



Field Notes

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission sworn personnel are fully constituted police officers with the authority to enforce all laws of the state, not just those relating to resource conservation.

A long way for just one...

While patrolling the shallow waters along the Nature Coast, Officers Robert Johnston and Kevin Losee found a Georgia vessel with four people aboard and 13 redfish in the fish box. In addition to the bag limit violation, 11 of the fish were undersized. The captain of the vessel said it was too long a trip from Georgia to keep only one redfish per person. The officers issued the appropriate citations and seized the illegal fish.

Someone called... again

Officer Matt Ervin responded to a complaint in Winter Haven concerning a subject feeding raccoons. Upon arrival, he observed a man feeding several raccoons in his back yard. Officer Ervin overheard the man's wife say that someone must have called the police on them again for feeding the animals because she stated, "There is a police vehicle parked down the road from the house." Officer Ervin announced his presence, stopped the feeding, and issued the man a notice to appear for the violation.

A gator flip?

Officer Clay McDonough responded to a call about two juveniles whose canoe had been overturned by what they believed was a large alligator. Both made it safely to shore without the canoe. Lt. Kevin McKinney and Officer McDonough searched the area and were unable to find evidence of any alligators. However, several large manatees were in the area and are believed to be the cause of the capsizing. The canoe was recovered by FWC and returned to the owner.

"Ran like a Deere"

After Columbia County deputies stopped a car on I-75 and interviewed the occupants, they placed the two men in their law enforcement vehicle. One man kicked out a window and both fled on foot into the woods. FWC ground personnel and pilot Joe Johnston responded to the call. Two K-9 teams from DOC, Union SO, Alachua SO helicopter, FDOT and FHP assisted in the search. K-9s tracked

the men to their hiding place under a mobile home where one was captured. The second man, however, "ran like a Deere" into Union County, down and across Olustee Creek and back into Columbia County approximately 10 times. He was glimpsed several times dashing through the woods with the DOC K-9 teams and Officer Bret Gill in hot pursuit. The runner was eventually found hiding under a log in the water with only his mouth and one knee visible. Officer Gill, after running approximately 10 miles in pursuit, was able to handcuff the subject without incident. The two men have criminal histories and are wanted for attempted murder, robbery with injury, aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, burglary, theft, criminal mischief, tampering with evidence, conspiracy and other charges.

Reunited

Officer Jason Rafter responded to a call about a newborn manatee separated from its mother. With the assistance of manatee biologist Kit Curtain and some local residents, the officer kept the juvenile manatee safe while they searched for its mother. Eventually they succeeded in reuniting the newborn with its mother.

Too much work

As Officer Alan Kirchinger patrolled the Yellow River, he came across two Tennessee men drifting along and watching seven free-floating devices that were fishing shiners in a deep hole. The men said "jug" fishing was a normal fishing practice in Tennessee. After Officer Kirchinger sent them on their way with warnings, the men had to resort to labor-intensive rod and reel fishing.

Oh, what a vision

Officer Danny Arnette watched a private tract of land after finding bait scattered for turkeys and evidence a turkey had been killed over the bait. One day, he found a parked truck, so he slipped up to the bait site and saw a hunter had placed turkey decoys in the bait. Suspecting the man was in a shooting house, he eased up and took a peek – no hunter. He

looked around and saw a man's head on the edge of a treestand platform. He ordered the man down. The man didn't come down, so Officer Arnette went up. As Officer Arnette's head reached the platform, he recognized the sleeping man. With just his head and FWC cap visible, he spoke softly to the man. After being called by name several times, the landowner opened his eyes – very wide – and shook his head several times while rubbing his eyes. He still couldn't shake the vision of Officer Arnette. Once the man got his wits about him, he admitted putting out the bait, saying it was easier to get turkeys that way. He was cited by Officer Arnette for hunting turkeys over bait.

Caught on tape

Investigator Maria Forrest filed criminal charges against a fishing boat's captain and mate after she received information about a great white shark that had been caught and killed offshore. The incident took place in May 2006 and was well documented on several online fishing forums. Investigator Forrest was able to obtain a video of the incident as part of a thorough investigation.

Rescued rescuers

Officer Erik Steinmetz responded to a boating accident that began when a 33-foot, triple-engine Aquasport broke down and started taking on water during a fishing trip. At 9 p.m., the passengers discharged distress flares without having tried to set anchor. A 73-foot sailing vessel with 23 Boy Scouts onboard responded to the flares and attempted to help with the sinking vessel. During rescue efforts, the sailing vessel's hull was punctured by the sinking vessel and also started taking on water. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) responded and "air dropped" pumps to the sinking sailing vessel. The Boy Scouts pumped out the hull and succeeded in securing the breach. The USCG airlifted the three occupants from the Aquasport for medical treatment.