



Texas Department of Public Safety

Information for the News Media

Media Relations Office

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May 17, 2010

Law enforcement agencies urging caution on Falcon Lake

Citing several armed robberies and attempted armed robberies on Falcon Lake in Zapata County, the Texas Department of Public Safety, the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and the Zapata County Sheriff's Office are strongly urging boaters on Falcon Lake to stay on the United States side of the lake and not venture into Mexican waters.

Three reported incidents since April 30 have raised concern among law enforcement officers in the Lake Falcon area. Two of the three incidents involved United States citizens who had gone into the Mexican side of the lake, passing the International Waters markers. Most of the incidents occurred in the Old Guerrero area, but it's possible that other areas are a concern as well.

Fishermen are advised to stay as far away as possible from any of the Argos-type fishing boats typically used as fishing vessels by Mexican fishermen. These boats have a large prow, a small outboard motor without a cowling and no identification numbers on the hull.

Several bass fishing tournaments are scheduled for Falcon Lake during the next few weeks, and officials are concerned that they could be in danger if they cross into Mexican waters while they fish. One of the incidents occurred in U.S. waters.

This weekend, Zapata County Sheriff Sigi Gonzalez, will discuss these concerns with bass tournament participants. He has been working with Texas Parks and Wildlife regarding security matters on Falcon Lake. The DPS Border Security Operations Center and the Fusion Center are working with Zapata County and Parks and Wildlife to review protective measures in the area.

The robbers are believed to be members of a drug trafficking organization or members of an enforcer group linked to a drug trafficking organization who are heavily armed and using AK-47s or AR-15 rifles to threaten their victims. They appear to be using local Mexican fishermen to operate the boats to get close to American fishermen.

- On April 30, five people in two different boats were fishing on Falcon Lake and went to the Old Guerrero area, where they were taking photos of the old church. While they were there, a boat with four heavily tattooed men approached the two boats quickly. The men identified themselves as "Federales," but they were not wearing uniforms. The men boarded the boats, demanded cash and asked "where are the drugs?" The fishermen told the men that they had no drugs and were just fishing and taking photos. They ended up giving the men \$200 cash

and left the area. The pirates followed the two boats, but the U.S. boats were able to outrun them and the men stopped following once the two boats entered U.S. waters.

- On May 6, three fishermen were about a quarter of a mile from Marker 14 on the north side of Salado Island on top of the ruins. As they were fishing, a boat with two men quickly approached and pointed AR-15s at the fishermen. One of the men boarded the boat and searched it, looking for drugs, cash and guns. During the incident, he chambered a round in the rifle and told the fishermen that he would shoot them if they did not give him money. The fishermen took money out of their wallets and gave it to them.
- On May 16, law enforcement officers were told that some boaters were approached by a boat with five armed men on it. Investigators have not been able to locate the boaters to determine whether any cash was taken. This incident occurred on the United States side of the lake near Marker 7.

Anyone who is involved in an incident on Falcon Lake should dial 911 and report it to the Zapata County Sheriff's Office.

To maximize safety, boaters should stay in U.S. waters on Falcon Lake and file a float plan. This means leaving a detailed note with family members telling the time and place of departure (boat ramp), destination and direction of travel, boater cell phone number if available, names of passengers and what they're wearing, and a description of the boater's vehicle and boat, including boat and vehicle license numbers.

The U.S. State Department website lists several travel alerts related to violence in Mexico. Travelers should always check that website for the most up-to-date information related to security issues in Mexico. (See http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_970.html).

(PIO 2010-51)