



Montana Sheriffs & Peace Officers Association
PO Box 794 • Helena, MT 59624 • (406) 443-5669 • www.mspsoa.org

Search and Rescue Subcommittee

Quarterly Meeting

Date: Tuesday, September 9, 2025
Time: 10:30 am – 12:30 pm
In-person: Fort Harrison, HAFRC, DES Small Conference Room
Remote: Via Microsoft Teams

MINUTES

Introductions *Matt Boxmeyer (Chair); Steve Holton (Vice Chair); Nanette Gilbertson (MSPOA); Jake Ganieany (DES)*

Matt Boxmeyer, Chair, Gallatin County SO SAR
Jake Ganieany, DES
Stacy Bourquin, DES
Nanette Gilbertson, MSPOA
Landon Kotesky, Cascade County SO SAR
William Darby, Cascade County SO SAR
Cory Hansen, Cascade County SAR
Chris Weiss, Lewis and Clark County SO SAR
Brad Bragg, Lewis and Clark County SO SAR
Darrin Wise, Flathead County SO SAR
Ty Williams, Stillwater County SO SAR
Gary Burke, Yellowstone County SO SAR
Tim Jurgonski, Madison County SO SAR
Brad Belke, Butte Silver Bow County – 1590 SAR
Jason Jarrett, Gallatin County SO/MSPOA Mutual Aid
Kent O'Donell, Yellowstone County SO SAR
Mike LaBaty, Park County SO SAR
Tom Curtis, Lake County SAR
Frank Pelli, Carbon County SAR
Craig Schroder, Madison County SAR
Cody Nelson, Wheatland County SAR
Petrina Deoria – Powell County SAR
Luke LaLiberty, Jefferson County – Elkhorn SAR
Stacey Bradley, Lewis and Clark County SAR
Laura Sherley, Legislative Analyst

Maxwell Parson, Legislative Analyst
Janae Grotbo, DES
Capt Harris Cannon, 40th HS
Capt Jordan Clark, 40th HS
Capt Jeremy Shimanek, 40th HS
SrA Ethan Reus, 40th HS
SrA Justin Petras, 40th HS
Flight Doctor: Maj Phillip McFarling, 40th HS

Review and approve minutes from previous meeting (6-10-25)

Motion to approve the Search and Rescue Subcommittee meeting minutes from the 6-10-25 meeting as distributed via email. Second. Passed unanimous.

Consensus to reorder agenda and do new business prior to old business

Old Business (Issues previously discussed which require follow-up)

- HJ 56 (Search and Rescue Study)
 - The Legislature is considering reimbursement issues related to tribal nations. To the group's knowledge, tribes have not submitted reimbursement requests, nor have there been significant past requests.
 - Counties regularly support tribal search and rescue (SAR) missions. Tribes typically offer reimbursement, though reimbursement has not been formally requested.
 - **Tom Curtis:** Described an extensive search on tribal land where multiple agencies participated. Workers were released to assist, but communication and coordination were limited. Lake County SAR participated but was not the lead agency.
 - Tribes have not requested reimbursement for SAR missions.
 - **Ty Williams:** Roosevelt County conducted an extended search for a person missing in a river. Although the individual went missing from non-tribal land, much of the search occurred on tribal land. Roosevelt County received reimbursement through the subcommittee.
 - Discussion on whether the \$12,000 mission cap is sufficient. Increasing the cap would only be effective if accompanied by an increase in the overall appropriation. An increase to the total appropriation would benefit more units than raising the per-mission cap alone.
 - Question raised regarding whether the statutory requirement to reimburse 50% of mission costs should be updated.
 - **JJ:** Noted that catastrophic, long-term, high-cost missions are not adequately addressed in statute.
 - **Jurgonski:** A single catastrophic incident can quickly exceed the current cap.
 - The group discussed the need to balance total appropriations with the ability to address catastrophic events.
 - **Bragg:** Even if the mission cap were removed, reimbursement requests would still be reviewed and approved through the subcommittee, allowing oversight of higher reimbursement amounts.

- **Ty Williams:** Recommended future meetings focus on potential statutory changes and development of a recommendation to the Law and Justice Interim Committee (LJIC). Emphasized the need for additional funding for training and equipment.
- **Darrin Wise:** Flathead County allocates approximately \$1 million to SAR missions but often does not submit reimbursement claims due to limited available funds. Raised the question of how to define a “catastrophic event,” noting that thresholds vary by county.
- **Law and Justice Interim Committee Panel:**
 - **Jake Ganieany:** Will discuss DES’s role as fiscal agent, appropriations and funding sources, and address committee questions regarding whether the capped amount is sufficient.
 - **Matt Boxmeyer:** Plans to cover the Chair’s role, collaboration with DES, statutory structure for reimbursements, reimbursement guidelines, and the review process, noting the cap is rarely exceeded.
 - **Ty Williams:** Focusing on the critical nature of training reimbursement. Training opportunities are often shared statewide, and without reimbursement, such training would not be available. Training is essential for effective, efficient, and safe SAR operations.
 - **Brad Belke:** Will highlight the importance of state funding for SAR equipment and assets. Emphasis on the volunteer nature of SAR teams and the significant time and personal financial commitment of members. Quality equipment reduces the financial burden on volunteers.
 - **MMIP Representative:** Will provide remarks from the DOJ perspective.
 - **Public Comment:**
 - **Nanette:** Plans to speak to the importance of partnership, collaboration, training grant funds through MSPOA, the Mutual Aid Program, and the history of SAR funds.
- [LJIC Agenda](#)

New Business (Emerging issues which require attention from the SAR Subcommittee)

- **40th Helicopter Squadron (Malmstrom AFB):** Presented SAR capabilities and resources.
 - The 40th is transitioning from Huey helicopters to the MH-139, resulting in significant capability improvements.
 - MH-139 enhancements include faster response times, upgraded FLIR for expanded search capability, increased power at higher altitudes (eliminating prior 9,000–10,000 ft. restrictions), a fixed hoist, and increased passenger capacity.
 - Two MH-139 helicopters have been deployed on missions within the past month.
 - Aircrews are continuing training, including mountain operations and flight proficiency.
 - Resource mobilization procedures remain unchanged; request process is outlined on the back of the SAR pamphlet.
 - Crews pre-position upon notification and maintain a one-hour on-call response time, with launch typically occurring approximately one hour thereafter.
 - Aircraft provide SAR support, not EMT transport services; missions focus on locating and extracting individuals rather than providing advanced medical care.
 - Limited medical capability is available for basic monitoring; aircraft are not equipped with comprehensive medical systems.

- Civilian transport aboard the aircraft is mission-dependent.
- Air-to-ground communications include VHF and LMR (SAR colors), with a polycom radio enabling direct internal line-of-sight communications.
- SAR missions typically utilize the tan frequency.
- Available equipment includes force penetrators, litters, and harnesses.
- The 40th is open to joint training with agencies; interested parties should contact Captain Cannon
 - Capt Harris Cannon
40 HS
CCX
DSN: 406-731-1517
SIPR: harris.c.cannon2.mil@mail.smil.mil
harris.cannon@us.af.mil
- **Ty Williams:** Reported the Air Force recently flew a mission in Stillwater County and performed exceptionally well; would utilize them again.
- **Kent O'Donnell:** Inquired about the disposition of the older FLIR unit; Yellowstone County may be interested if it becomes available.
- **Darrin Wise:** Noted Two Bear Air will be transitioning helicopters and is expected to be out of service from approximately September through February, which may result in additional utilization of the 40th HS.
- Action item: Post the SAR pamphlet to the DES website and distribute it via email.

SAR Financial Update

Janae Grotbo: SAR Decision package was approved and increased the appropriation to just over \$200K for SFY26. The added appropriation was possible due to the revenue in the fund balance

- Funds Balance (as of 9-5-25)
 - HB2 authority (840H5) - \$200,154.00
 - **Total SFY26 Authority - \$200,154.00**
 - Cash Balance: \$301,095.56
- Number of FWP Conservation Licenses Sold in SFY25 – Not Final
 - Resident: 542,476
 - Nonresident: 297,278
 - W/ Search and Rescue: 690,092
 - W/O Search and Rescue: 149,662
 - Overall total: 839,754
- Number of FWP Conservation Licenses Sold in SFY24
 - **For comparison**
 - Resident: 318,733
 - Nonresident: 285,580
 - W/ Search and Rescue: 455,285 (254,061 resident, 201,221 nonresident)
 - W/O Search and Rescue: 149,028 (64,672 resident, 84,356 nonresident)
 - Overall total: 604,313

Training

- 2025/2026 SAR Trainings Needs
 - Continue to share training opportunities with Chair Boxmeyer

- Share upcoming training opportunities
 - **Wilderness First Aid**
 - Date: October 25 and 26
 - Location: St. Ignatius
 - Get ahold of Tom Curtis if you are interested (406-214-7758)
 - **Hybrid Wilderness First Responder Course**
 - Online: Oct. 30 – Nov 19, 2025
 - In-person: Nov. 20 – Nov 24, 2025
 - Location: Red Lodge, MT
 - Fee: \$790/student
 - Sponsored by Red Search & Rescue
 - Course Contact: Frank Pelli. frank@redlodgefire.com. 406-426-0378 (cell)
 - Intent is to host a recertification in 2 years. Initial certification is expensive, but having WFRs in SAR, helps reduce other costs.*

Resource List

- Updated Lists Provided via Email
 - Review and send updates to Chair Boxmeyer

Reimbursement Requests

- SFY25 Training and Equipment Reimbursement Requests
 - **Submit by June 6, 2026**
- Reminders and Documentation
 - Include a roll-up and documentation for all costs to ensure SAR Chair does not have to manually add individual costs to verify reimbursement total
 - Vehicles are reimbursed at the federal mileage rate and require a mileage log (not fuel receipts)
 - Equipment is reimbursed for actual fuel costs and must include receipts
 - For training reimbursement requests, please include the total number of attendees in the narrative
 - Do not include sensitive criminal justice information details in the narrative
- Reimbursement Submission Deadlines
 - Submit Mission Reimbursement Requests within 90 days of the mission, when possible, to assist with record keeping, balance tracking, etc.
 - Submit training and equipment requests upon purchase of equipment or completion of training.

➤ Mission

→ Lincoln County - DTSAR

Date: July 8, 2025

Total = \$49.00

Reimbursement Purpose = Mileage

Resources: 10 DTSAR Members/Rope Team, 2 DTSAR Trucks

Narrative: On 7/8/2025, LCSO dispatch received a 911 SOS text. Two hikers had lost the main trail and became stranded on the side of a mountain when they got stuck in some cliffs. DTSAR Mountain Unit and Ropes Team were called out to respond. DTSAR members were able to locate and safely rescue the two stranded hikers from the side of the mountain.

Resolution: 2 stranded hikers rescued off the mountain.

Motion to approve the Lincoln County DTSAR Mission Reimbursement for \$49.00 with funding authorized by State DES (Hansen). Second (Bragg). Passed unanimous.

Open Comment/Public Comment

None

Attendees had the opportunity to tour the 40th HS MH-139A

Next Meetings

- January 6, 2026
- April 7, 2026
- June 9, 2026