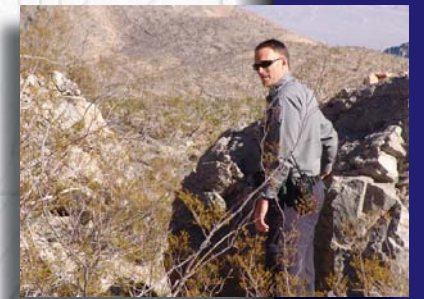


# NEVADA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE

## Division of Law Enforcement 2010 Annual Report



# Contents

A Message From the Chief.....	3
The Division of Law Enforcement – An Overview.....	4-5
A Day in the Life of a Game Warden.....	6 - 7
Boating Enforcement.....	8 - 9
Boating Education.....	10 - 11
Wildlife Law Enforcement - A Historic Mission.....	12 - 13
By the Numbers.....	14 - 15

## Administration

Kenneth E. Mayer, Acting Director  
Richard L. Haskins, II Deputy Director  
Patrick O. Cates, Deputy Director

## Division Staff

Chief Rob Buonamici  
Capt. David Pffifner  
Capt. Cameron Waithman  
Capt. Joe Maslach  
Edwin Lyngar, Education/P.I.O.  
Nick Duhe, Education/P.I.O.  
Joanne Trendler, AAIII  
Laura Feliz, AAII  
Brooke Van Haitsma, AAI



## Game Warden Supervisors

Lt. Paul Dankowski, Western Region  
Lt. Don Klebenow, Eastern Region  
Lt. Mike Maynard, Southern Region

# Our Mission

The mission of the Division of Law Enforcement of the Nevada Department of Wildlife is to protect and manage the wildlife resources and provide for public safety and protection of life and property of residents and visitors of the State of Nevada through enforcement of wildlife and boating safety laws.

We are highly trained, dedicated to service and education, technologically advanced and respond rapidly to change. We strive every day to exceed expectations as we accomplish our mission through enabling qualified, motivated, committed, and professional game wardens to patrol the mountains, deserts and waterways of Nevada, consistently earning the public's trust as we protect and manage their wildlife resources and enforce the boating safety laws.

# A Message From the Chief



Last year I talked about tough times in this space in the previous annual report. Since that time, things have steadily deteriorated in the state's finances and in the Nevada economy overall. However, in these trying economic times, Nevada's game wardens are committed

to doing our absolute best to meet public expectations with existing resources. We know that many Nevadans are having a hard time making ends meet, but we also see evidence of our fellow citizens doing everything they can to make our state a better place to live, and we are committed to doing the same. This year, we are continuing to build on our core values of "Partnerships, Pride & Performance," and our performance indicators are better than ever in boating and wildlife protection.

This year, we had two boating fatalities on Nevada's waters, although a tragic loss of lives it is one of the smallest numbers of fatal accidents on record in a decade. We were striving for a zero fatality year—an accomplishment we have not seen in 18 years—but we had unexpected boating tragedies late in the year. Even though we didn't reach our goal of "absolute zero" boating deaths, we are encouraged by how much safer Nevada waters are becoming.

As part of our effort to improve boating safety, we also educated more boaters than any other previous year—nearly fifteen hundred. Our efforts to reach out to boaters and teach them to be safer are clearly paying dividends as more people take the Boat Nevada safety class, put these practices into action and help to make their recreational experience a safe one.

Although our boating program has shown great resilience in the face of declining budgets, we take nothing for granted. Due to funding constraints, we stand to lose two more game warden positions along with equipment and training—resources heavily geared toward boating safety. With the success we've had in protecting lives, we think this is no time to take away from our boating safety mission; however, we know that we can't change reality. We are committed, no matter the outcome of this year's budget cycle,

to do all we can to keep fatal accidents low and boaters educated. Our commitment to you is that any funding cuts will be done in a manner that has the absolute minimum impact to the people of this state and its visitors.

On the wildlife side, we are now in our third year of having a dedicated wildlife crimes investigator, and this program is generating higher-level police work than at any time in our history, driving wildlife protection to new heights. Much of the investigative work is secretive by its very nature, so we don't talk about specific cases, but the program has grown beyond our early expectations. Nevada's wildlife is not getting shorted in tough times, and we are committed to this program in the long term.

Sportsmen and the public at large care about wildlife. Environmental issues, wildlife diversity, and protection of wildlife are all concerns for society at large, not just game wardens and sportsmen. Everywhere we look in the community, we see tremendous support for the value that game wardens provide to society.

I hope to be writing about better financial news in this space next year. We believe Nevada could benefit from more game wardens, more wildlife protection and boating safety. But even as we struggle against these tides, we know that we can count on you, our generous and concerned supporters, to value the work that game wardens do on a daily basis. Whatever may be said about the politics of the moment, the future of wildlife and boating is very bright.



*Thank you for your support,*

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert W. Buonamici".

*Robert W. Buonamici*  
*Chief Game Warden*

# The Division of Law Enforcement - An Overview



## The Division of Law Enforcement

The Division of Law Enforcement has a multifaceted mission that stretches across the entire state. The job—from the division’s own mission statement—is simple: “to protect and manage the wildlife resources and provide for public safety and protection of life and property of residents and visitors of the State of Nevada through enforcement of wildlife and boating safety laws.” But these few words, boiled down, capture a lot of effort by our committed and professional game warden force.

Many people don’t realize the importance that enforcement plays in the management of Nevada’s wildlife resources. One could even call enforcement a central component to managing every species in Nevada from mule deer to leopard lizards. The first office of state game warden was appointed by the governor in 1917, who appointed deputy game wardens that were assigned to counties. In 1947, nine state game wardens were appointed by the Commission.

Today, the division is staffed by more than 50 professionals, including game wardens, administrative personnel, educators, dispatchers, communications personnel and others. The mission itself has grown, and the training, qualifications and expectations of the division are greater than ever.

The mission for which game wardens

are known best is protecting wildlife, and this ethic remains central to what game wardens are all about. “We manage wildlife by managing people,” said Rob Buonamici, Chief Game Warden. “Without enforcement of seasons, bag limits, tags and other regulations, it would be very difficult to manage wildlife, and we take this responsibility seriously and are diligent in the protection of resources.”

This is an essential part of wildlife management that needs to be done, and the good news is that Nevadans care more for wildlife and the environment now than at any other time in history. The public expectation reflects a passion—even love—for Nevada’s natural resources. An ever-larger number of citizens have become cheerleaders for what the division does. In many ways the American public is rediscovering the game warden, and this profession is a natural addition to the public’s growing concern for the natural world.

Boating safety is the division’s other primary function, added in the early seventies. The boating program has grown in importance, serving a complex boating constituency that use boats to fish, hunt, in tow sports, to cruise and just for fun. In the early 2000s, the division added a full time education component, and the technology of boats, safety equipment and the very mission continues to grow in sophistication and importance.

At a time of complex and growing missions, the division faces unprecedented challenges in declining revenue from a shrinking sporting public, fewer boat registrations, and depleted general fund revenues. Also, the pace of everyday life has doubled, technology has exploded and the speed of change itself is accelerating. Despite future challenges, the division’s duty to wildlife resources and boating safety is no less important than at any other time.

“We continuously evaluate everything we do. With the public expectation that game wardens should catch poachers in mind, we recently created a major wildlife crimes program to target those egregious poaching cases,” said Buonamici. “No matter what the future holds, we are going to continue to apprehend poachers, protect boaters and provide public safety. We don’t know how to do any less.”

Aside from the main mission, there are many individual but interrelated programs administered by the division that make up the whole. These programs have a number of goals, some, for example reach out to the sporting public, educate boaters, manage Nevada guides and even help to better deter wildlife crime. These programs include:

## **Wildlife Law Enforcement**

Stopping poachers and other wildlife criminals is the central, historical mission of the Division of Law Enforcement. Every game warden has a role in enforcing fishing and hunting licenses, checking big game tags and ensuring sportsmen in the field know and follow the guidelines put in place to protect Nevada's sporting legacy. This critical program defines the division.

## **Major Wildlife Crimes**

Just as with any major metro police department, the division has a separate investigator corps that targets the most egregious and damaging poachers and wildlife criminals. A very new program, this initiative has already started to change the way the division targets these "career poachers." Results will be slow because big-time poachers seem to put more thought into their crime than bank robbers, and investigations like these require tremendous intelligence gathering prior to initiating an action plan to apprehend these poachers.

## **Operation Game Thief**

OGT was established in 1981 to provide sportsmen a mechanism for reporting wildlife crime— anonymously and with a system of rewards. Most often, the sporting public is the most concerned group when it comes to protecting wildlife, and OGT gives them a way to get involved. Many poaching cases are only discovered—and ultimately solved—because of the deep concern of the sporting public.

## **Boating Enforcement**

The Division of Law Enforcement is the primary entity enforcing Nevada's boating laws.

Game wardens patrol Nevada's many lakes and reservoirs, including Lakes Mead, Mohave, Tahoe, Topaz, Southfork and Lahontan, to name a few. Game wardens investigate an average of just over five fatal boat accidents a year and more than 100 non-fatal injury accidents.

## **Boating Education**

Along with law enforcement, boating education is a key component to keeping Nevada waters safe. The program as it exists today was implemented with new state laws that took effect on January 1, 2003 that require education for some boaters. This program in its current iteration has grown from less than 200 participants a year to more than 1,400 annually, including classroom and internet courses and a robust public relations, outreach, and education program.

## **Guide Program**

The centralized guide program started in 2004, and it aims to standardize guide licensing (formerly handled regionally) across the state. The program also adds resources to better police illegal guide operations to protect the sporting public and wildlife.

## **Training**

Game Wardens are full, Category 1 state peace officers certified by the Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST). They train to protect the public, themselves and other officers at large through counter assault, firearms, taser and other critical law enforcement training. The nature of law enforcement itself continues to evolve with ever-increasing advances in the technology, changing case law and the division training program keeps up on these advances, keeping game wardens on the very leading edge of their profession.



# Wildlife Law Enforcement - A Historic Mission



When the average citizen or sportsman thinks about game wardens, the mission they most often cite is that of wildlife protection. In fact no single aspect of the job more embodies game wardens than protecting Nevada's big game.

Although the history of game wardens is tied very closely with the importance of protecting wildlife, the duties of a game warden



have grown. Since the early days of wildlife protection, a game warden's job has included public safety, boating enforcement, search and rescue and every manner of police work imaginable, all taking place in Nevada's far flung places.

Even with all these newer duties, wildlife protection itself has changed in

complexity over the past few decades. The number of hunting seasons and big game hunts has more than tripled, and the number of people living in Nevada—even accounting for a recent slowdown in growth—has exploded over the last twenty years. At the same time, the number of game wardens dedicated to wildlife protection has grown very modestly, from 15 to 22 full time equivalent game wardens dedicated to wildlife patrol over the span of about twenty-five years.

"We do a great job with the resources we have," said Rob Buonamici, Chief Game Warden at NDOW. "To have twenty-two people patrolling a land mass that dwarfs many countries is an amazing feat."

To get a sense of the size and scope of the job, just to patrol the Ruby Mountains in area 10 would take a game warden at least three or four





long, hard days to get around the entire area just once. And that's one mountain range out of more than one hundred. Nevada is the most mountainous states of the lower 48. On top of the geographic reality, there has been an increase in various special hunts, hunt areas, recreational shooting and an explosive population growth. In addition, an animal poached and left to rot will be destroyed by coyotes and other predators in only a day or two, creating a small window to even locate a crime scene. The scope of the job of protecting Nevada's wildlife, or even detecting poached animals is an overwhelming responsibility.

---

*“We do a great job with the resources we have,” said Rob Buonamici, Chief Game Warden at NDOW. “To have the equivalent of twenty-two people patrolling a land mass that dwarfs many countries is an amazing feat.”*

---

The number of hunters in Nevada is one statistic that remains fairly flat. It's true that the public “at large” has a greater respect for the

outdoors than ever. Yes, more people care about the environment and wildlife, but hunters still pay most of the tab for protection of all wildlife.

“People in Nevada recreate with guns, often in the middle of nowhere. They may not even be sportsmen, but they might be killing wildlife, and there are so many vast areas of Nevada, that a game warden isn't necessarily nearby,” said Buonamici. “We don't have a game warden in Lovelock, Mesquite, Wendover, Alamo, Hawthorne and Wells different places where people recreate. We do a tremendous amount with the resources we have, but living in Las Vegas or Reno, it's easy to forget just what a massive state we live in.”

The very first step in law enforcement is education; the second is deterrent. The more people see game wardens, the less likely that “crimes of opportunity” are going to happen. When you have one game warden in ten thousand square miles and multiple seasons, the chances of a sportsman being contacted and of detecting a crime in an area is low. When people don't see a game warden for weeks, months and even years, the law enforcement deterrent becomes less effective.

## Game Wardens Through The Years

**1986**

15 game wardens with primary responsibility for wildlife patrol: 276 big game hunts, Nevada population 993,000

**2010**

22 Game Wardens with primary responsibility for wildlife patrol, 578 big game hunts, Nevada population 2.6 million



# Boating Enforcement



This year, the Division of Law Enforcement reported two fatal boat accidents to the U.S. Coast Guard, a dramatic drop from previous years and one of the smallest numbers in over a decade.

The division goal every year is zero fatal accidents. Even one person killed while recreating on Nevada's picturesque and diverse waterways is too much, but significant drops in average numbers is cause to examine what went right.

Numbers can be fickle, so game wardens who patrol Nevada waterways want to take nothing for granted. However, it seems that this year, the education (see following article) and enforcement programs combined to raise education and safety to the forefront of boaters minds. In addition, division game wardens have become the premier law enforcement agency for boating with a long history of cutting edge training and an ingrained professionalism that creates an ethic of safety on Nevada waters.

"We asked our game wardens to really look for people who were required to

have education and let them know about it," said David Pfiffner, NDOW's Boating Law Administrator. "Combined with our consistent and professional workforce, we are finally seeing years of effort really pay off."

A professional, capable law enforcement work force is the most important factor in protecting boaters and keeping chaos off the waterways. Particularly in areas where drinking and large groups of boaters have historically congregated, it's critical to have a visible law enforcement presence. The lower numbers of fatal accidents seem to show that the training of officers



combined with strategic, thoughtful enforcement in problem areas is really paying off.

The seasonal game warden program has also entered its third season. The division created this program to put two seasonal game wardens on Lake Tahoe in the busy summer months. As this program has reached a point of maturity, boaters become use to seeing more law enforcement presence in places they had not before, again contributing to an atmosphere that fosters safer boating.

Though pleased with the progress, leaders in the division worry about losing funding. Revenue declines appear to be most significant in the boating program. Recent budgets indicate rough water on the horizon. With the possible loss of a few positions, and the elimination of training for a few cycles, could hamper efforts to keep the safety and enforcement pressure at a level it needs to be to keep boaters safe.

“We’ve done a tremendous amount to create a professional program that addresses the boating communities’ needs, we want to do whatever we can to keep our public safe.”



have made this year’s statistics seem better than other years, but the division cannot and will not take these numbers for granted. Whatever the factors behind success, the division will evaluate and try to capitalize on what was learned this year and duplicate it in years to come.

---

*A professional, capable law enforcement work force is the most important factor in protecting boaters and keeping chaos off the waterways.*

---

There are challenges to the boating enforcement program going forward, but the outlook for the future is bright.

“I understand the value of boating enforcement efforts,” said Rob Buonamici, Chief Game Warden. “And I also realize it will be a challenge to keep boaters safe without a commitment to budgets, training and ultimately service our constituents’ ever changing needs.”

Likewise, there are many factors that could

## Nevada's Boating Law Administrator



Capt. David Piffner has been with the Nevada Department of Wildlife for 22 years. Capt. Piffner served with the Nevada Department of Wildlife patrolling on lakes Mead and Mohave as well as serving as a supervisor for the southern region.



# Boating Education



“Education is the necessary precursor to effective law enforcement,” says Rob Buonamici, the Chief Game Warden. His statements on education capture the essence of this past year for the boating education program in the Division of Law Enforcement.

This year, NDOW educated nearly 1,500 boaters from all walks of life. The division mostly focuses on young boaters, who by law must take a boating education course if they were born on or after January 1, 1983 to operate a boat on any of Nevada’s interstate waterways (Tahoe, Topaz, Mead and Mohave mostly). The mandatory requirement affects people under the age of 28 (approximately), and because the



1983 date is set, the age of the average educated boater affected by the requirement will continue to grow with time, so that more and more people will become safe boaters.

An unexpected side effect of the mandatory boating education program is that more people are voluntarily taking the course. People who are not required to have boating education include those born before 1983 and many boaters from out of state. However, this year, figures show a great deal of participants from those very groups, including border regions of California as well as older boaters. Some anecdotal information shows that many older boaters take the course with their children who are required to have it, and boaters from California feel a need to meet the Nevada laws because they boat frequently in the state.

But what’s the point of all this boating education? The data is clear. This year Nevada had one of the lowest numbers of fatal boating accidents in a decade (see previous article.)

---

*Anyone born on or after  
January 1, 1983 must take  
and pass an approved  
boating safety course in  
order to operate a boat on  
any of Nevada’s interstate  
waterways.*

---

Educators in the division are hesitant to attribute this success to any one factor, education or enforcement; however the combination of education and enforcement create an environment of safety. Boaters know the rules, and they want to be safe, while on the flip side unsafe boaters who break the rules—well that’s when law enforcement comes into play. Game wardens often refer to enforcement as a slightly more insistent form of education. “Education isn’t effective without enforcement,” said David Pfiffner, Nevada’s boating law administrator. “But likewise it’s really tough to write tickets to people who didn’t know or

understand their duties as a boater. So we need a really robust program on both ends.”

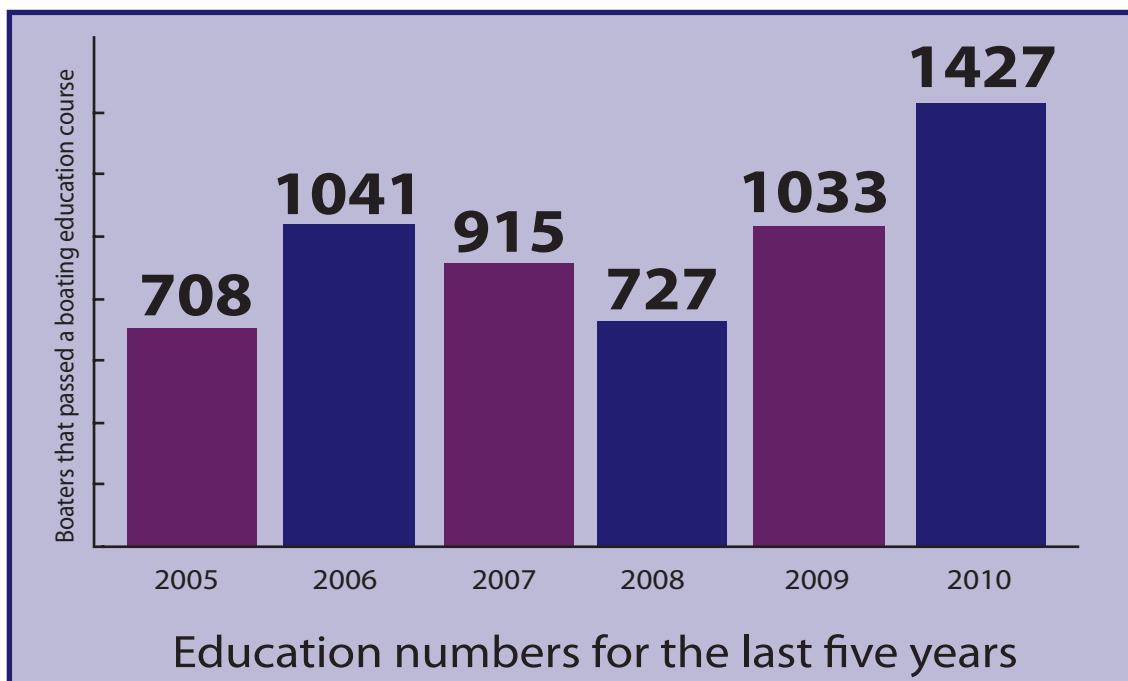
Whatever the reasons for the improving boating safety statistics statewide, the division intends to continue to bring down the number of people hurt on the water. The biggest challenge in the next year is to continue the education and outreach programs that have proven so successful. This year’s program is a great example of what can be done.



This past year, the division used \$25,000 worth of education funds to partner with private industry and advertising agencies to create a boating safety and outreach program for the Southern Region of Nevada. Division funds were matched by radio stations to grow the amount of airtime the division could use for outreach. Private boat rental companies and various marinas on Lakes Mead and Mohave matched the funds with prizes to create an incentive—and publicity—for boating education. Also as part of the promotion, the division and several partners purchased advertising and outreach space at the AAA ball park in Las Vegas, home of the Las Vegas 51s baseball team.

This was the biggest outreach program ever conducted for boating safety and education in Nevada. The results seem to speak for themselves. This year the division issued almost 20% more boating education certificates than at any other time in the program’s history.

With adequate continuing funding, division support and enforcement behind it, the boating education and outreach program should be able to continue to move the needle on injuries and accidents, educating new boaters to be safe, reminding experienced boaters of their responsibilities and bringing a culture of safety to Nevada’s far-flung waterways.



# A Day in the Life of a Game Warden . . .



Saturday morning and the alarm clock sounds at 5 a.m., time for another day of patrol for the game warden. A few hours of sleep will have to suffice because there's work to do. The game warden wolfs down breakfast, brews a pot of coffee and packs a cooler with food and water—he may not return until evening or even the next day. He knows from experience that this day will be like no other. There hasn't been a routine day in 15 years. The game warden dons body armor, uniform, badge and duty belt, does a quick check of his sidearm, spark tests his Taser and checks the rest of the equipment for proper function. He gives a last check to his slumbering children and a kiss on the cheek for his sleeping spouse, and then it's out the front door.

The air is crisp, fall has come early, and he glances at a fresh blanket of snow on the mountain tops. He starts his patrol truck, and while it warms up, he does a quick check of his patrol rifle and shotgun and the quick release lock. The game warden contacts the dispatch center.

“Reno, dispatch 1440 on Virginia repeater, 10-41, 10-8, unit 015.” Checked in, he heads to the mountains.

With dawn coming, his headlights show fresh tire tracks in the dirt leading to a remote canyon. The game warden heads up the road keeping a keen eye ahead and the window down listening for gun shots. A camp comes into view

with two parked pick-up trucks. A harvested deer hangs in a tree. As the camp sleeps, the warden takes a look at the animal, a pool of blood on the ground below the hanging deer. Something isn't right. After freezing nighttime temperatures almost 12 hours have passed since legal shooting hours the previous day. The warden checks the nearest truck and the hood still retains some heat. Peering through the window, he sees a spotlight on the front seat and a rifle on the passenger side floorboard.

The game warden contacts dispatch and advises his location and that he's investigating a possible poached deer.

“State game warden, anyone in camp?”

The camp comes awake and two men emerge from a tent bleary eyed and nervous. They swear the deer was killed the prior afternoon, but the game warden knows it's a lie. The two men are checked for weapons as their identification information is radioed to dispatch. He investigates the carcass, using field forensic work to identify the time of death. It was killed within the last four hours. He seizes the evidence and the poachers are arrested. The game warden heads to town to book the poacher into jail.

After clearing the jail, he makes a stop at the office to book the evidence. He heads to the river to check fishermen, eating a sandwich for lunch as he drives. After checking several who have licenses in hand, he provides tips on good fishing spots. He heads next to a local pond to investigate reports of people taking over-limits of fish.





His cell phone rings and one of the game warden investigators requests his help during the next week for a covert operation involving a suspected trophy poaching ring. He will be there to help, always when needed, though he knows he will be away from his family for at least a week.

On the way to the pond, the dispatch center advises him of a problem bear reported in a neighborhood off Mount Rose Highway, so he diverts to the scene. When he arrives, he says a quick good afternoon to the local deputy while an enormous bear rummages through a garbage can in a driveway.

He retrieves his dart gun, mixes the tranquilizer drugs and sneaks towards the bear. The dart flies true, and twenty minutes later, he and the deputy load the hobbled, slumbering bear into the back of his patrol truck. The warden heads to a trap he had previously set for the bear and loads him into the trailer. After towing the trailer to a safe location, it's "10-8" and back on patrol.

Monitoring his radio scanner the game warden hears a trooper requesting back-up on a vehicle stop near his location.

"Reno dispatch 10-20 is I80 and Wells assisting NHP on a vehicle stop." On scene the game warden covers the trooper as the trooper removes the combative subject. Other troopers arrive to assist and the game warden clears the scene. He heads up Peavine Mountain to see who is out hunting.

While observing hunters through his spotting scope, he pulls out his laptop to type his criminal complaint from the morning poaching arrest. Time is

precious and he takes any opportunity to get a jump on paperwork. Less time with paperwork means more time to protect the wildlife resources and provide public safety.

"1440 Reno Dispatch on Virginia repeater."

"1440," he responds.

"Reported piranha in a fish tank at a local restaurant," the radio crackles, and he heads down the mountain to town.

Arriving at the restaurant the game warden sees Red-Bellied Pacu on display in a fish tank. He advises the owner that the fish are a relative of the prohibited Piranha but not a prohibited species. He thanks the owner for his cooperation and exits the restaurant. He takes another trip to the office on the way home, backs his patrol truck up to his patrol boat, so that he will be ready for early morning fishermen and boating safety checks the following morning. With weary eyelids, it's time to make the drive home.

"Reno 1440, 10-7 ... 10-42, good night," he says into his radio. Looking at his watch, it's 11 p.m.

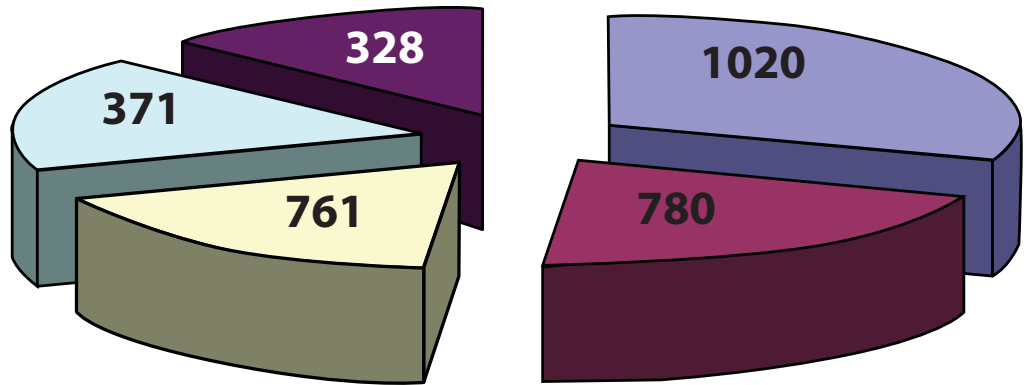
The game warden enters his darkened home quietly, to avoid waking his family. His spouse has left a warm meal in the oven, and he makes short work of it before showering and crawling into bed. After a few hours of sleep, it will be back on patrol for another day in the life of a game warden.



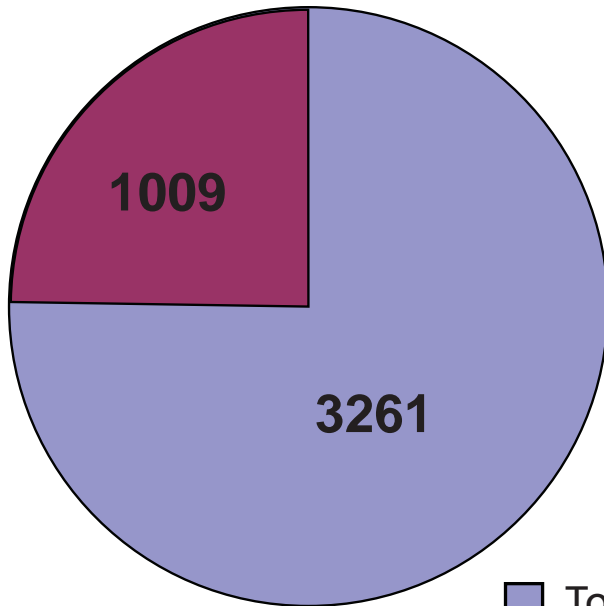
# By The Numbers

## Top 5 Boating Violations

- PFD
- Fire Extinguisher
- Excess Speed/Flat Wake
- Reckless Operation
- Registration



**Total Boating Violations = 4270**

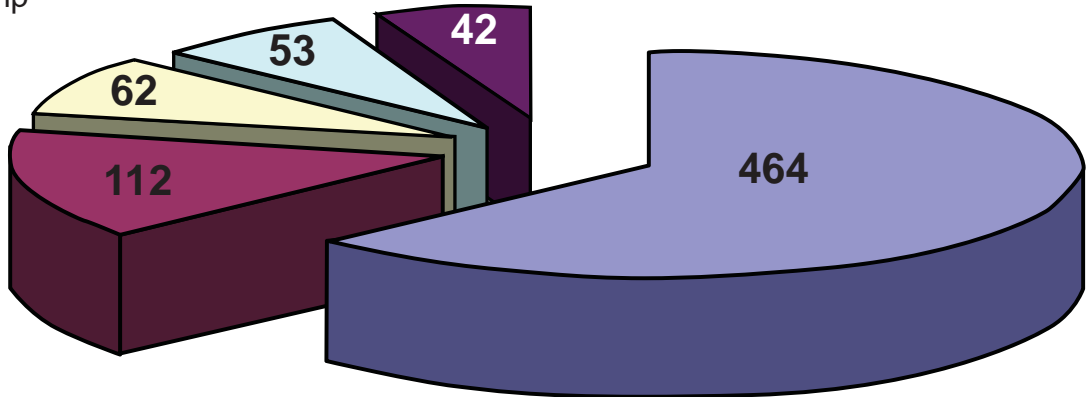


- Total Warnings
- Total Citations

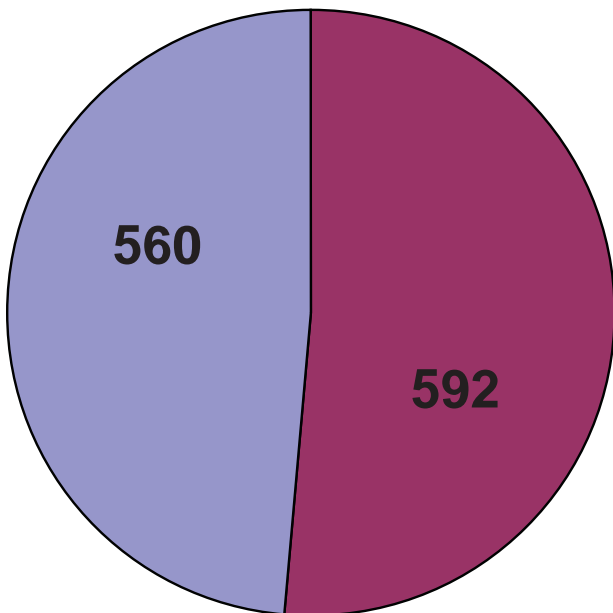


# Top 5 Wildlife Violations

- No fishing license
- No 2nd pole stamp
- No trout stamp
- Fishing prohibited method
- Fishing closed waters



## Total Wildlife Violations = 1152

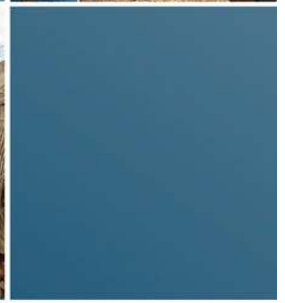
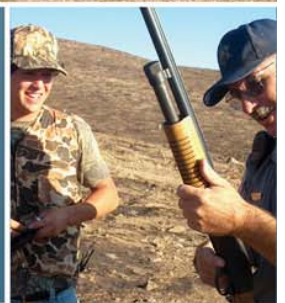
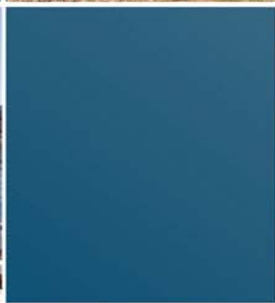


- Total Warnings
- Total Citations



# Division of Law Enforcement

Protecting Nevada's  
Wildlife and Boating Public



[www.ndow.org](http://www.ndow.org)