

# 2016

## Boating Accidents Statistical Report



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Division of Law Enforcement

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## 2016 Boating Officer of the Year



Officer Jarrod Molnar

Officer Jarrod Molnar was selected as the Florida Boating Officer of the Year. He has worked with the FWC for five years and is assigned to Okaloosa County. In 2015, Officer Molnar responded to 10 calls for service due to swimmers in distress or missing. He rescued 27 people from the water due to currents or tidal conditions. In one incident, he observed a kayak overturn while out on water patrol. Jarrod made his way over to the elderly gentlemen who was unable to right his kayak after multiple attempts. Jarrod assisted him into his patrol vessel, then recovered the kayak and as many of his belongings as they could find. In another incident Jarrod responded to a man that was in distress after falling off a PWC. When Jarrod arrived, the large man had exhausted himself while attempting to get back on his PWC. Jarrod and another officer had to hold onto the man and support him for approximately 30 minutes until a Good Samaritan with a pontoon boat came to their aid. With the help of the officers and those on the pontoon boat, they were able to get the man up the boarding ladder and onto the pontoon boat. He was transported to the beach, uninjured.

As a field training officer, he has assisted in training new FWC officers in the area. Along with the needed skills and training, Jarrod provides in depth instruction on BUI investigations and proper report writing. One of Officer Molnar's greatest strengths is his continuing commitment to keeping Florida waters safe by enforcing BUI laws. He is a certified breath test operator and made 13 BUI arrests in 2015. He also cited a number of underage individuals for possession of alcohol.

He has a strong desire and passion for boating safety enforcement and education, primarily accomplishing this through contact with the public while on patrol. His success in boating enforcement is centered on his knowledge of Florida statutes relating to; boat registration, titling, livery laws, marine sanitation, navigation rules, vessel safety requirements, boating accidents, and derelict vessel investigations.

Officer Molnar was selected as the Regional Boating Officer of the Year by the Southern Region Association of Boating Law Administrator's. In September, Jarrod was selected as the National Boating Law Enforcement Officer of the Year.

## 2016 Boating Educator of the Year



Ernie Martin

Ernie Martin was selected as the 2016 Boating Educator of the Year. He has dedicated 29 years to teaching and coaching in Northwest Florida schools. One of his passions is to work in the community and encourage participation in traditional outdoor activities.

Coach Martin teaches the Outdoor Life class each semester at Crestview High School. Within this course, he includes a number of outdoor skills, conservation, and boating safety elements. Although a basic-boating safety classroom course may involve eight hours of classroom instruction, the format developed by Coach Martin is more extensive and involves the use of hands-on training tools. In addition to using NASBLA approved content, he demonstrates the use of many safety items, personal floatation devices, visual distress signals, and VHF marine and emergency communications devices. Teacher-owned boats are used to identify safety requirements and document vessel safety checks. At the end of the course, the final exam includes the NASBLA and Florida approved boater safety course. Resulting in successful students receiving the Florida Safe Boater ID Card.

As an honorary member of Fort Walton Sail and Power Squadron, Coach Martin includes squadron members as co-teachers and uses both United States Power Squadron (USPS) and Florida boating safety materials to provide the highest learning level possible for the students. In support of the creation of outdoor and boating safety knowledge, he invites guest lecturers from FWC, commercial boat operators, military personnel, and emergency responders to provide a balanced and well-rounded understanding of the boating, hunting, and fishing environments.

The safety oriented program developed by Coach Martin has successfully educated over 1500 students during the past 10 years. Ernie is one of a very few teachers in Northwest Florida who teach this type of class. It has been so successful in that over 99 percent of the students passed the test and received their Florida Safe Boater ID cards. These same students go on to enjoy recreational boating activities and demonstrate skills as responsible skippers. Because of his efforts, many students receive a thorough indoctrination in the proper way to safely operate a boat. For some of these students, they never would have had an opportunity to receive dedicated, hands-on boating safety instruction.

## INTRODUCTION

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), powered by science-based leadership, is committed to creating a sustainable and healthy future for Florida's fish, wildlife, water and habitat resources. The FWC serves Floridians and visitors alike in a variety of ways, most of which revolve around our mission of managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people. The Division of Law Enforcement is perhaps the most visible tool within the FWC's "tool belt" used to meet its goal of providing healthy resources for safe, satisfied customers.

## THE DIVISION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

### **Roles and Mission**

The FWC is the only state agency in Florida tasked with the management of the state's fish and wildlife resources. As a primary responsibility, the FWC's Division of Law Enforcement focuses on enforcing regulations aimed at protecting and sustaining these resources both for their long-term well-being and the benefit of Florida's residents and visitors, all the while blending in its unique and specialized public safety role. The Division's mission is clear: "Protecting Florida's natural resources and people through proactive and responsive law enforcement services."

### **Responsibilities**

The FWC Division of Law Enforcement (DLE) provides protection to those who enjoy Florida's natural resources, while also enforcing resource protection and boating safety laws. Officers patrol rural, wilderness, inshore and offshore areas, as well as areas where other law enforcement agencies do not routinely patrol. FWC officers have the authority to enforce all the laws of the state and are cross-deputized to enforce federal fisheries and wildlife laws.

In the course of carrying out their broad responsibilities, FWC officers seek every opportunity to educate and introduce Floridians and visitors to the wonders of Florida's fish, wildlife, and natural resources, as well as safe boat operation and safety equipment requirements.

The Division also provides general law enforcement services as part of Florida's statewide emergency response network. Because of their unique jurisdiction and specialized training and equipment, FWC is also charged with protecting the state's waterways and critical infrastructure during times of heightened security threat levels. As seasoned first responders, FWC officers are trained to move fast and efficiently.

Moving forward into the future, FWC will continue to pursue and apply advances in technology to improve response to both conservation and general law enforcement incidents. When duty calls, FWC will always be among the first to respond, providing aid as needed. Until then, FWC will continue to lead the way in natural resource protection, proactive boating safety law enforcement and education are what we do best.

### **Uniquely prepared**

On the water, in the woods and in the air, FWC law enforcement officers are uniquely situated and equipped to identify and respond to illegal activity and promote public safety, particularly in the maritime and wilderness areas.

### **Core Missions**

The FWC protects Florida's people and natural resources. The Division of Law Enforcement is an integral part of the agency and is vital in fulfilling the agency's responsibilities. These core missions reflect the unique capabilities, training and equipment our personnel use to achieve those responsibilities.

#### **Resource Protection and**

**Access:** State and federal fisheries and wildlife law enforcement. Threatened and endangered species protection. Captive and nonnative wildlife management. Habitat protection. Investigations. Education and outreach programs developing the next generation that cares.

#### **Environmental Protection:**

State and federal environmental law enforcement. Cultural and natural resources protection and preservation. State lands and water quality protection. Investigations. Education and outreach programs developing the next generation that cares.

#### **Boating and Waterways:**

Boating rules and regulation enforcement. Boating safety campaigns and education. Access to public waters. Waterway management and accurate signage. Boating accident investigations. Derelict vessel prevention and investigation. Vessel theft and title fraud investigation.

**Public Safety:** Provide a safe experience for residents and visitors engaged in outdoor activities. Interagency support and coordination. Specialized response units. Disaster response. Search and rescue. Intelligence and security. General and specialized law enforcement services. Critical incident investigations.

## Intervention equals prevention on the water

FWC officers help to ensure Floridians and visitors are safe when they are on the water. The FWC accomplishes this through proactive law enforcement, initiating boating safety and fisheries inspections, and identifying and minimizing potential navigation or environmental hazards in the waterways.

FWC's Boating and Waterways Section supports officer efforts by coordinating statewide boating safety efforts. Some examples of support are: education campaigns, ensuring waterway markers are accurate and maintained, permitting and marking speed-regulated areas, coordinating initiatives aimed at removing derelict vessels and improving public boating access.

With close to a million vessels, Florida leads the nation in the number of vessels registered in a state. As a negative consequence of high vessel numbers and our mild climate, Florida also has the highest number of boating fatalities in the nation annually. The vast size of our inland, coastal and offshore patrol areas combined with a significant population of avid and diverse boaters, presents a unique and daunting challenge for FWC and our local and federal maritime enforcement partners.

## Boating education is critical

The 2016 Boating Accidents Statistical Report indicates there were 714 reportable boating accidents and 67 boating related fatalities in the calendar year. This total includes seven missing persons who at the end of 2016 have not been located or accounted for and their circumstances suggest that death or serious injury has occurred. Many of the deaths were due to victims falling overboard and drowning. A large number of the deaths could have been prevented if the victims had worn life jackets. FWC continues to reduce the number of boating-related fatalities through education about the importance of wearing life jackets while boating.

Florida's current boating safety education law only applies to boaters born on or after January 1, 1988 operating a motorized vessel of 10 horsepower or greater. The face-to-face contacts by FWC officers and our partner agencies are a critical part of our outreach efforts and education to the boating public. These statistics show us that the boat operator most likely to be involved in a boating accident is a middle-age or older male who has boating experience yet has never learned the most important safety considerations by having taken a boating safety course. When officers observe boating violations or perform fresh and saltwater resource enforcement activities, they conduct boating safety inspections aimed at both identifying and preventing violations or accidents. FWC officers make boating safer and ultimately save lives.

## Safe boating is a choice

Florida is the leader in promoting boating accident prevention. The FWC, in association with the National Safe Boating Council, Bombardier Recreational Products Inc., West Marine, and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), has launched a statewide boating safety campaign as part of a national initiative. The "Wear It Florida" campaign encourages boaters to wear life jackets anytime they are on the water and educates boaters about the ease and convenience of inflatable life jackets. The campaign is designed to reach the public through a variety of methods including media events, exhibits, personal contacts, social media, radio and televised public service announcements.

### --- Division of Law Enforcement Values ---

#### **Integrity**

We value candor, honesty and the highest standards of ethical behavior and are committed to upholding our positions of public trust.

#### **Professionalism**

We value the skillful performance which demonstrates a clear sense of commitment and direction in an environment that encourages teamwork and innovation.

#### **Dedication**

We value the motivation and dedication with which our members serve the visitors and residents of Florida.

#### **Adaptability**

We value our unique capability to adapt and respond appropriately to diverse circumstances in all environments.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

The 2016 Boating Accidents Statistical Report is compiled by the Boating and Waterways Section of the FWC's Division of Law Enforcement. Most of the data contained in this report is gathered from boating accident investigative reports submitted by FWC officers and our marine law enforcement partners.

At the end of each calendar year, boating accident data is compiled and assembled into Florida's annual report. The FWC's Boating and Waterways Section analyzes this information and uses it to formulate proactive plans aimed at reducing the number of boating accidents and their related injuries, fatalities and property damage. This information is also reported to the U.S. Coast Guard's Boating Safety Division in Washington, D.C., to be included in the national database consisting of data from all U.S. states and territories.

The statistics reflect data from "reportable boating accidents" that occurred in Florida. Boating accidents must meet at least one of the five criteria below to be classified as reportable:

- A person dies.
- A person disappears under circumstances that indicate possible death or injury.
- A person receives an injury requiring medical treatment beyond immediate first aid.
- There is at least \$2,000 aggregate property damage to the vessel(s) or other property.
- There is a total loss of a vessel.

The number of vessels registered in Florida increased slightly in 2016. With 931,450 registered vessels, Florida leads the nation in registered vessels. Additionally, it is estimated that up to one million non-registered vessels actively use Florida's waters, and this segment of the boating population appears to still be growing. Our waterways show the strains of congestion as each year brings more residents and visitors together to utilize our abundant water resources and enjoy Florida's boating lifestyle.



## 2016 SUMMARY

### BOATING ACCIDENT REVIEW

- Florida leads the nation with a total number of 931,450 **registered vessels** in 2016.
- There were a total of 714 reportable boating accidents in 2016.

### REPORTABLE BOATING ACCIDENT

- Collision with vessel was the leading type of accident with a total of 181 (25%).
- Towed watersport activities were involved in 13 accidents, resulting in 13 injuries.
- Paddlecraft (canoes, kayaks, rowboats, paddleboards) were involved in 10 accidents resulting in nine fatalities and three injuries.
- July was the month with the highest number of accidents (96).
- Monroe County reported the **highest number of accidents and injuries** (105 total accidents with three fatalities and 52 injuries).

### REPORTABLE BOATING FATALITIES

- **56 fatal accidents** for 2016 resulting in **67 fatalities**.
- **29%** of the fatal accidents were **falls overboard** (16 accidents). Boaters falling overboard remains the main cause of boating fatalities.
- **The leading cause of death** in fatal boating accidents was **drowning** with 40 fatalities (60%).
- **July** was the **deadliest month** in 2016 with 8 fatalities.
- **Alcohol or drug-use** is reported to have played a role in 24% boating fatalities.
- 95% (58) of the victims of fatal boating accidents were males.
- 65% (39) of the 60 operators involved in fatal accidents were age 36 or older.
- 78% (47) of all vessels involved in fatal accidents in 2016 were 21 feet in length or less.

### REPORTABLE BOATING INJURIES

- There were **714 accidents resulting in 421 injuries**. The rate of injury was 45 injuries per 100,000 registered vessels.

### REPORTABLE PERSONAL WATERCRAFT ACCIDENTS

- Personal watercraft (PWC) accounted for 13% of all registered vessels in Florida.
- PWC were involved in 26% (253) of reportable boating accidents.
- Rented PWC represented 41% (89) of PWC involved in accidents
- **42%** of PWC accidents involved a **collision with another vessel**.
- 45% of PWC accidents occurred in Miami-Dade (32), Monroe (20), and Pinellas (18) counties.
- 11 fatalities resulted from the 158 PWC accidents.

### BOATING EDUCATION STATISTICS

- FWC issued 47,307 Boating Safety Education ID Cards in 2016.
- 63% of the cards were issued to persons born on or after January 1, 1988.
- Of the 47,307 cards issued, 34,654 were issued to males, 12,606 were issued to females. An additional 1,132 cards were printed for lost, damaged and information changes.
- **70%** of the **operators** involved in fatal accidents had **no formal boater education**.

Boating accident statistics for 2016 were compiled on 3/27/2016. Reports received after that date are not included in the following data. In 2016, there were seven missing persons reported. There has not been any updated information as to their status. The seven missing persons have been included in the fatality data.