

Western Perdido WMP Steering Committee

Monday, May 16, 2022



Ryan Bennett, ALEA; Mike Cleveland; Mary Kate Brown; Lani Camron; Ashley Campbell; Gerry McManus; Lucy Smith; Tom Schmitz; Christian Miller; Wade Burcham

- Ryan Bennett, District Commander for the State's marine police, talked to the group about marine laws/enforcement. He covers an eight-county area which includes both Mobile and Baldwin counties.
- In 2015 the State decided to consolidate law enforcement agencies to reduce duplication of services and streamline processes. Marine police were moved under the State Troopers and out of ADCNR.
- There is a total of 9,000 LEOs in the State of AL. There are only 51 police officers on the water Statewide.
- The primary mission of marine police is to ensure public safety on the waters.
- Over 275,000 pleasure vessels registered in the State. 120,000 registered in Mobile and Baldwin counties.
- There are only 12 officers on the water to cover the eight-county area that includes Mobile and Baldwin counties, Jurisdiction stops at 3-mile line offshore and at the State line.
- There is an issue that comes up in WMPs related to shoreline protection. Many WMPs recommend wake/idle zones to protect shorelines and avoid the cost of hardened shoreline infrastructure and the impact of boat wakes on shorelines.
- ALEA has no authority to regulate traffic moving through the intercoastal waterway.
- Idle speed zones are a primary method for reducing boat speed that marine police have under their purview. Idle zones are placed based on potential hazards to public safety.
- The State is currently under a one-year moratorium and will not be issuing any new idle speed zones.
- The State is going through a process of evaluating idle speed zones throughout the State and revising the system to request idle speed zones. Once this process is established all current idle zones will have to be reapplied for.
- Lots of requests for idle speed zones around the State. ALEA works hard to balance uses of the waterways. Lots of people want them in front of their property. Many others do not want them due to their desire to move at a quicker pace.
- You are liable for any damage caused by your wake, both criminally and civilly
- Officers generally must witness an offense to make an arrest
- Marine Police from Orange Beach generally patrol the Perdido Bay/River area 2-3 times per week.

- “Proximity zone” legislation was working through the State legislature that would have mandated idle speed within a certain distance from shoreline or infrastructure. Mobile and Baldwin counties opposed this, and the legislation ultimately failed.
- Law currently on the books requires all boats to have a trash receptacle on board.
- \$1 million/year would fund about three additional marine police officers and the boats and equipment necessary to perform their job.
- Consensus of the Steering Committee:
  - Support funding for additional resources for enforcement
  - Leverage opportunities for educational outreach. ALEA has media-related resources but need assistance with science-based content
  - Explore possibility of educational signage along waterfronts
  - Assist ALEA in citizens advisory group in determining new policy for establishing idle speed zones