

# Game wardens assemble for water training

Officers learn how to react when attacked on duty



*Photo by Angeli Wright*

Travis Haug, of Victoria, takes his assailant, Ronnie Yates, a lieutenant at the Game Warden Training Center, into the water with him during an exercise at Officer Water Survival class for Texas game wardens at VISD Aquatic Center on Wednesday. "It sounds like fun and games, but it's work," Haug said of the training.

Jon Kocian, a Texas game warden in Victoria, didn't blink twice when an aggressive man grabbed him by his shirt and wrestled him into a body of water.

Instead, he used the forceful blow of his knee to push away the assailant, and with combat training, he took hold of the dire situation, pulled his weapon on the man and walked away unharmed.

This was not a real attack. It was training day.

Kocian was one of 20 Texas game wardens getting a hands-on education in water survival. The training is part of the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators Boat Operations and Training program catalog of credentialed courses.

The class, which was conducted Tuesday and Wednesday at the Aquatic Center in Victoria, taught skills in surviving a water entry in uniform, disengaging from an assailant while in the water, water extraction techniques and other lifesaving skills.

"Texas game wardens are by statute the primary law enforcement officers on the state's waters, and that environment brings its own hazards," said Cody Jones, assistant commander of Texas' Boating Law Administration. "In the course of their duty, game wardens wear gear, including their duty belt and ballistics vest, that add an additional 18 to 20 pounds of weight to them. It's important that if they enter the water - whether expectedly or unexpectedly - they know their capabilities and how to survive."



Six wardens have drowned in the line of duty, Jones said, "and that's too many."

Kocian, who's worked with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for more than 10 years, hasn't had to deal with an aggravated assault in the water over the course of his career, but said he's ready.

"The training taught us to know our limitations - know what we're capable of and what we aren't," he said. Capt. Rex Mayes, district supervisor, said the training is long overdue.

Mayes said his officers are on the water two to three days a week at a time, and while the course isn't a substitute for a real-life situation, he said it's an eye-opener.

Mayes said he lost an officer six years ago when the officer was shot.

"Sometimes, people want to get you in the water - we carry a lot of things - and this training will teach us to keep an advantage," he said.

Victoria is the first area to take the training. Mayes said as soon as he learned about it, he told trainers he wanted it in his district first.

The courses, thanks to donations, the hospitality of the Aquatic Center and the help of the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators, didn't cost to attend.

The cost of the equipment, Mayes said, would have been cost prohibitive.

Course Program Manager Roger Norcross, of Ohio, said [Safariland](#) and [Mustang Survival](#) donated \$15,000 in equipment for the course.

Norcross said the program was designed to show game wardens that survival is an option if they fall in the water.

"When a game warden enters the water, he already is 16 pounds heavier with his gear on," he said. "Add the water and an officer will gain another 16 to 18 pounds. With that kind of weight, he'll sink straight to the bottom."

Kocian weighed 207 pounds with his gear before entering the water. After five minutes of wading, he weighed in at 220 pounds.

"They learn they can survive in the gear they're in," he said.

By [Bianca Montes](#) •Originally published February 12, 2014 at 10:42 p.m., updated February 13, 2014 at midnight

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