



# A special group of officers

*By Carol Pratt ~ Photographs by Tim Donovan*

The Special Operations Group (SOG) of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is a group of elite teams of law enforcement personnel created by the agency to deal with potential threats to public safety and to protect property and natural resources. These men are prepared for the worst and are ready for immediate deployment to a variety of unusual occurrences and special events.

The SOG responds to natural and manmade disasters. In 2004 and 2005, they were deployed throughout Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana after a series of hurricanes pummeled



the Gulf Coast. They have also helped provide security for the Super Bowl, provided escorts for dignitaries, searched for lost or wanted persons and helped other law enforcement agencies deal with the control and safety of large crowds. Like all FWC officers, they are trained to work in the roughest and most remote terrain and on the water under the worst circumstances.

There are five 15-man teams throughout the state. SOG members come prepared, having received rigorous special training and armed with a variety of equipment – everything from chainsaws and generators to night-vision goggles and riot gear. **FW**



**Top left and above:** Officers practice search-and-rescue techniques. **Top right:** Officers climb a tower on the firearms course. **Left:** Officer Claude Stacey waits for his turn to shoot.

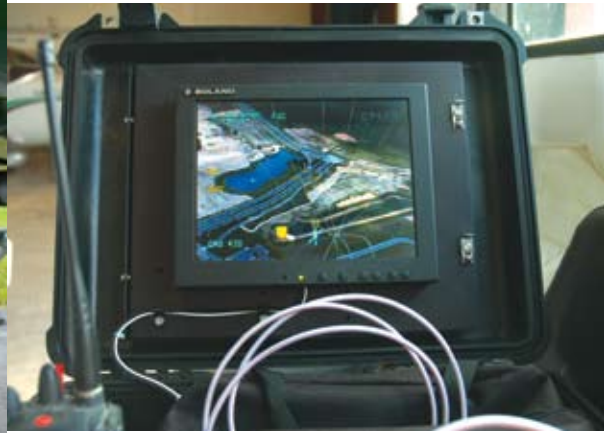


**Above:** Officer Crickett Bailey exits the woods while running through the land navigation course. **Left:** Investigator Eric Johnston uses his GPS on the land navigation course. **Facing page, top:** The officers of the FWC's Special Operations Group. **Center:** FWCSOG officers train with members of the U.S. Coast Guard. **Bottom:** Capt. Brad Williams, statewide coordinator for FWCSOG, conducts a training class.



**Above:** Officer Tony Lee takes aim during the firearms competition. **Right, top:** Officer Louis Hinds runs the firearms course. **Right, middle:** Lt. Mike Sommers totals the scores from an officer's target shots. **Right, bottom:** Lt. Christian Rodriguez on the firearms course. **Below:** A SOG officer takes aim at a target 300 feet away.





Forward-looking infrared (FLIR) cameras enable law enforcement officers to see what is happening – day or night and in all types of weather. They are used for search-and-rescue, land and sea patrol, reconnaissance and other conservation law enforcement duties. They can record what is seen onto a DVD for later study or evidentiary use. These systems include video downlink transmitters, allowing the images to be viewed both in the aircraft and on the ground via portable receiver units. **Above:** A FLIR camera mounted on one of the FWC's helicopters. **Right:** FWCSOG officers watching the monitor of a FLIR camera. **Below and top right:** Close-up views of a FLIR system monitor.

