

Moving Her Agency's Capabilities Forward

FWC's Top Cop Is Diligent, Determined & Devoted

By Captain Kevin Vislocky, FWC Aviation Section

A female commander, Colonel Julie Jones, manages the largest law enforcement agency in Florida. The state has 53,927 sq. miles of land with 5,983 sq. miles of water including 10,550 miles of rivers, streams and creeks, as well as 5,500 lakes greater than 10 acres. It is the mission of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to enforce rules to protect fish and wildlife, keep waterways safe for millions of boaters and cooperate with other law enforcement agencies providing homeland security and search and rescue.

Colonel Jones moved to Florida with her family in 1968. Growing up in Broward County, she saw the State of Florida change dramatically into what it is today. After graduating from Florida Atlantic University with a master's degree in ecology, she joined the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission as a biologist working on the Kissimmee River Project. The law enforcement division recruited her in 1983, and she worked her way through four of the five geographical regions and achieved the rank of captain before being promoted to regional director in 1997.

As regional director, Jones worked directly for the executive director's office and was charged with oversight of the various divisions within the region, as well as serving as a legislative liaison and agency advocate. During her tenure as regional director, she maintained her law enforcement standards and attended all of the training offered to law enforcement officers.

On July 1, 1999, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission merged with the Florida Marine Fisheries Commission to become the FWC. In August 2002, Jones became the director of the law enforcement division within the commission. As director, she is responsible for a division that includes 902 employees, 723 of whom are sworn law enforcement officers, and has a budget of approximately \$78 million recurring and a budget appropriation of \$98 million for fiscal year 2007, making it the largest state resource enforcement agency in the nation.

As a law enforcement officer progressing through the ranks, Jones has recognized the importance and value of airborne law enforcement as a "force multiplier." The FWC operates an aviation section consisting of 14 aircraft and 12 pilots. The aircraft fleet is currently composed of two Bell 206BIII JetRanger helicopters, two Bell 206L4 LongRanger helicopters, three Bell OH-58 helicopters, four Cessna 182 airplanes, one Cessna 172 airplane and two Partenavia P-68 twin-engine airplanes.

"If an agency that has to go through a budget reduction, the first inclination is to look at aviation as a luxury item, but it's not," Jones said. "If you use aviation wisely, you can save money by using your officers in a more efficient manner."

In addition to law enforcement missions, the agency is frequently called upon for SAR missions to locate lost or abducted children and Alzheimer's patients, as well as missing hunters and boaters. FWC law enforcement officers are among the first on the scene to help with natural disasters because of their specialized equipment to access remote, hard-to-reach locations.

Colonel Jones recognized the need not only to maintain an aviation section through tedious legislative budget appropriation discussions, but to upgrade the aircraft fleet. She recognized the inevitable escalating

costs associated with maintaining and operating aging and outdated airframes. In addition, she recognized the increased safety factor for pilots, crew and passengers by utilizing new airframes and associated new technologies.

In 2002 Jones supported the acquisition of a new Partenavia P-68 Observer II. This twin-engine, high-wing aircraft was especially suited to aerial law enforcement. In 2004, she supported the acquisition of two new Cessna 182 airplanes equipped with Garmin 1000 instrument panels. In 2005, Jones, through diligent persistence and factual justification, successfully convinced the state legislature to allocate \$600,000 for the complete refurbishing and upgrade of the agency's two Bell JetRanger B206BIII helicopters and \$3 million for the acquisition of two new Bell B206L4 LongRanger helicopters to replace two aging Bell OH58 helicopters.

The FWC, through Jones' persistence with acquiring homeland defense grants, received two new FLIR 8000 infrared camera systems with video downlink capability in 2006. These FLIR units are installed on the new Bell LongRangers, further increasing the aircrafts' utility and value to the agency as a law enforcement tool. These systems will allow the aviation section to immediately provide real-time information to agency officers and to the State of Florida Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to make critical decisions on where to deploy law enforcement assets.

Colonel Jones has demonstrated her commitment to aviation safety by not only acquiring new assets, but also supporting the need for recurrent aeronautical training for all FWC pilots. This training includes Bell Helicopter factory recurrent emergency procedures training, night-vision goggle training, instrument refresher courses with Embry Riddle Aeronautical University, water survival with the U.S. Coast Guard and annual attendance at ALEA regional safety seminars and annual conference.

During the last three years of devastating hurricanes that struck Florida, FWC aircraft were routinely the first aircraft to respond with aid due to being strategically positioned throughout the state to ensure a prompt response. The FWC aircraft carried FEMA personnel to the hardest hit areas of Charlotte and Lee counties following Hurricane Charley. FWC helicopters were also the first to search barrier islands off the southwest Florida coast, looking for survivors and offering assistance. FWC helicopters were used effectively at night in Escambia County following Hurricane Ivan to curtail looting of personal property. During all these natural disasters, Jones personally directed the allocation of FWC rescue resources from the EOC, where she spent long hours to ensure maximum utilization was achieved. Consequently, the FWC is nationally renowned as a leader in state natural disaster recovery efforts.

In 2005, following Hurricane Katrina's landfall in Mississippi, Jones responded to a mutual aid assistance request from the State of Mississippi to deploy men, officers and equipment to the hard-hit area around Biloxi. Literally within hours following the storm's passing, Jones had FWC assets, including helicopters, searching for survivors in southern Mississippi. With no outside support, FWC officers living in tents established a base camp near the coast and conducted continual day and night SAR operations for several weeks. Helicopter support was used to assist residents in remote areas where access by vehicle or boat was impossible. Jones personally visited the area to ensure FWC officers had the necessary equipment to accomplish their mission.

Jones has demonstrated her commitment to the homeland defense mission by deploying aircraft in support of the 2004 Free Trade of the Americas Conference in Miami and the 2005 Super Bowl in Jacksonville. In both events, FWC aircraft played a major role in crowd surveillance and waterway management. The use of these assets showcased the value of airborne law enforcement as critical tools for the homeland defense mission.

Jones has not rested in her perseverance to move the agency's capabilities forward. She is currently pursuing acquisition of a medium class helicopter to better serve the citizens of Florida during times of peril.

Colonel Jones was recognized in October 2006 by the International Association of Chiefs of Police with the "Excellence in Police Aviation" award for perpetuating the professionalism and advancement of airborne law enforcement in public service.

"Women in airborne law enforcement are uniquely qualified to excel and have a special touch when it comes to flying," she said. "Now, more than ever, is a great time for women to look at aviation as a career."