Law-Fit Team in which his team won over all in several categories. Under his training he has developed officers that are now in leadership positions which now oversee some of the agency's specialized units, K-9 and the Dive Team. As Major, he also served as Central Regional Administrator overseeing the day-to-day operations of officers within twenty-five counties along with a command staff.



**Jody Matheny** has been promoted to the rank of Major and will serve as the Administrator of the Law Enforcement in the Central Region. There he will oversee operations and leadership throughout the area. He is a dedicated public servant with a distinguished career in both military and wildlife law enforcement. He proudly served in the United States Navy for 22 years, retiring in 2012. In February 2007, Major Matheny joined the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, where he began his service in Hinds County following his graduation from the Mississippi Conservation Officer Training Academy. After two and a half years, he transferred to his home county of Scott in 2009.



Throughout his career, Major Matheny has held numerous leadership roles and specialized assignments, including serving as a member of the Special Response Team, Rope Team Supervisor, and the Honor Guard. He also has served as the Primary Liaison for Emergency Support Functions (ESF) 9 and 13 at the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. His commitment to professional development service has also led him to roles such as Secretary of the Officer Foundation, Enclosure Team Inspector, Lieutenant law Enforcement Supervisor, and Captain over the Central East sub-region.

His career reflects a lifelong dedication to service, leadership and community safety.

**Kallum Herrington** has been promoted to the rank of Major as the South Region Administrator. A Conservation Officer of 27 years of service and a second-generation officer, following in the footsteps of his father who served for 35 years with the department. He began his career with the agency in the Fisheries Bureau starting at Jeff Davis Lake prior to his law enforcement journey. While working his way through the ranks he has been in supervision for approximately 19 years, starting at Lieutenant, and onto Captain within the South Region. In his region, he has taken part in and has supervised numerous wildlife crime investigations on both the state and federal levels. The most notable investigation was “Operation Long Beard”, that lead to numerous arrests of violators. This incident resulted in the largest turkey poaching case in US history.



**Brent Madden** has been promoted to the rank of Major, in his continued role as Training Coordinator. He started his career in 2005 as a Conservation Officer assigned to Scott County. Later, he became a TAC Officer in July 2016 and was promoted to the rank of Captain as the Senior TAC Officer of MCOTA in July 2021. His oversight of the agency training program is a result of some of our cadets that are now in leadership roles. Such as the department’s K9 and Dive Team. Major Madden also is a member of the Honor Guard Unit.

Major Madden served 21 years in the MS Army National Guard with 3 overseas deployments and then retiring in 2021, at the rank 1SG of the 113th Military Police Company.





**Steven Westerfield** will now serve as Major of our Special Response Team (SRT) he began his career with MDWFP in 2007, as a Conservation Officer assigned in Rankin County. Over the years, he has taken on a wide range of operational and leadership roles, including Supervisor, Acting Boat Coordinator, and member of the Special Response Team (SRT). His skill and commitment to duty were recognized when he was named Boating Officer of the Year in both 2013 and 2015. He has contributed extensively to training initiatives, including teaching water survival to cadets and coordinating emergency operations under ESF-9.



Major Westerfield has been a part of the SRT since its inception, playing a foundational role in its development and operations. His leadership progression within the team—from Logistics Coordinator to Assistant SRT Commander and eventually SRT Commander—highlights his dedication and tactical expertise. With nearly two decades of experience, Major Westerfield continues to be a vital asset to MDWFP's mission through his operational readiness, instructional capability, and proven leadership in critical response situations.

**Larry Primeaux** is now promoted to the rank of Sergeant Major and currently serves as the Supervisor of the Special Response Team K-9 Unit with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks. In this role, he leads the unit in both operational deployments and training. He oversees four specialized K-9 teams assigned throughout the state; each trained in wildlife detection, evidence recovery, and search and rescue operations. Under his leadership, the K-9 Unit plays a critical role in supporting conservation law enforcement efforts across Mississippi.



Since beginning of his law enforcement career in 2017, Sergeant Major Primeaux has held key positions including Field Training Officer and K-9 Unit Supervisor. He is a graduate of both the Mississippi Conservation Officer Training Academy and the Hattiesburg Police Department Basic Police Academy.

His dedication and excellence in the field have earned him numerous accolades, including:

- 2023 Wildlife Officer of the Year – Shikar Safari Club International
- 2023 SEAFWA Officer of the Year
- 2024 MDWFP Top Cop
- Life Saving Award

In addition to his distinguished law enforcement career, Sergeant Major Primeaux serves in the Mississippi Army National Guard as a Command Sergeant Major. He is a graduate of the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy.

He holds a bachelor's degree in Academic Studies from Mississippi State University.

# Missouri

**Travis McLain, Chief**



## Training Issues

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) Agent Training Academy began on March 16. The six-month (1000+ hour) academy consists of 20 agent trainees, with a graduation date set for Late September 2025. With 21 vacancies within the Protection Branch, we will be seeking to hold back-to-back Training Academies in 2025 and 2026. The Academy is Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) certified and consists of training in a variety of law enforcement, resource management, conservation education, and communications/community engagement topics. We continue to attract exceptional candidates to serve as conservation agents; however, while passionate about the outdoors, many don't have as much outdoor experience as applicants of the past. An emergent and continuing challenge is preparing/training our new generation of agents to recognize and speak the lingo of more traditional consumptive users, while proactively applying what was learned in the academy to connect all citizens with conservation.



*Missouri Conservation Agent Training Class 2025*

## Funding and Staffing Issues

The operating budget for MDC represents less than 1 percent (0.4%) of the total state budget and the Department 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 FY24 the conservation sales tax equated to \$172 million, federal reimbursements \$50 million, permit sales \$43 million, with sales/rentals/other sources and interest \$18.5 million. Total receipts for FY24 came to \$266 million.

With 21 vacancies and several pending retirements, the Branch is facing the loss of considerable institutional knowledge in the next 3-5 years. Approximately 80% of our Protection Management Team (PMT) is eligible to retire during this time. Back-to-back training academy classes are certainly

keeping staffing levels at an acceptable level and offer opportunities to develop the next generation of branch leadership through a mentoring program, instructor certifications, and becoming field trainers. The Protection Branch is also utilizing a variety of leadership training opportunities through NACLEC and partnerships with other state fish and wildlife agencies, MDC LEADS (leadership academy), FBI-LEEDA courses, the State of Missouri Leadership Academy, and unlimited access to online training through Police One and LinkedIn to help prepare staff to fill supervisory vacancies in the future.

The 2024 report included information on the pending retirements of Director Sara Parker Pauley, and Protection Branch Chief Randy Doman during 2024. Jason Sumners was selected as the tenth Director in MDC's 87-year history, and Travis McLain was selected to succeed Randy Doman as the twelfth chief of Protection Branch.

## Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

Requests for increased opportunities to use drones and thermal imaging equipment to take or recover wildlife has been a hot and polarizing topic. In 2021, MDC implemented regulations to allow the use of night vision, thermal imagery, infra-red, and artificial light to take coyotes from Feb. 1 to March 31. The popularity of these technologies has increased as the equipment has become more affordable. Hunters are asking for increased opportunities to use this equipment. Consequently, the Conservation Commission is considering regulations that would expand the opportunity to use of this equipment to hunt coyotes, while minimizing the potential for user/landowner conflicts and the opportunistic/intentional take of non-target species. More to come on this issue.

Using drones equipped with night vision, thermal imagery, or infra-red equipment to recover hunter wounded turkeys, deer, elk, and black bears was approved in 2024. Overall, the first deer season of authorized use for recovery purposes was well-received by the public and presented minimal enforcement challenges. However, using drones to locate and/or recover wildlife with an artificial light (not authorized by the new regulations) has caused several problems for staff statewide. In November 2024, Pike County Conservation Agent Dirk Otterstein responded to a landowner complaint on a drone flying over their property while shining a powerful spotlight. Agent Otterstein observed the drone fly over multiple properties with the spotlight activated before contacting a hunter and drone operator attempting to locate a wounded buck. A citation was issued to the drone operator for illegal use of artificial light to locate/purse wildlife. Technology is changing our future!

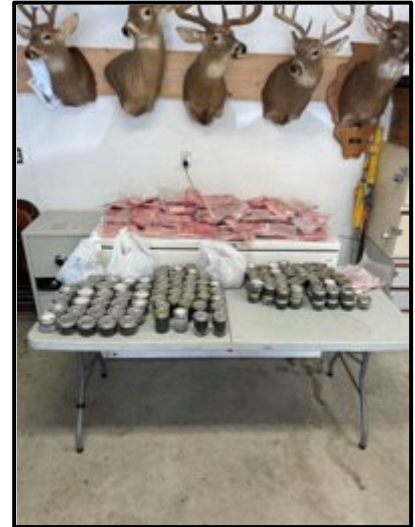


*Illegal use of drone/spotlight – Pike County.*

The illegal transportation of extracted paddlefish roe/trafficking in paddlefish caviar has surged during the past year, with conservation agents making more than 20 arrests for this violation during the 45-day season. During the last two weeks of the paddlefish season, Conservation Agents around Truman Lake, Lake of the Ozarks, and Table Rock Lake contacted three separate groups of anglers illegally transporting large quantities of extracted paddlefish eggs taken from these reservoirs. One of these seizures alone, included 123 pounds of processed caviar and unprocessed



eggs. The retail price for North American paddlefish caviar currently ranges between \$340 and \$680 per pound, making the value of this one seizure somewhere between \$40,000 and \$80,000.



## **Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts**

Twelve Conservation Agents assisted with the security detail at Governor Mike Kehoe's inauguration in January of 2025. This was a unique opportunity for our agents, and we were proud to serve alongside state troopers, capital police, and other law enforcement officers during this event.

Since its inception in 2021, the MDC canine program has responded to requests from other agencies to assist with everything from search and rescue to article searches. In 2024, MDC canine handlers responded to requests from multiple agencies across Missouri for 25 article searches, including searches for weapons used in violent crimes. To date, our officers have responded to requests for 75 article searches and 13 tracks for suspects or search and rescue from their neighboring agencies.

## **New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement**

Statewide issuance of red dot sights (RDS) on the Glock 45 platform took place in summer 2024. Agents completed an 8-hour transition and orientation training prior to completing qualifications. Many agents have expressed increased confidence in their ability to shoot their duty weapons, especially at longer ranges since completing the transition. The current training class is the first to receive their initial firearms training with an RDS equipped handgun and the positive impact on new shooters is obvious from the first range session.

## **State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement**

The Missouri legislative session overall was positive for the Missouri Department of Conservation. Bills to challenge our authority to regulate wildlife, open fields, and change the landowner permit

requirements were introduced. These bills gained very little traction and were not a major cause of concern this year. Legislation of note that did pass during this legislative session and will become effective on Aug. 28, 2025, includes a specific exemption from the Sunshine Law (open records) for any records showing the location of species of conservation concern (threatened, endangered, etc.).

## Other Special Law Enforcement Issues

The backbone of Protection Branch is its conservation agents. In Missouri there are one (1) or two (2) agents per county to officially represent the Department. The primary focus is on increasing voluntary compliance with the Wildlife Code of Missouri through a strong law enforcement presence and community engagement strategies. In 2022 the branch developed a dashboard to help determine resource contact compliance rates and conviction rates across the state. Visualizations of this data drives decisions by measuring the impact of our work on citizen engagement, education, and community policing. It also helps with accountability for maintaining good relationships with prosecutors and judges, and with submitting quality cases (with good reports), which ultimately correlates to a high conviction rate. The statewide resource contact compliance rate was at 91.7% with agents documenting approximately 8 violations per 100 contacts. MDC agents also achieved a 93% conviction rate during the year. Agents take pride in the relationships built with local prosecutors and the members of their respective communities to achieve these high compliance and conviction rates.

- 2024 Law Enforcement Contacts ..... 191,504
- 2024 Non-LE Contacts.....353,136
- 2024 Resource Violations.....15,853
- 2024 Non-Resource Violations.....3,616
- 2024 Public Programs.....6,380

## 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***

- Chad Arnold - Major of Support Services
- Brent Hodges - Captain – District 7
- Darrell Johnson – Sergeant – District 5 Area 5
- Chase Vaughn – District 3 Area 2
- Hannah Hoffman for her promotion to Admin Officer!
- David Sellers on his promotion to Sergeant in district 4 Area 3
- DJ Woods on his promotion to Lieutenant in District 7
- Chris Wilkins on his promotion to Sergeant in District 9 area 4
- Shawn Martin on his promotion to Captain in District 9
- Darryl Southern on his promotion to Sergeant in District 7 Area 3.
- Sampson Parker on his promotion to Sergeant in the Special Investigations
- to Brandon Bryson on his promotion to Lieutenant in district 9
- Emily Stewart on her promotion to Program Specialist, effective 6/9/25
- Rachel Strickland on her promotion to Comm. Center Supervisor

## **Hurricane Helene Response**

When Hurricane Helene struck Western North Carolina on Sept. 27, 2024, wildlife law enforcement officers and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission Swiftwater Rescue Team were among initial first responders to assist with search-and-rescue efforts. These officers were on the front lines, performing lifesaving rescue efforts such as swimming into flooded homes and rescuing people from mudslides. The team used four-wheel drive vehicles, drones, all-terrain and utility-terrain vehicles, and small boats as they completed a variety of missions.



Along with the local officers in Districts 7, 8 and 9, which were impacted the most, wildlife officers from across the state travelled to the mountains to provide much-needed support. Wildlife officers initially assisted with search-and-rescue efforts, security for distribution sites and medical facilities, and general law enforcement duties. Beyond rescuing people, they helped keep businesses secure, checked on residents' well-being and transported medical staff to remote areas.



The Swiftwater Rescue Team, which consists of 18 members working in shifts, performed over a thousand saves and welfare checks. While floodwaters were high, this group used small boats to reach trapped victims while cooperating with local teams and teams from across the nation. The Swiftwater Rescue Team was also crucial in clearing paths, removing debris and ensuring that important routes to cell towers and water supplies were accessible. It was not uncommon for this team to hike over 15 miles in a day to complete assigned tasks.



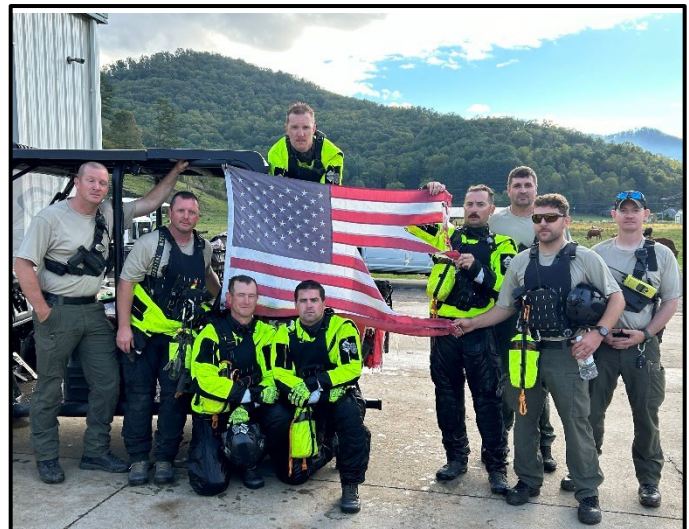
Cell service in many of the affected areas was initially wiped out, but the Law Enforcement Division telecommunications team ensured everyone stayed connected via radios. The communications center in Raleigh relayed vital information between officers on the ground and the State Emergency Operations Center.

This massive team effort exemplified the true spirit of coming together in tough times. Wildlife officers made a huge impact, reminding us of the power of community support. Despite the challenges, their relentless efforts continue, bringing hope and relief to the devastated areas, proving we stand together when it counts the most.

As the initial rescue missions wound down, the focus shifted to recovery and sustainment. Their work is far from over, but their actions have already made a significant difference in the lives of countless individuals.

Here is a breakdown of official deployments requested through the NC State Emergency Operations Center:

- Number of missions: 29 Missions assigned from EOC
- Number of deployed staff: 112 individual staff. Multiple staff assisted on multiple missions.
- Number and type of deployed assets: 4x4 Vehicles for each person deployed, approximately 15 UTVs and 10 ATVs, 5 drones, and 5 small boats.
- Number and locations of law enforcement missions: 29 Missions assigned from EOC. (Locations by County- Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Catawba, Cleveland, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Rutherford, Yancey, Watauga).





## Samarcand Training Facility

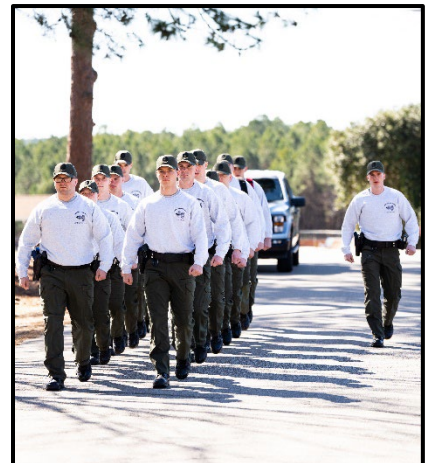


The NCWRC began using its new training facility in February 2025. This facility can house 55 recruits, officers, and instructors along with a 1,600-square-foot mat room, gym, dual classrooms and recreational areas. It will be located on the Samarcand Training Facility in Jackson Springs. There will be 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 the history of all the officers that made us who we are today.

### *New Facility highlights:*

- 28,000+ Square Feet
- 52 beds (28 single rooms and 12 double rooms)
- Classroom that can be partitioned into two rooms approximately (25 to 30 students in each or 50 - 60 total).
- Defensive tactics mat room & workout gym
- Student / Instructor Lounge (Insert 61<sup>st</sup> Academy 1)

On June 23, the NCWRC celebrated the official opening and ribbon cutting for the new facility. The facility will house the Law Enforcement Division training academy and will be available for other divisions to use for meetings or training. Guests in attendance included members of North Carolina Congress, NCWRC Commissioners, NCWRC Staff from multiple divisions, and NC Department of Public Safety Partners. During the event the Memorial to Fallen Wildlife Officers was rededicated after it was moved from the Setzer hatchery in



Transylvania County. Guests were given a tour of the new facility and a glimpse of the Wildlife Officer History display that will open in the future.

## Awards

Congratulations to Sergeant Billy Cain on being selected by the North Carolina Bow Hunters Association board as the NCBA officer of the year. While in Beaufort County, Sergeant Cain instructed and participated in multiple programs throughout the year. Sergeant Cain instructed two classes for campers at YMCA Camps, Sea Gull and Seafarer, certifying over 60 kids from across the United States in Hunter Education. Sergeant Cain also instructed a class at Pamlico County High School for their summer camp program. Sergeant Cain was also involved in many impactful wildlife cases this past year, ranging from dove baiting, turkey baiting, and multiple night deer hunting charges. Billy was recognized at the NCBA awards banquet on March 29.

## Special Olympics Torch Run



During May, officers from across North Carolina participated in many Torch Run events from the mountains to the coast. Friday, May 30 was the NC Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics Final Leg. The Final leg is the last leg of a statewide campaign to raise awareness for Special Olympics in North Carolina.

This is also the kickoff for the NC Summer Games. At this year's Final Leg,

over 450 runners from across the state participated in the run from Carter Finley Stadium to the State Capitol building, where they were greeted by Governor Stein. The NCWRC Law Enforcement Division was well represented with over 30 participants. We were also honored to be the agency carrying the torch as it made its way around the State Capitol building. So far, in 2025, NCWRC has raised over \$12,000 for Special Olympics North Carolina.



## Women in Wildlife Law Enforcement – Gone Fishing!

Every year female Wildlife Officers get together from across the state (currently a total of 11) for an outdoor adventure. This September the ladies found themselves in Hyde County for a trout and red drum fishing excursion. Captain Nathan Green, LAWA Supervisor Nick Shaver and Commissioner Kelly Davis worked together to organize the event.

Commissioner Kelly Davis was kind enough to open her beautiful home for the ladies for an overnight stay. The next morning Captain Green and LAWA Supervisor Nick Shaver took the ladies on an inshore fishing trip complete with speckled trout red drum and flounder (released of course). Commissioner Davis then provided a delicious home cooked lunch, followed by a private tour of the Mattamuskeet Lodge. For the evening adventure, Captain Green helped to provide a private guide





who put the ladies on some monster red drum! These officers thoroughly enjoyed their time and were able to create some lifelong memories.

## On the Road/ On the Water

### *Operation Dry Water*

During the busy boating months of May, June, and July, wildlife officers focus on keeping the boating public safe. Over Memorial Day weekend 2025, officers participated in the annual “On the Road/ On the Water” campaign. See results for the following 2025 holiday weekends.

#### Memorial Day Weekend

#### Independence Day Weekend (July 4-6)

# of Officers	163	# of Officers	153
# of Vessels Contacted	1031	# of Vessels Contacted	1169
# of Boaters Contacted	3298	# of Boaters Contacted	4189
# of Boating Citations	360	# of Boating Citations	389
# of BUIs (Drug impairment)	1	# of BUIs (Drug Impairment)	4
# of BUIs (Alcohol Impairment)	27	# of BUIs (Alcohol Impairment)	39
Highest BUI	0.19	Highest BUI	0.24
# of Boating Warnings	490	# of Boating Warnings	598
Media Contacts	29	Media Contacts	47
Non-Boating Violations	287	Non-Boating Violations	114
# of Boating Incidents	8	# of Boating Incidents	8



## Youth Hunter Education Skills Tournaments

Starting on March 1, officers from all 9 districts assisted in their yearly Youth Hunter Education Skills Tournaments. These district tournaments bring middle school and high school aged youth together to compete in shotgun, .22 rifle, archery, and hunter skills. Individual scores and team scores are compiled. Winners on the district levels will be invited to compete at the state tournament on April 26 at the John Lentz Hunter Education Complex in Ellerbe.



## Back in the Woods Disabled Hunt

The 2024 Back in the Woods Again Disabled Sportsman's Hunt was a resounding success, demonstrating the importance of

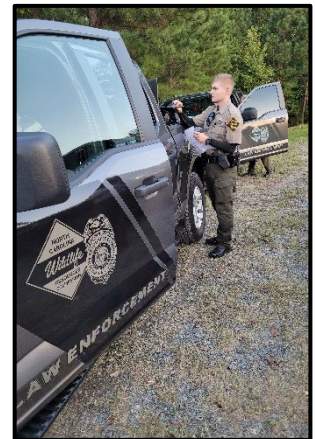


accessibility in outdoor activities. This year's event was held from September 20-21 at Tysons Creek Baptist Church in Bear Creek. This annual event provides an inclusive hunting experience for individuals with disabilities, promoting both participation in outdoor activities and wildlife conservation.

A total of 50 hunters participated in this year's event, resulting in the successful harvest of 46 deer. The enthusiasm and camaraderie among participants contributed to a positive experience for all involved.

Multiple agency divisions worked together to ensure the event's success by providing:

- WRC Track Chairs: These adaptive chairs allowed hunters greater mobility and access to hunting areas.
- Tagging and Registration: Officers assisted with the proper tagging and documentation of harvested deer.
- CWD Sampling: Surveillance efforts were conducted to monitor and manage wildlife health.
- Outreach and Education: Officers engaged with participants to promote awareness of wildlife conservation practices and regulations.
- Support for Disabled Sportsmen: A focus was placed on accommodating the needs of all participants, ensuring a supportive and inclusive environment.



## Interstate Meeting

On March 24, Officers from the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources met for training and to discuss interstate collaborations. The meeting consisted of officers who work along the state line in Anson, Richmond, and Union Counties. 42 officers between the two states were part of this meeting. Officers met at Camp



Millstone in Ellerbe, NC. Officers discussed hunting investigations from the previous hunting seasons that involved both agencies. Officers also had a break-out session to discuss upcoming work plans for the 2025 boating and hunting seasons.

SCDNR officer Aukeem Ruff gave a brief legal update regarding the tagging of big game animals including deer and wild turkeys. He also gave an update on the new regulations for hunting turkeys in SC.

NCWRC Officer Jared Thompson gave a detailed presentation on the NCWRC Swift Water Team. This presentation included team training, team structure, and team equipment. The presentation also covered the team's response to Hurricane Helene in WNC.

Lt. Brady Branham and Staff Sergeant Jason Davis from South Carolina gave a detailed presentation on their newly formed ATV Response Team. He presented in the team structure and training. The team trains and works with the SC Highway Patrol. The ATV Response team's purpose is to work in woodland areas, fugitive apprehension, crowd control, and public demonstrations and protests.

NCWRC Commission Chairman Monty Crump provided lunch for everyone who attended.

## Field Activity

### *Snapchat Turkey*



In October 2024, officers in District 1 received a report that a woman in Currituck County had posted a picture of herself on Snapchat carrying a dead turkey. She added a caption stating the turkey walked in front of her deer stand. Officer Jonathan Montague and Sergeant Anna Barbosa located the woman and determined that her uncle had shot the hen turkey while they were deer hunting. The uncle claimed he thought he was shooting at a buzzard, which would have also been unlawful to shoot.

The officers recovered the turkey from the subject and charged him with taking wild turkey during the closed season and unlawful possession and transportation of a wild turkey. He plead guilty in District Court and was ordered to pay the \$525 replacement cost of the turkey, a \$250 fine, and repay the Wild Tip reward amount.

### *Friends in Low Places*

On Nov. 12, while on his scheduled day off, Officer Xiong received a call about a deer hunter that was stuck in a tree on the Pee Dee River Game Lands. The deer hunter was using a climbing tree stand and had dropped the foot portion of the stand. Officer Xiong responded to the scene and was able to use coordinates provided by the hunter to locate him in the tree. Officer Xiong used a haul





line in conjunction with tree stand straps and was able to tie the line to the foot portion of the stand and toss the line up to the hunter. The hunter then safely retrieved the foot portion of the stand and safely climbed down the tree. The deer hunter successfully harvested a buck on the game lands that afternoon and texted Officer Xiong thanking him for his assistance.

### ***Double Trouble***

On June 21, while on patrol with Officer Doran in Currituck County, Officer John Schlegel spotted a personal watercraft (PWC) with two individuals onboard not wearing life jackets. As the officers turned to intercept and activated their blue lights, the two occupants switched operators. It didn't take long for Officers Schlegel and Doran to determine that both individuals were impaired, and they were placed under arrest by Officer Schlegel for Boating While Impaired (BWI) and transported to the Magistrate's Office. Before Officer Doran was able to return to the ramp to go assist Officer Schlegel with the impaired operators, he stopped and arrested another person for BWI!

On July 5th, Officer Schlegel was back on the water, this time patrolling with Lt. Beardsley in Dare County. While navigating a narrow creek, they stopped a vessel for violating a clearly marked No Wake Zone. During the interaction, the operator showed clear signs of impairment. While doing field sobriety testing, another vessel came through the same No Wake Zone at an excessive speed. The officers shifted their attention to the second vessel and discovered that not only was that operator also impaired—he had removed and taken the No Wake Zone buoy with him. Officer Schlegel arrested both impaired operators and demonstrated his newfound proficiency processing multiple OWI's at the same time.



### ***In the Spotlight***

On the night of Sept. 23, 2024, Officer Quantra Taylor received a report of an individual spotlighting deer in Scotts Hill. While patrolling the area, Officer Taylor observed a vehicle shining a spotlight into the tree line. A traffic stop was initiated. The driver stated he was "looking to see if he could see a deer." A search of the vehicle revealed six firearms. A handheld flashlight was also seized from the vehicle.

Based on the use of artificial light in a deer-inhabited area, the presence of multiple loaded firearms, and the driver's own statements, he was charged with night deer hunting.

On the following night, Sergeant Ludwick continued patrols in the same area. Around midnight, he observed a vehicle driving through a neighborhood with no headlights. The vehicle then activated a handheld red lens spotlight aimed into the woods. A traffic stop was conducted. The driver admitted he had been arrested the previous night for the same offense. This time, he had a passenger in the vehicle. While no firearms were present, both individuals were cited for violating the spotlight curfew.

## *Dove Bait*

Master Officer Allen Vang had a very successful opening day of dove season in Alexander County this year. The week prior, he had located a field that appeared to be prepped for doves on a property that has had duck bait in the past. Officer Vang went in the middle of the night prior to the season opener and found the field to be unlawful. On opening day, he involved other officers in his patrol area and was able to catch the hunter responsible for placing the bait. Once done, he went to another field on the opposite end of the county. He had been watching this field for



several days prior but, due to the location, was unable to check it for bait. Once Officer Vang arrived at the field, he immediately knew that something was wrong. While walking across the field, he noticed it was clearly baited. After another successful interview, the hunters responsible admitted to unlawfully baiting the field. While finishing up with the hunters, he received a call of dove hunters shooting toward a residence at another location. After arriving on scene, Officer Vang was suspicious of the number of birds the hunters had harvested based on the location. He walked to where the hunters were sitting and found this field to be unlawfully baited as well. By the end of the morning, Officer Vang had charged those responsible in three different unlawfully baited fields.

## *Out of Season*



On the night of April 12, 2025, Wildlife Enforcement Officer Hunter Perdue received a call from Raleigh communications regarding a traffic stop conducted by the Rockingham County Sheriff's Office. Officer Perdue responded to the Bethany community to investigate the wildlife violations uncovered during the traffic stop. The Rockingham County Sheriff's Office had detained Mr. Dylan Corder. Mr. Corder, who also a subject of a 3-month investigation involving multiple deer killed at night from the roadway in 2023.

Upon arrival on scene, Officer Perdue interviewed Mr. Corder about 2 pairs of turkey feet, a turkey fan and a shot that was fired earlier that evening around

2300 hours. Mr. Corder admitted having killed two turkeys on the opening morning of the adult wild turkey season. Mr. Corder also admitted to having shot at a deer at night from the roadway that evening. Officer Perdue and the RCSO searched a field in the area that the shot was heard, and a fresh, dead female white-tailed deer was recovered.



Mr. Corder was charged with:

- Taking more than the daily limit of turkeys
- Failure to tag a big game animal
- Failure to register a big game animal
- Shooting from the roadway in Rockingham County (Session Law)
- Night deer hunting.

Additional charges were filed by the Rockingham County Sheriff's Office including possession of marijuana and driving left of center.

### ***Birds of a Feather***

On Dec. 1, 2024, Sergeant Claude Smith and Lieutenant Michael King were conducting patrol operations on the Jordan Game Lands when they observed a suspicious vehicle parked in the vicinity. The officers suspected that the individuals might be hunting on the game lands on a closed day. After a brief evaluation, it was determined that the vehicle owners were likely hunting within the area. The officers decided to employ game warden tactics and investigative techniques to assess the situation further. The officers stationed themselves in a discreet location and patiently waited while listening for any sounds that could indicate illegal hunting activity. After a lengthy period, Sergeant Smith identified the distinct sound of a firearm discharge—a .22 caliber rifle shot—



in the distance. The officers subsequently used their binoculars to observe the area in the direction of the sound and successfully located two individuals as they were returning to their vehicle. Upon contacting the suspects, the officers initiated a brief investigation.

Through questioning and further investigation, it was discovered that the suspects had killed a total of 21 birds that are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The birds they had unlawfully killed included:

Northern Cardinals, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Blue Jays, Eastern Bluebirds, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Hairy Woodpeckers, and Downy Woodpeckers

Sergeant Smith initiated a federal investigation under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act due to the unlawful killing and possession of migratory birds. All seized items, including the birds and firearms, were taken into evidence for further analysis and processing. This case is currently under federal and State investigation.

### ***Helping Hand***

On June 14, 2025, Wildlife Officers Eric Burkhalter, Joshua Goodman, and Matthew Lee were taking shelter during a raging storm on Lake Norman when they received a call from Iredell County Emergency Communications. Two kayakers had called 911 and were caught in the storm. The kayakers were taking on water due to the heavy rain and their kayaks were sinking. The kayakers were able to make it to a small island, but the island they sought refuge on was beginning to flood



due to rising water. The three wildlife officers responded without hesitation during the heavy storm and rain and rescued the distressed kayakers and their equipment. Once safely on the patrol boat, the officers escorted the kayakers to the nearest access area where they were met by their family. The two kayakers were very appreciative of the officers coming to their aid. If not for the valiant efforts of these officers, this situation could have easily turned into a tragedy.

## Oklahoma



### ***Nathan Erdman, Colonel***

The following report covers the period July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025 (FY2025) 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 118 field employees, including game wardens who are divided into 8 districts, each containing two lieutenants and a captain. A game warden's primary responsibility in Oklahoma is to enforce the state's wildlife laws. However, game wardens also have the jurisdiction to enforce all other state laws when necessary. Beyond law enforcement, game wardens are responsible for conducting public outreach programs as well as assisting other divisions with research and other projects. Game wardens often assist with spotlight counts, controlled burns, fisheries research assistance, and other Department programs and projects.

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

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

### ***Training Issues***

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

## ***Funding And Staffing Issues***

Our financial situation has improved with the passage of the license modernization bill. This bill is the first revamp of license structure and costs since 2003. This bill also condensed licenses and streamlined what is needed from residents and nonresidents. In our last commission meeting, the new licenses increased our funding by about \$7 million with 95% of the increase coming from nonresident license purchases. After the passage of the license bill our Commission approved a 16% across the board pay raise and also ordered a pay study be completed in the coming year. We are hopeful this pay study will address the pay discrepancies and retirement system differences between game wardens and other state law enforcement.

We ordered 25 Ram SSV trucks for the budget year. They are all 4-door crew cab pickups. We will issue lightbar trucks to the field wardens, while the supervisors and captains will be issued slick top trucks. The other markings on the trucks are all the same from field warden to captain position.

In April 2025, we successfully concluded our fifth game warden academy, where 7 probationary game wardens graduated. The academy lasted for 10 weeks and incorporated classes such as Fisheries Enforcement Techniques, Wildlife Enforcement Techniques, NASBLA Officer Water Survival Training, and extensions of the previous classes. The upcoming Game Warden Academy is scheduled to commence in February 2026 and has the potential to offer 8-10 or more vacancies. We will see how the pay study comes back to decide on how many we may be able to hire. The open positions are a result of retirements and resignations.

We acquired 3 new 16' Fluid RHIB boats, 1 new center console shallow water surface drive boat and we updated our body cameras to Axon 4 body camera systems with the evidence and report functions. To go along with the new body cameras, we issued all wardens a mobile Wi-Fi hotspot for video upload from their vehicle. This new hotspot will also be used to connect their laptop computers, which we also recently updated, so they will have access to Geosafe, Brandt license system and OLETS systems from the vehicle. While talking about new equipment we also replaced 6 outboard motors with new 4 stroke Mercury motors on our older boats.

## **Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends**

### ***Unique Cross-Boundary or Cooperative Enforcement Efforts***

Our wildlife investigative specialist (Investigator Long), who is working as a joint task force officer with USFWS, now has a wildlife investigative team (WIT) of 12 volunteer game wardens who assist her on investigations that focus on state charges. She is also in charge of training and coordinating their efforts.

Investigator Long and the WIT team have been conducting numerous investigations on topics from license fraud to the illegal reptile trade. This is promising to be an ongoing issue in the coming years. The WIT team has split into sub teams to focus on different topics of concern, those being license fraud, reptile and amphibian trade and commercial/non-commercial breeders along with NWCO and rehabilitators. With the increase in license costs, especially for non-residents, we have seen an uptick in license fraud cases.

### ***New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement***

1. The use of GeoFence warrants played a huge role in a high-profile endangered species/ MBTA case. The case has been presented to the AUSA and plea agreements are being discussed. The use of Google for gathering data is well-documented and is utilized in GeoFence warrants to pinpoint devices that have accessed Google and were in close

proximity to a specific location during a particular time period. It is not beneficial for urban areas due to population, but our wardens are using it more and more to successfully narrow down suspects. Once devices are identified near a location and time of a poaching incident, wardens have had no issues with receiving search warrants for those individuals who own those devices (most commonly phones).

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

## **State, Regional, and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement**

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

In addition to general housekeeping changes and reorganization of Title 800, fishing regulation changes for 2024-2025 include the following:

- We made a push this year to only conduct rule changes every other year. The only changes made this year were emergency rules forced by passed legislation.
- The one rule change in fisheries was a sunset clause on how some types of fishing equipment has to be labeled. Trotlines, juglines, limblines, yo-yo's, minnow traps, stringers, fish baskets, etc now require the angler's customer ID number, name and address no longer satisfy this requirement.
- The only other changes had to do with implementation of the new license consolidation bill that went into effect July 1, 2024.

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:

- We made a push this year to only conduct rule changes every other year. The only changes made this year were emergency rules forced by passed legislation.
- All changes had to do with implementation of the new license consolidation bill that went into effect July 1, 2024.

## **Cost-Saving Initiatives**

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

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



# South Carolina

**Chisolm Frampton, Colonel**

## 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 and Staff Awards

### Promotions

- Region 4:
  - PFC Justin Gant was promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant of Unit G.
- Staff Operations:
  - Lieutenant Charlotte McKee was promoted to Captain over LE Education and Outreach L/CPL Courtney Angotti-Smith was promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant over the Radio Room and OGT

### Awards

- Lieutenant Erik Martin and Lieutenant Eric Vaughn completed the Certified Public Manager Course.
- Lieutenant Brady Branham graduated from the 294th session of the FBI National Academy.

## 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 waterborne 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.

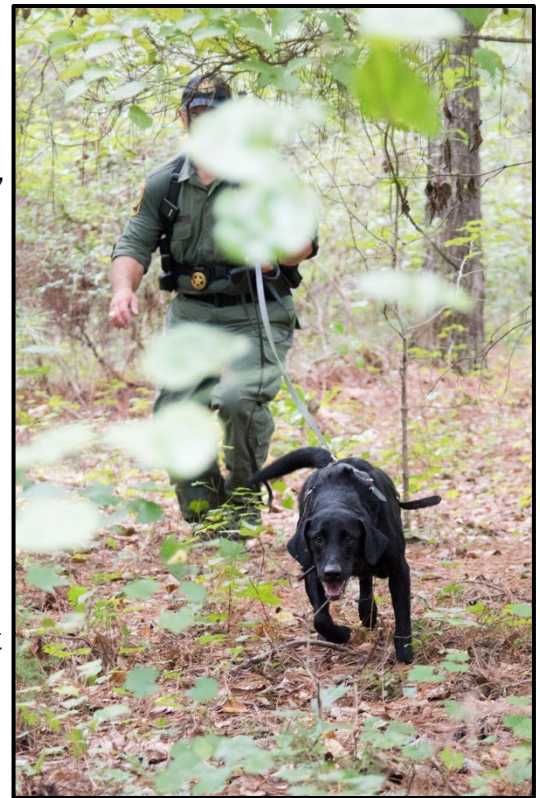
I am pleased to present the SEAFWA Annual Accomplishments Report for the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division for the year 2024-2025. As the Colonel of the division, I am proud to highlight the significant achievements of our officers across various areas of patrol and investigation. The following sections provide a comprehensive overview of our accomplishments during this reporting period:

## Patrol and Investigations

### *Patrol Hours*

- **Boating Hours:** Our dedicated officers spent a total of 48,393 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 38,708 hours of night patrols, working diligently to safeguard our natural resources during critical hours when illegal activities are more likely to occur. These patrols play a crucial role in deterring wildlife poaching, enforcing boating regulations, and ensuring the overall well-being of our citizens.
- **Search and Rescue Hours:** The division dedicated 4,075 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 16,817 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 3,394 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 3,685 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.



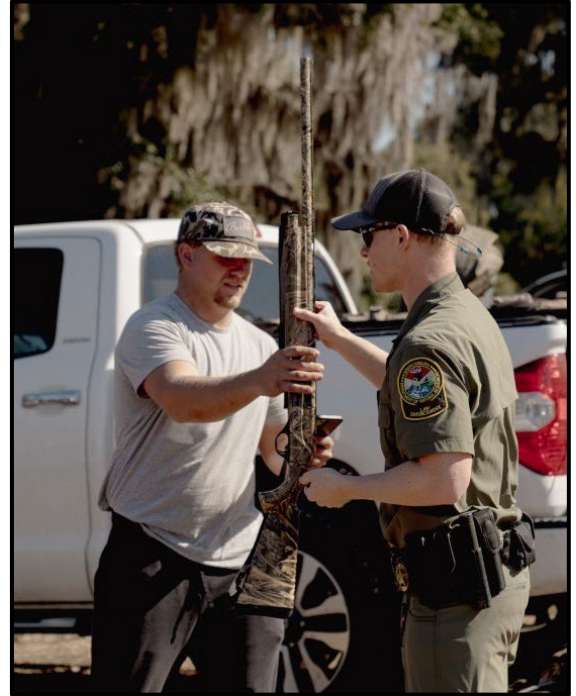
### ***Investigation Hours***

- **Hunting Accident Hours:** Our officers spent 573 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 2,600 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 8,855 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 14 boating fatalities and 4 hunting fatalities.



## Enforcement

- **Enforcement Activities:** Officers wrote 10,131 summons and issued 27,353 written warnings, resulting in \$1,059,825 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 42,913 vessel inspections, ensuring compliance with boating safety standards and regulations, and promoting responsible boating practices.
- **Hunter and Fisherman Checks:** Our officers conducted 48,916 hunter checks and 63,581 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 1,552 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 918 nuisance animal calls, aiding residents, and ensuring the well-being of both the public and wildlife.
- **Warrants/Suspensions Served:** Officers served 48 warrants and 498 suspensions, ensuring compliance with legal requirements, and maintaining public safety.
- **Depredation Permits:** We issued 1,007 depredation permits, facilitating responsible management of wildlife-human interactions and minimizing negative impacts.
- **Public Presentations:** Our officers conducted 3,897 public presentations on hunting, fishing, and boating ethics, and safety, fostering public awareness and education about responsible outdoor practices. Education and Outreach
- A total of 13,892 students were certified in Hunter Education; 3,793 students were taught Hunter Education in 267 classes; 10,099 students were taught Hunter Education in Internet Classes



- 7,144 students were certified in Boater Education; 2,883 students were taught Boater Education in 225 classes; 4,261 students were taught Boater Education in Internet Classes
- Take One Make One Program held 48 mentored hunts with 72 students participating.
- Officers spent 1,473 hours at job fairs and other events recruiting new officers
- National Archery In Schools - 2,387 students competed in the 2025 State Archery Tournament with \$52,000 in scholarships awarded
- Scholastic Clay Target Sports
  - 500 Youth Shooters participated in the State Skeet & Trap event with
  - \$36,000 in college scholarships awarded.
  - 540 Youth Shooters participated in the State Sporting Clay Event with
  - \$40,000 in college scholarships awarded.
- 47,706 people used manned ranges operated by the Division

## Technology

In June 2025, the Training Section unveiled the new De-Escalation Training Center. This has been a multi-year project that involved the filming of individualized scenes on land and water with varying outcomes and the construction of a new 1500 square foot building at our Law Enforcement Training Center to house De-Escalation Training. The 180° high-definition projection system uses large screens and surround sound to immerse the officer within the scenario. This system is the first of its kind in the country to use actual Game Warden field videos created to simulate real-world experiences for our officers. The instructor can change the outcomes of the scenario based on how an officer responds. This modern immersive experience increases the realism of training, heightens awareness, and improves proper use of force responses. This project was partially funded through the Department of Justice COPS De-Escalation Grant.

The Division continues to implement significant technological advancements to enhance operational efficiency and officer safety within the law enforcement division. A total of 300 Cradle point routers were installed in patrol vehicles statewide, providing reliable and secure connectivity to support mobile tablets and body-worn cameras. This upgrade significantly improved data transmission and real-time access to the SmartCop Records Management System (RMS), enabling officers to operate more effectively in the field.

The Law Enforcement Communications Center underwent a comprehensive refurbishment during this past year. This included the installation of the new SmartCAD computer-aided dispatch system, which enhances call processing, unit deployment, and real-time tracking. Dispatch operations were further modernized with the integration of updated console computers and multiple-monitor configurations, allowing for improved situational awareness and multitasking capability. The interior of the Communications Center was also refurbished to create a more functional and ergonomically optimized workspace for dispatch personnel. These combined improvements have modernized law enforcement technology infrastructure and strengthened agency-wide communications and coordination.

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

### ***Dale Grandstaff, Colonel***

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency Law Enforcement core responsibilities include patrolling to enforce boating, hunting, and fishing laws, protecting public safety on waterways and public lands, preserving and managing wildlife and habitats, arresting violators, providing public safety education on hunting and boating, and assisting landowners with wildlife management.

### **TWRA Mission Statement**

To preserve, conserve, manage, protect, and enhance the fish and wildlife of the state and their habitats for the use, benefit, and enjoyment of the citizens of Tennessee and its visitors. The agency will foster the safe use of the state's waters through a program of law enforcement, education, and access.

### **TWRA Commission Members**

Confirmation of Appointment to the Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commission

TFWC commissioners are nonsalaried members of the public who serve as the governing body of the TWRA. Members are appointed by the governor, speaker of the house, and speaker of the senate. There are 13 seats total, with staggered appointment dates to ensure continuity of leadership. This year 2025, five vacancies were filled with new appointments (listed below). Commissioners are expected to be knowledgeable about hunting, fishing, boating, and/or other outdoor recreation activities.

- Rosemary McIlhenny – appointed by Governor Bill Lee
- Hanes Torbett – appointed by Governor Bill Lee
- John McCarty – appointed by Governor Bill Lee
- Steve Jones – appointed by Randy McNally, Lt. Governor and Speaker of the Senate
- Steven Johnson – appointed by Cameron Sexton, Speaker of the House of Representatives

### **2025 TWRA Legislative Round Up**

On Tuesday, April 22, the 2025 session of the 114th Tennessee General Assembly adjourned. During this session, the General Assembly enacted several laws impacting the agency including those related to baiting, drone recovery of deer, online boater education, and several other topics.

The agency compiled the information below to support the public in understanding the laws enacted this year, including when each law takes effect and any other relevant information.



Colonel Dale Grandstaff



## *Agency Legislation*

- **Public Chapter No. 141:** Authorizes the Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commission (TFWC) to provide naming rights of infrastructure under agency jurisdiction to businesses or individuals in exchange for compensation. Effective July 1.
- **Public Chapter No. 203:** Removes outdated references to “firing” ranges and changes to “shooting” ranges to allow more consistent marketing of agency ranges. Effective July 1.
- **Public Chapter No. 206:** Establishes fluorescent pink (blaze pink) as an optional hunter safety color. Blaze orange is still allowed. Effective July 1.
- **Public Chapter No. 478:** Provides that the TFWC may promulgate rules to allow the use of drones solely for the recovery of wounded deer. Specifies that the drones may only be used on private property. Drone use is not allowed until rules are promulgated.

## *Licensing Legislation*

- **Public Chapter No. 444:** Establishes a “deer bait privilege license” for use on private land only; sets the fee at \$50 for resident/\$100 non-resident; specifies that there are no exemptions from obtaining a permit if an individual seeks to hunt over bait, including landowners who are exempt from obtaining a hunting license. The legislation maintains the agency’s authority to close certain areas to baiting for disease management purposes (CWD for example). Directs the TFWC to promulgate rules regarding the license by August 1, 2026. License not available until 2026-2027 hunting season. Until that time, baiting for all species is illegal (except baiting authorized under a wild hog depredation permit).
- **Public Chapter No. 443:** Directs the TFWC to promulgate rules establishing a waterfowl guide license specific to Reelfoot Lake. License not available until rules are promulgated.

## *Fees Legislation*

- **Public Chapter No. 57:** Adjusts the fee for a sportsman lifetime license for adopted children under the age of 13 to be the same as the fee for children ages 0-3. Effective now. The bill removed the time limit on how long adopted children qualify for the infant rate.
- **Public Chapter No. 216:** Establishes a temporary group hunting license (7 days) for disabled veterans participating in a hunting event hosted by a non-profit organization. Effective July 1. Allows for rules to be promulgated by TFWC. The agency will put out more details once the process for obtaining the license is established.
- **Public Chapter No. 214:** Authorizes online, non-proctored boater education exams; authorizes the TFWC to promulgate exam fee and fee for replacement card via rule; caps both fees at \$15.00. Effective now. Information related to the online exam is readily available on the agency’s website here. Additionally, in person boater education is still an available option for Tennesseans and visitors.

## *TFWC Legislation*

- **Public Chapter No. 524:** Changes the term start and end dates for the TFWC commission appointments from March 1 and February 28 to July 1 and June 30, respectively. Effective July 1.

## ***Misc. Legislation***

- **Public Chapter No. 407:** Updates the criminal classification for hunting on the land of another without permission from a Class C to a Class B misdemeanor; increases the maximum fine a judge may impose for the violation from \$50.00 to \$500.00. Effective July 1.
- **Public Chapter No. 437:** Establishes categories of wetlands (artificial isolated, isolated, low, moderate); reduces permitting and mitigation requirements for certain categories; prohibits the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation from considering cumulative impacts to wetlands in their permitting process. Effective July 1.

## **Training Changes**

A few years ago, the Law Enforcement Division went away from statewide in person in-service training and chose to do more V-Academy and regional training. In February 2025 over a four-week period we went back to in-person statewide training at Fall Creek Falls state park. Everyone enjoyed being back in a classroom together and sharing stories from around the state, but one of the most common responses from everyone that attended was “It was great to see and talk to officers from other parts of the state and share stories and information!” The LE Division plans to do similar training in 2026.



## **Operation Dry Water July 4th Weekend Boating Report**

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) reported a single fatality over the July 4th holiday and Operation Dry Water weekend. The incident occurred on Center Hill Lake shortly before 6 p.m. Thursday evening (July 3) when a 57-year-old Brentwood woman jumped into a water from a ski boat and was fatality injured by the prop.



The Law Enforcement Division compiled the holiday statistics after receiving reports from the Agency's four regions. There were three injury incidents across the state, along with 24 alcohol-related boating under the influence (BUI) arrests. Additionally, officers made an arrest for public intoxication and one warrant arrest. Several written warnings and verbal warnings were issued, mostly due to marine events and compliance issues. The Agency's remotely operated vehicle (ROV) also assisted in the recovery of a drowning victim.

TWRA's total number of boating-related fatalities this year stands at 13 as compared to 11 through the July 4th holiday period last year. Operation Dry Water is a period of increased enforcement and education about the dangers of impaired boating around July 4th, one of the busiest times for boating activity in the year.

## Recruiting

TWRA hired 12 new wildlife officers in July 2025. Recruiting continued to focus on finding the most



qualified applicants to fill our 25 vacancies. Agency staff were focused on college career days, social media posts, and most recently a recruiting day meet and greet at our newly acquired Catoosa Ridge training facility. In June, we offered potential

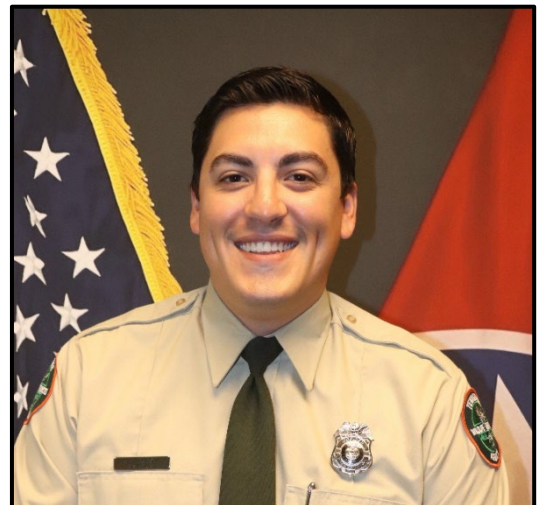
new recruits the opportunity to stop by a statewide law enforcement meeting near Crossville, TN where they built wood duck nest boxes and ate lunch with all potential hiring managers.

Officers and agency employees also attended the Southeastern Wildlife Conclave held in March at the University of Tennessee at Martin in west Tennessee. TWRA employees cooked fish for the over 400 attendees from numerous colleges all over the Southeast.

## Awards

### *Jon Mark TWRA Boating Officer of the Year*

Jon Mark has received the honor of being selected as the Agency's 2024 Boating Officer of the Year. He was presented with his award during the August meeting of the Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commission at the Region II Ray Bell Building. Jon has quickly become a vital part of District 21's boating enforcement efforts. He performed more than 600 boating inspections on Old Hickory and Percy Priest lakes, and the Cumberland River. Jon was the primary officer in seven BUI cases and assisted others. He worked on seven boating incidents and was the primary investigator on two of them, both of which were fatal. In addition to his boating enforcement efforts, he was responsible for answering wildlife calls in Davidson and Cannon counties while they were vacant. In addition to his law enforcement duties, Jon made more than 2,000



contacts during six boating education events in the area and participated in many events. Among his many assets, Jon fluently speaks Spanish. His ability to communicate with the Spanish-speaking



community has provided the Agency with a resource it has never had previously. Jon has helped interview suspects, translate, assist with explaining boating, hunting, and fishing laws, and help issue citations. He also assists other agencies. Jon translated the Boater Education test into Spanish and translated the Field Sobriety Task form. Jon has taken on increased responsibility in training, benefiting both cadets and veteran officers.



### ***Sgt. Dustin Burke 2024 TWRA Wildlife Officer of the year***

Sgt. Dustin Burke was named the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency Wildlife Officer of the Year. He is responsible for the Off-Highway Program in District 41 which includes the 200,000 acre North Cumberland Wildlife Management Area.

The recipient of the award was announced by Darren Rider, TWRA Boating and Law Enforcement Division Colonel. Burke represented TWRA and was recognized at a meeting for the SEAFWA Chief's Council in December 2024 in Augusta, Ga.

Also honored as TWRA region and district selections were Sgt. Ray Garton, Region I and Ray McMillen, District 11; Montana Michelson, Region II and Hailey Guffey, District 22; Derrick Gray, Region III and Tim Mannale, District 32; Justin Pinkston,

District 42. These officers were selected for their efforts in teamwork, public outreach, innovation, attitude, leadership, and accomplishments.

### ***Valor Awards Presented to Officers for Life-Saving Efforts***

The Boating and Law Enforcement Division has recognized two wildlife officers by presenting the prestigious Valor Award for their bravery and selflessness in a pair of separate incidents. The latest to be honored are Davidson County Officer Dusten Moffitt and District 41 part-time Boating Officer Mike Raleigh, who were presented their awards at the August Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting.

Dusten displayed bravery and selfless service during a life-threatening swift water rescue in Sumner County on the evening of June 15, 2025. Upon notification of the incident by Sgt. Nathan Karch, Dusten immediately responded, unaware of the full extent of the unfolding emergency. Grabbing only his personal flotation device, he ran toward the chaotic scene. Guided by cries for help through the darkness and floodwaters, Dusten located multiple victims stranded in submerged and partially submerged vehicles and rescued three individuals. Dusten found a fourth victim barely conscious, wedged in a tree with water rushing over his head. In an act of exceptional courage, Officer Moffitt entered the current, maneuvering from tree to tree until he reached him. Members of the Whitehouse Community Volunteer Fire Department arrived with a rope, successfully pulling Dusten and the victim to safety. The victim was unconscious and near drowning, but due to Dusten's efforts, he survived.



*Wildlife Officer Dusten Moffitt*

On Feb. 26, 2025, Officer Mike Raleigh displayed extraordinary courage and an unwavering commitment to duty during a high-risk rescue on the Little River at the Rockford Dam in Blount County. When two men became trapped in a small jon boat, caught in the dangerous, recirculating currents of the low head dam with water flooding their boat, they quickly had their lives in imminent danger. In the face of the violent current and the danger it posed, Mike expertly maneuvered his boat into the area, contacted the stranded vessel, and gave clear, calm instructions to the victims. Mike latched the boats together and, relying on his skill, training, and instinct, pulled both men to safety.



Officer Mike Raleigh



### ***TWRA Honor Guard***

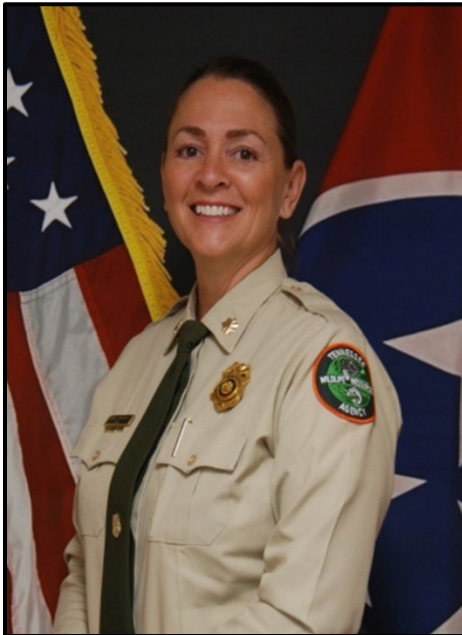
The TWRA Honor Guard is a 24-member team who support the families of active and retired officers through funeral services to honor their life and dedication to their career. The team also represents TWRA, the State of Tennessee, and conservation law enforcement officers through ceremonial flag presentations.

## **Statewide Promotions and Retirements**

### **Shelley Hammonds**

Lt. Colonel promoted Jan. 2025

From Major Reg. 4



### **Dale Grandstaff**

Colonel promoted Aug. 2024

From Lt. Colonel



**Darren Rider**

Colonel: Retired August 2024



**Brian Elkins**

Major Reg. 1: Retired June 2025



## Texas



### ***Ron VanderRoest, Colonel***

#### **Training**

The 67th Texas Game Warden Cadet class of 26 Game Wardens and 7 State Park Police Officers graduated on May 30, 2025. (The class began on Oct. 1, 2024, with 36 game wardens and 10 state park police officers).

- TPWD-LE transition from Glock 17-9mm pistols to a Glock 45-9mm pistol with ACRO-P2 red dot sight has been completed by all Game Wardens and State Park Police Officers.
- GWTC and field-based trainers have completed mandated 16-hour Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERT) LEVEL I training statewide.
- Training Center recruiting staff conducted various onsite open house and travelling recruiting events.
- The 68th cadet class has been selected and will start with 25 Game Warden and 10 State Park Police Officers. The class will start Oct. 1, 2025.

#### **Funding and Staffing**

- Funding continues to be a challenge based on inflation related to capital equipment, office and boat storage leases, and general operational needs in addition to replacement cost of critical equipment.



- Various funding solutions were proposed and some successfully passed during the 89<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session. This included appropriations from new funding streams within state coffers to ease strain created by agency wide dependence upon license revenues.
- We've seen some improvement in relation to staffing issues with very specific positions within the Law Enforcement Division to include police communication officers (dispatchers) and aircraft pilots. Yet to be determined are the potential impacts of mandates to end remote or "teleworking" practices in place for other non-commissioned staff.
  - Solutions have included adding position classifications to increase potential salary and exploring options identifying alternate work locations.
  - Progress is being made on an internal program to train pilots and Tactical Flight Officers (TFO) as selected Game Wardens move through the licensing and training process.
- Budget action by the legislature appropriated funding to sustain a 50-hour work week for game wardens. This will help significantly in addressing personnel shortages statewide until more permanent positions can be created and filled.
- Game warden applicant numbers have stayed consistent over the past three hiring processes between 700-800 applicants. Innovation in recruiting quality applicants continues to be a priority.

## **Law Enforcement Trends**

- Spring 2025; the Governor's Operation Lone Star border security initiative, which began in January of 2022 was suspended. This operation had required 24/7 presence on the assigned area of the border of 60 officers (in addition to those stationed in the AOR) and 30 vessels for over three years.
- Preparations are being made to provide LE Division support of efforts to address potential impacts upon wildlife and livestock of the predicted return of the New World Screw Worm to the US across the southern border.
- Expanded Point of Entry (POE) operations across the entire Texas/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.
- Focus has been placed on developing a process to increase our rate of submission of cases related to nonresident violators to the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact.
- The Texas Operation Game Thief Program has implemented the Tip 411 system to facilitate the reporting of resource violations by the public.

## **Innovations in Law Enforcement**

- Current projects related to technological advancement include the implementation of in-car CAD technology and electronic ticketing.

- New rotary and fixed wing aircraft acquired and/or in the pipeline will facilitate increased capabilities both in conservation enforcement and general LE/emergency response.
- LE staff have developed and conducted a wildlife forensic investigation course for cadet trainees. The course includes instruction in the use of readily available tools to facilitate better investigation and documentation of evidence in poaching related crimes. The course has also been completed by current game wardens for dissemination to more field personnel.

## Legislative Issues

- The following bills are representative of some of what was filed during the most recent legislative session which ended in June that would have impacted TPWD LE. None were adopted.
  - HB 676 Relating to the use of an unmanned aircraft to locate and retrieve wounded or killed wildlife. This bill would have legalized the use of UAV to pursue/recover wildlife wounded as part of sport hunting.
  - HB 1379 Relating to the authority of a game warden or other peace officer commissioned by the Parks and Wildlife Department to enter private property. This bill proposed to require a probable cause threshold be met by Game Wardens to enter onto private property.
  - HB 41 Relating to the acquisition or use of certain foreign equipment or services by a governmental entity. This bill would have effectively ended our UAV program in its current state.
  - HB 4938 Relating to the abolishment of the Parks and Wildlife Department and the Parks and Wildlife Commission and the transfer of their functions to the General Land Office, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Public Safety.

## Cost Saving Initiatives

- Concerted efforts are being made agency wide to reduce costs and increase accessibility of information by phasing out various paper publications and replacing them with digital versions.
- Another initiative has been to, when and where appropriate and feasible, procure or construct office and other facility spaces that will be shared across divisional lines (Wildlife, State Parks, Fisheries, etc.)

## Other Special Law Enforcement Notes

- TPWD continues to seek solutions for cloud-based storage system for BWCs. Issues are cost and internet connectivity.
- Expungements: The Division continues to receive a comparatively higher volume of expunction orders and has created a more streamlined process, in conjunction with agency Legal Division, to ease demands on field/HQ personnel while tightening the timeframe for completion.

- TPWD-LE has created and filled an HQ based position responsible for, among other duties, the review/updating of division policies and has made the move to the PowerDMS system for policy editing and approval. Trends in legislative action indicate a likely need to develop and/or update enforcement related policies almost continuously.
- Texas Game Wardens responded to the July 4<sup>th</sup> flooding event in Central and South Texas. Game Wardens, including swift water SAR teams, aviation (hoist capable helos), UAS assets, Dive Team, and K-9 units arrived in the early hours of day one to conduct search and recovery efforts and continue to aid in recovery efforts three weeks in. In total, 375 Texas Game Wardens were mobilized across a large portion of the state, saving 33 lives and conducting more than 400 evacuations. Much was learned during this event that will be applied to future disaster responses.

## Virginia

***John J. Cobb, Colonel***

### Message from the Colonel

As we enter our 121<sup>st</sup> year as Protectors of Wildlife and Natural Resources, we should be aware that we must evolve to remain relevant in the future. For us to be essential to the public it often comes down to what services we provide and how well we meet their needs. Much has been done over the last few years to show we are following best practices, through state and national accreditation certification efforts. We are being seen across this nation as leaders who are advancing this noble profession. The challenge continues to be having appropriate funding and staffing to meet our needs, which leads us to the bigger picture of the VCP *Relevancy Plan* that we launched last summer in 2023, after comprehensive research and development.

We now need to focus more attention on bringing others to the outdoors to see firsthand our successes in protecting wildlife and natural resources.

To accomplish this goal, we need to diversify our workforce who will be better equipped to bring others that have had less opportunity to experience the outdoors with them. The first area of focus will be our ability to train our officers and staff to include developing a passion for the outdoors. The missing piece that we are working on at HQ is determining and finding the appropriate environment, which we are referring to as the W3 (Woods\*Wildlife\*Water) Natural Resources Training Academy. This will be a significant investment and as such, we drafted a W3 Vision and Mission Statement and you can certainly expect to hear more on this W3 Initiative as we continue to move forward!

I generally do not spend much time looking back on initiatives successfully implemented and past accomplishments as I am more focused on the future. However, the purpose of the VCP 2024



*Colonel John J. Cobb*

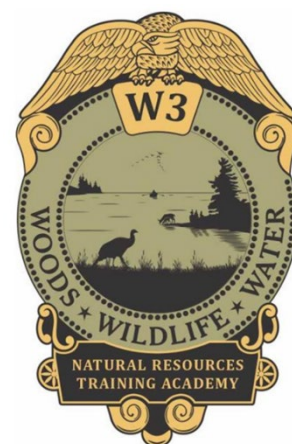


Annual Report is to look at that specific year in retrospect, so here is a list gathered from our monthly Rollcall Newsletters:

1. Completed a total of 106 Career Progression Program (CPP) pay adjustments with an effective date of February 25, 2024. These included the new \$51,000 starting pay and associated increases to all seven pay sub band minimum baselines. In addition, we implemented CPP for Supervisors and Managers. Furthermore, we budgeted for the next round of CPP level increases, including 40 officers who were scheduled to move up on July 10, 2024. The CPP Sworn Compensation Model allows us to forecast our intentions in many proven beneficial ways using a standardized transparent approach.
2. Welcomed 25 recruits to our 13<sup>th</sup> Basic Academy that began in February; this brought us to 176 sworn positions filled, just six below our current authorization of 182, which is the highest level that we have been at in over more than five years.
3. In regard to our Recruitment and Training Section, we have been conducting significant research, over the last couple of years, on other Wildlife Law Enforcement Training Academies across the nation to include how they are structured in terms of staffing and related duties/responsibilities. As a result, the decision was made to restructure our three training sergeant positions to the rank of First Sergeant.
4. Sixth Annual VCP Awards Ceremony was held in March, where we formally recognized a record 63 officers and staff members. We are extremely fortunate to have so many passionate, hardworking, and outstanding representatives of the agency.
5. **O.P.S.A.C. Unit Citation** (Team Award) was presented to 24 dedicated members of the Office of Professional Standards (O.P.S.) Advisory Council by the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources Travis Voyles (see resolution). The collaborative team effort that began six years ago has led to a vast majority of the positive proactive changes that we see today.
6. Launched a new recruitment tool, known as Regional Recruitment Ambassadors. Those selected were tasked with creating a consistent recruitment message, developing in-service training on recruitment efforts with a focus on every CPO is a recruiter, updating and maintaining recruitment materials, attending career fairs, and assisting with applicant testing. Regional Recruitment Ambassadors will also be expected to perform a limited number of speaking engagements at local colleges and universities while building a working network with professors, career counselors and other staff.
7. This year marked the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of us having an Independent Law Enforcement Academy and we have seen many recruit classes come through during this time. To be an approved training academy we have to be recertified every three years by DCJS in a comprehensive auditing process of our records to ensure we are meeting their minimum standards. Due to the efforts of our training staff as well as our volunteer certified instructors, we passed and received our recertification certificate.
8. With the 13<sup>th</sup> Basic Class Graduation, 19 new officers headed to the field to assist with staffing concerns and we also completed the recruitment of 14 recruits. This was an outstanding team effort of those members of our training unit as well as those who assist with the recruitment, the selection process, and certification training. In addition, we announced that the Virginia Marine Police with the Marine Resources Commission (MRC) would be enrolling in our 14<sup>th</sup> Basic Academy that was set to begin in March of 2025.

9. Received over 250,000 views overall with the first two New **True Wildlife Crime** Series, beginning with Exposing a Prolific Turkey Poacher followed by The Hollywood Buck Case.
10. Reached a milestone this year by recognizing and awarding the 50<sup>th</sup> Outstanding Monthly Accomplishment Spot Recognition; this unique Colonel's Challenge Coin was created to recognize Conservation Police Officers / Law Division Staff who perform an outstanding accomplishment. This spot recognition is given each month to an individual or team lead for Outstanding Leadership, Professionalism and Excellence.
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; Since January of 2024, after being recognized by the DOJ, there are now 18 member enrolled states with six of them in the self-assessment phase, including our agency.
12. As a vital part of this Public Safety Investment, we are continuing to move forward with the W3 (Woods\*Wildlife\*Water) Natural Resources Training Academy. This capitol initiative and specialized unique training programs includes research, planning and development, marketing, fundraising (i.e., establishing public/private partnerships), etc.

As we proceed with meeting the needs of a broader constituency base as identified in the national relevancy studies, we must use our instructional expertise in new ways. We have certainly proven over the last 20 years that we can offer highly successful academy training to our recruits, officers, and staff. However, to be seen by others as essential, especially with our ever declining number of enforcement officers through the years (50 Officers and counting), now is the time to reach larger audiences as a force multiplier to ensure we can continue to provide a safe environment for those who want to explore and enjoy the great outdoors. More to come as we begin to form public/private partnerships with others to visualize this relevancy endeavor...



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 Law Enforcement 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.

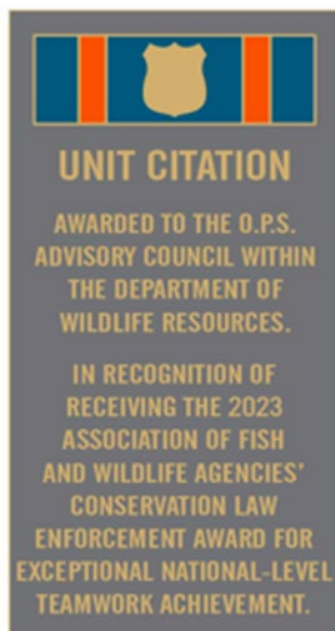
Within these pages of this annual report, you will see many of our accomplishments where it is evident that we are the "Protectors of Wildlife and Natural Resources" as well as those who want to enjoy the great outdoors and all that it has to offer. It is absolutely my honor and privilege to be the Chief 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.

## Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources UNIT CITATION



In the year 2024, the Office of Professional Standards (O.P.S.) Advisory Council was honored with our first ever **Unit Citation** by the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources Travis Voyles with an Official Resolution presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual VCP Awards Ceremony.

The 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 our CREED is the benchmark of this council's work. 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 team projects; VCP Recognition and Engagement Handbook; and the Leadership Development Continuum.



Furthermore, in 2023 the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) recognized the O.P.S. Advisory Council with their highest annual teamwork recognition award in Calgary, Alberta (Canada) for outstanding national teamwork achievement in conservation law enforcement. 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."*

As a result of this **Unit Citation**, those officers who served on the O.P.S. Advisory Council during the first five years are awarded and shall wear this associated commendation bar on their uniform. In addition going forward, those officers who are members of this council in the



future are authorized to wear this same commendation bar, only while they actively service in this role.



# Resolution by the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources



## COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

### RESOLUTION BY THE SECRETARY OF NATURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

#### **Conferring a UNIT CITATION upon the Office of Professional Standards Advisory Council within the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources Law Enforcement Division**

**WHEREAS**, the Office of Professional Standards Advisory Council had been established in 2018 with a 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; and

**WHEREAS**, the Office of Professional Standards Advisory Council has contributed directly to the research, development, and successful implementation of many comprehensive long-term team projects, including the Citizen Feedback System; Employee Suggestion Program with its 33 implemented group projects; the Virginia Conservation Police Recognition and Engagement Handbook; and the Leadership Development Continuum; and

**WHEREAS**, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in 2023 at their 113th Annual Meeting held in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, recognized the Office of Professional Standards 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; and

**WHEREAS**, per the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the Office of Professional Standards 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; and

**WHEREAS**, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies recognized that the 24 dedicated team members had shown *"through unwavering commitment and outstanding accomplishments of its membership and collaboration with officers and staff, the Office of Professional Standards Advisory Council has exemplified the highest standards of excellence, making a lasting impact on the conservation and protection of our natural resources. The Virginia Office of Professional Standards Advisory Council stands as a shining example of excellence in conservation law enforcement and embodies the very essence of this national-level recognition"*; and

**WHEREAS**, during this first five-year recognition period, these proactive initiatives resulted from the successful efforts of the following who served as a member of the Office of Professional Standards Advisory Council – Founding Members: John J. Cobb, Ryan M. Shuler, Ronnie Warren, Charter Members: Randy Hickman, Owen Bullard, Jason Culbertson, Greg Funkhouser, James Slaughter, Travis Murray, Members: Tyler Blanks, James H. Hale, Rich Landers, Tyler Sheets, Joshua Thomas, Robert O. Ham, Milton Robinson, Ashley Hart, Alan Hatmaker, Ken Williams, Joseph Morris, Angela Comer, Katrina Morris, Jessica Fariss, and Frank Spuchesi; therefore, be it

**RESOLVED**, by the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, Travis A. Voyles who confers a UNIT CITATION for team recognition on those members of the Office of Professional Standards Advisory Council, which authorizes them to wear a special commendation bar on their uniforms.



  
Travis A. Voyles  
Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources

## Recognition and Awards

### *Officer of the Year*

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) is proud to announce that Conservation Police Officer (CPO) Daniel Smith has been selected as the 2024 Officer of the Year. Assigned to Sussex County, Officer Smith has demonstrated exemplary service, outstanding leadership, and an unwavering commitment to protecting Virginia's natural resources.

Over the past year, Officer Smith has gone above and beyond in his duties, consistently exemplifying the highest standards of professionalism and community engagement. He led numerous district-wide operations, including coordinated responses to spotlighting complaints and joint patrols with local law enforcement. Officer Smith also played a key role in fostering public outreach, organizing eight educational events—including a new youth fishing program in Hopewell that will now be held annually thanks to its success.

A standout achievement was his six-month investigation into widespread spotlighting violations across several jurisdictions. The operation led to 180 charges, including 22 spotlighting offenses and 25 violations for exceeding bag limits. His efforts resulted in significant legal consequences, including four license revocations totaling 48 years and restitution of more than \$6,700. In recognition of his dedication and investigative excellence, Officer Smith was awarded the Colonel's Challenge Coin in April 2024.

Officer Smith also served as Region 1 Lead Firearms Instructor and a Field Training Officer (FTO), training new officers and supporting statewide instruction for firearms and officer survival tactics. Despite these additional responsibilities, he led the region in violations detected and responded to 25% of all public-generated calls for service in his district.

His ability to excel across multiple roles—patrol, investigations, public education, and officer development—distinguishes him as a leader among his peers and a valued asset to the Virginia Conservation Police.



### *Boating Officer of the Year (NASBLA)*

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) is proud to announce that Senior Conservation Police Officer (CPO) Tim Bostic has been selected as the 2024 Boating Law Enforcement Officer of the Year. Serving in Region 4 and based in Rappahannock County, Officer Bostic has earned this prestigious recognition through his outstanding dedication to boating safety, professional excellence, and mentorship.

Throughout the 2024 boating season, Officer Bostic distinguished himself as a leader in the field. He conducted 21 boat patrols and made 25 boating-related arrests, including three for operating under the influence (OUI) and two for reckless operation. Demonstrating a remarkable 1:3 OUI arrest-to-patrol ratio, Officer Bostic balanced



proactive enforcement with a deep commitment to mentoring new officers. He directly assisted colleagues with four additional OUI cases, often stepping back to allow less experienced officers to take the lead, helping them gain confidence and valuable field experience.

Officer Bostic's leadership extends far beyond enforcement. He served as a critical mentor on Lake Anna, training fellow officers in techniques ranging from field sobriety testing to courtroom procedures. His calm guidance in high-pressure situations, including those involving uncooperative or belligerent individuals, ensured officer safety and professional conduct.

In recognition of his contributions to impaired boating enforcement, Officer Bostic was honored with the 2024 MADD Virginia Law Enforcement Award. His efforts have not only made Virginia's waterways safer but also strengthened the capabilities of the entire conservation police force.

Committed to public outreach, Officer Bostic coordinated and participated in nine boating safety education events, reaching nearly 6,000 community members. His engagement in programs such as First Night Out, Fireman's Parades, and school career days underscores his dedication to building public trust and promoting water safety awareness.

Officer Bostic exemplifies the values of the Virginia Conservation Police: professionalism, service, and stewardship. His selection as the 2024 Boating Law Enforcement Officer of the Year reflects a career marked by excellence, leadership, and a tireless commitment to protecting the citizens and waterways of the Commonwealth.

### ***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 for 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 2024 Colonel's Leadership Award is Sgt. Alan Hatmaker.



### ***O.P.S. Professionalism Decree (Class of 2024)***



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. The recipient of the 2024 O.P.S. Professionalism Decree is First Sgt. Derrick Kekic.



View the Entire 2024 Virginia Conservation Police Annual Report Here:

[Click Here](#)

# West Virginia



*Colonel Bobby L. Cales*

*Chief, WV DNR Law Enforcement*

## Officer Training

The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Section had an extensive training year during FY25. The FY25 Quarter one training consisted of 16 hours of Swift Water Rescue Training for all Natural Resources Police Officers. Quarter two firearms training was a Tactical Movement Training that is utilized during ERASE (Exterior Response to Active Shooter Events) training, the third Quarter Defensive Tactics training consisted of handcuffing and ground control, and the fourth quarter training was an additional ERASE firearms training, movement to neutralize threats. During the Law Enforcement Section statewide training/meeting held at Pipestem State Park, Natural Resources Police Officers received blocks of instruction on the WV Fusion Center capabilities, dealing with sovereign citizens, cell phone investigations, sudden custody death syndrome, and gang investigations. In FY25, 17 NRPOs became certified ALERRT (Exterior Response to Active Shooter) instructors, as well as Simunitions Scenario Instructors. The ten-member Law Enforcement Swift Water Team completed intensive three-day Submerged Vehicle training and continued to assist and train other public safety personnel statewide. Four newly sworn Natural Resources Police Officers attended the mandatory eight (8) hour Seated Battery Transition Course for BUI enforcement. FY25, seven NRPOs attended the Mountain Trackers Association, Forensic man-trackers courses, two NRPOs were certified as man-tracker instructors. FY25, two NRPO District Captains attended the International Wildlife Crime Stoppers Conference, one NRP Lieutenant attended the FBI National Academy, and a NRP Captain completed the National Association of State Boating Law Administrator's Leadership Academy. During this training year, seven NRPO K9 handlers attended the West Virginia Police K9 Association and Certification Conference and two NRPO K9 handlers attended the 2025 K9 Memorial Service in Washington D.C., a Law Enforcement Section K9 was honored during this service. Supervisory In-Service in FY25 consisted of technical sessions during the SEAFWA Spring Chiefs meeting, SEAFWA's Annual Conference, NASBLA's Recreational Boating Safety Workshop, NASBLA's Annual Conference, and various virtual training courses approved by the West Virginia Law Enforcement Training Subcommittee. In FY25, two additional WV DNR Law Enforcement Dive Team members 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 300 hours of training on a variety of methods, skills, and equipment, after the initial certification in South Carolina. The Law Enforcement Section Dive Team completed ROV (Remotely Operated Vehicle) training, full-face mask comms training, lift-bag training, and two divers attended the Search and Rescue Forum, and two divers attended the Midwest Public Safety Diver Conference. The 12 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. The WV DNR Law Enforcement Section Dive Team assignments and calls for service continues to increase.

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 118 Natural Resources Police Officers (NRPO) actively working. During FY2025, 1 officer retired with 29 years of service, and 6 officers separated from service, 11 new officers were hired, and 10 officers were promoted. 1 civilian support personnel hired.

## Law Enforcement Trends

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

The Law Enforcement Section offers in-seat Boating Safety classes in all counties in West Virginia. Students may view class information and register online at [www.register-ed.com](http://www.register-ed.com). The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and The U.S. Power Squadron also teach Boater Education within the State of West Virginia. NASBLA and State of West Virginia approved On-line Boater Education courses can be found on [www.wvdnr.gov](http://www.wvdnr.gov). Anyone born on or after December 31, 1986, is required to successfully complete a NASBLA-approved boating safety course before operating a motorboat. While using news releases and interviews during *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](http://www.Facebook.com/DNRpolice). The Facebook page continues to see increases in media contacts for additional information within the state and nationally. The reporting of wildlife violations on the DNR website, [www.wvdnr.gov/lenforce/poachers.shtm](http://www.wvdnr.gov/lenforce/poachers.shtm) is increasingly useful.

## Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative Enforcement Efforts

The West Virginia DNR Law Enforcement Section increased BUI patrols on West Virginia waters from July 1, 2024, to September 29, 2024. These patrols resulted in 5 BUI arrests, and 537 other citations/warnings.

Natural Resources Police Officers participated in the nationwide program *Operation Dry Water* from July 4, 2024, to July 6, 2024, to reduce alcohol-related boating incidents. This operation resulted in 176 citations/warnings, and 3 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.

Four officers work at 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.

## 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 FY2025 new Class A Uniforms were purchased and distributed statewide. Swiftwater rafts and trailers were added to the fleet as the need for emergency responses continue to grow. Two larger drones were purchased to broaden the capabilities of our drone program. Operators will be trained and used in conjunction with the Swiftwater and Search/Recovery units. These will aid in delivering items such as water, life jackets, and ropes.

Ten Ford Police package trucks have been added to the fleet. All units are equipped with transport cages, gun racks, new Motorola 8500 radios, cradle points and a full pursuit lighting package to include take down and scene lighting which greatly improves officer safety. Gun racks were purchased and are being installed in all current police vehicles. This keeps the officers long gun close to them instead of locked in the rear of the vehicle and provides easier access in emergency response situation. It adds another layer of security against theft. We have purchased temporary evidence lockers and freezers for all Districts in pursuing the NAWLEA accreditation. The main evidence areas have been fortified using a double locked door system and 360-degree containment areas only accessible by the District Lieutenant and Captain.

Due to the ever-growing issue of Litigation and the need to modernize equipment, not only for the Section but for the officers, the Colonel has implemented a technology advancement plan for the field officers. Body worn cameras have been successfully deployed. New cruisers have been outfitted with cradle points to facilitate automatic video uploads and prepare for future technological enhancements that rely on data connection. A digital evidence management piece through SmartCop has been developed and will soon be joined by a digital records management system (RMS) and other features that will allow officers to do field reports digitally and to run real time identity, license, and warrant checks which is crucial for officer safety and will also let the officers see the locations of everyone in the system for emergency responses.

The Section continues to work with federal and state agencies to procure grants to assist with equipment purchases. The Wildlife Sport Fish Restoration Basic Hunter Education, U.S. Coast Guard Recreational Boating Safety, and Port Security Grant programs are monitored to maximize returns from expenditures of time, mileage, and equipment purchases.

## **Legislative Changes**

Legislative changes that occurred this past session.

1. HB 2043 added UAV to 20-2-5j for tracking and locating mortally wounded species listed under code. Also added a provision that only one dog on a leash with one handler may be used for tracking. UAV operators for profit must be properly licensed.
2. SB 844 allows nonnative quail and partridges for agricultural purposes to be exempt from game farm licensing.
3. HB2836 created article 2D establishing a rehabilitation and permit system for the care, treatment and release of orphaned wildlife. The Director's office is in process of getting rules ready for the next session.
4. HB 2387 repealed 20-2-47L pistol stamp for hunting. The bill originally created funds to be used for law enforcement purposes.
5. HB2331 rules bundle passed. Several rules were sunseting and needed reapproved. CSR 58-47 struck provision for restriction on firearm calibers for night hunting. Originally it was to allow larger calibers for coyote hunting but expanded it to all night hunting. CSR 58-49 clarifies that an adult may assist a youth in the safe handling of a firearm during youth seasons.