



GEORGIA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

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NEWS RELEASE

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Col. Barnard: Game Wardens Seeing Compliance with Social Distancing Order

SOCIAL CIRCLE – As news headlines are filled with reports of people continually and blatantly disregarding social distancing orders in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Georgia DNR’s Colonel Thomas Barnard says his game wardens are reporting that most people are following Governor Brian Kemp’s Executive Order (EO), and those that are not, are unclear on the details and are compliant when asked to disperse.

“I believe most people want to do their part in helping to stop the spread of the Corona virus,” said Barnard, Director of the agency’s Law Enforcement Division. “Those that we do find in groups just don’t know the specifics of the Order. But once our officers explain it to them and ask them to disperse, they are very cooperative.”

In fact, in the 9,952 cumulative hours that game wardens worked on enforcement of the EO between March 31st and April 19th, they documented verbal warnings to 476 individuals and made only one felony arrest. In six cases, the officers dispersed groups of 30 or more and all were compliant.

The Executive Order, which is in effect through April 30th, states that all Georgia residents should practice social distancing of at least six feet from those not living in their household, and that gatherings should be no more than 10 people at a time and they must maintain the six-foot distance as well.

The Order also states that Georgia residents are required to shelter in place in their residences, unless performing essential services, like getting food or medicine.

According to Barnard, blatant disregard of or failure to comply with the Order after being warned could result in a reckless conduct charge, but arrests are a last resort and not the focus for his officers.

“The overall goal is to stop the virus from spreading, not to write citations and make arrests. That’s why our emphasis is on education and information. Our citizens get it and we appreciate their cooperation,” said Barnard.

Since Governor Kemp deployed all state law enforcement agencies to enforce the EO and to perform other duties to assist in the COVID-19 fight, game wardens have been very busy. They are embedded at the GEMA State Operations Center and the Strategic National Stockpile Warehouse. They are providing medical supply transportation and security of the Specimen Points of Collection sites being operated through the state. They are also performing their regular duties which include patrolling State Parks, Wildlife Management Areas, Public Fishing Areas, and beaches, as well as responding to citizen complaints, conducting search and rescue missions, and supporting other local and state law enforcement.

DNR Commissioner Mark Williams weighed in on the agency’s overall response. “The DNR Law Enforcement Division and our hardworking game wardens, along with the entire DNR team, have been on the front lines during the COVID-19 response. Our Governor put great trust in the Department from the beginning to help give Georgians a degree of normalcy and to protect Georgians by reinforcing compliance with COVID-19 recommendations. I am proud of our Governor’s focused directives and the commitment of Georgians to come together during this difficult time, which has resulted in our game wardens observing high levels of compliance and very few cases of defiance.”

For body camera footage of several encounters that Game Wardens have had during COVID-19 enforcement, [click here](#).

Law Enforcement Off the Pavement