

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.

FWC K-9 school graduates hit the ground running



TIM LEWIS

New partners Bradley W. Clayton and Cain are assigned to Polk County.

Scofflaws had better watch out because seven newly-trained natural resource canines and handlers are ready to hit the trail.

The officers, from fish and wildlife and natural resource agencies in Florida, Delaware and Maryland, finished more than 400 hours of training and were awarded their certificates on the steps of the Old Capitol Building in Tallahassee.

Florida's officers include:

- Edward "Eddie" R. Brown and Grady
- Bradley W. Clayton and Cain
- Samuel D. Dishman and Bear
- William E. Giles and Parker

The dogs were donated, with the majority coming from animal shelters. One dog, Grady, was saved from possible death. She had been beaten with a shotgun and a shock collar had been used on her, Brown said.

"I've been amazed about how far my dog has come," he said like a proud, new father would when speaking of his baby. "She got a perfect score in tracking."

FWC instructor John Snow, a handler for 18 years, said the canines are trained to sniff out illegally taken wildlife, such as dove, deer, turkey, lobster, alligators and ducks.

They also can track humans and find evidence, such as guns, shell casings, knives, handcuffs – anything a human has touched.

Saved from the storm

During Tropical Storm Alberto, Officers George Wells and Baryl Martin received a call regarding a kayaker in distress. The kayaker had fallen off his kayak and could not get back on due to 40 mph wind gusts and heavy surf. He had been in the water for more than 45 minutes when the officers received the call. Officer Wells found a Good Samaritan with a PWC who gave permission for it to be used for a rescue operation. Officer Wells was able to rescue the kayaker and transport him to safety.

Careful what you ask for

On July 4, Officers Andy Maltais and Lee Hendrix were on patrol during a fireworks show. After the show, the officers stopped a boat full of people to conduct a safety inspection. A passenger on the boat became irate and verbally abused the officers. His family tried to calm him down, but couldn't. After being told repeatedly to be quiet and sit down, he jumped into the officers' boat and demanded to be arrested. His demand was met.

Not the way to get ready

Officer Troy Starling, responding to a complaint that an alligator had been unlawfully killed, spoke with a witness who said that he'd seen a 6-foot alligator crossing a road. A young man got out of a stopped vehicle and stabbed the alligator with a harpoon and chopped its head with a machete. The witness showed Officer Starling tire tracks with four different tire treads. Officer Starling checked the neighborhood and found a driveway with the same tire tracks. He interviewed a 17-year-old man who confessed to killing the alligator. He told Officer Starling he was planning on enlisting in the military and wanted to do something to get ready.

Horse and rider roundup

While on patrol, Officer Darrin Riley passed a state forest entrance and saw a horse by the road with full riding gear but no rider. He coaxed the horse out of the right-of-way and began to look for the rider. Eventually, he found the juvenile rider who had been thrown from her horse and provided first responder medical assistance until EMS arrived.

He just wouldn't listen

Officer Louis Hinds contacted Officer Lee Birge about an angler who'd caught a goliath grouper at the local fishing pier earlier that day. When several anglers told the man he could not keep the fish, he packed up his equipment and fish and quickly left the area. Witnesses provided Officer Hinds with a tag number registered to the subject's girlfriend. The girlfriend took Officer Birge to the subject. Officer Birge recovered the fish and issued the subject a notice to appear for possession of goliath grouper.

Quick actions save a life

While on water patrol, Officer Will Secure noticed a private yacht make an abrupt U-turn and come to a stop. Watching through binoculars, Officer Secure saw crew members pull a person onto the transom. Secure rushed to the yacht and found an unconscious man on the deck. The man had been wave jumping and had been knocked unconscious as he fell from his jet ski. Secure called dispatch, tied his patrol vessel to the yacht and checked the victim. Seeing that the victim was not breathing, Secure started rescue breathing. Officer Dave Burnsed responded to the emergency transmission and helped Officer Secure put the victim into Officer Burnsed's boat. While Officer Secure continued rescue breathing, Officer Burnsed headed for the boat ramp. En route, the victim regained consciousness.