

MAINE ASSOCIATION FOR SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mounted SAR Team Certification Standard

I. Introduction

- A. The Maine Association for Search and Rescue (MASAR) is dedicated to providing a centralized clearinghouse of search and rescue (SAR) services for the State of Maine. To this end, MASAR has developed the following standard for mounted search teams used in SAR incidents.
- B. This standard is intended to define the minimum requirements necessary for any mounted search team.
- C. The certification issued under this standard is the requirement for those horse¹ and rider (mounted) teams that wish to participate in search and rescue operations managed by the Maine Warden Service. The exception is an uncertified mounted team which may be allowed to take part in an actual search if the following requirements are met:
 - 1. The mounted team in training has met the requirements of Section IV, Part A, subparts 2 and 3, below.
 - 2. Participation is approved by the unit training director responsible for the trainee's instruction to date.
 - 3. The mounted team in training works under the direct supervision of a certified mounted search team rider. A certified mounted team may not supervise more than one uncertified mounted team at one time.
- D. Testing of a mounted team for certification shall be done within the unit of which the rider is a member, utilizing the objectives and procedures provided by MASAR. A mounted team that is not a member of a unit must apply to a MASAR-certified mounted SAR unit or the MASAR Standards Committee for testing.
- E. These standards apply to mounted wilderness search only. Other mounted search specialties shall be evaluated based on other standards and evaluation tests accepted by the MASAR Standards Committee.

II. Certification

- A. Certification shall be for mares and geldings only.
- B. The certification shall be issued by the MASAR Standards Committee.
- C. The team certification is valid for five years.
- D. Limited Certification
It is recognized that, after many years of dedication to SAR activities, a mounted team member's usefulness in wilderness search may become limited. In addition, the MASAR Standards Committee recognizes that not all riders nor all horses will be capable of the full range of SAR activities.

¹ Throughout this document, the term "horse" shall refer to any equine animal ridden for the purpose of performing search and rescue.

For these teams the MASAR Standards Committee may issue a limited certification for a mounted team.

- E. To apply for certification a person must do one of the following:
 - 1. Request certification in writing as an individual from the MASAR Standards Committee or
 - 2. Have certification requested for him or her by a unit training officer.
- F. Suspension and Revocation of Certification
 - 1. Suspension
 - a) Mounted teams which are temporarily unable to work in the field for an extended period (usually greater than six months) should request inactive status from the Standards Committee.
 - b) The Standards Committee may suspend a team which does not request inactive status when some deficiency impedes that teams effectiveness.
 - (1) When a report of a team's deficiency is brought to the attention of the Standards Committee, the committee will consult with the team's rider and the unit training officer before taking any action.
 - (2) The rider in question will have the right to challenge any report of deficiency and has the right to know and confront the person who makes the report. He or she may provide written, oral, and recorded testimony in his or her support.
 - (3) The committee may take one of the following courses of action upon the challenge of a mounted team's competence.
 - (a) The committee may confirm that team's continued certification.
 - (b) The committee may require that the team in question complete the re-certification process before the normal re-certification time.
 - (4) In all instances, the rider in question shall have the right to request a Performance Expectation Trial, or the relevant parts thereof, in order to confirm certification.
 - 2. Revocation

The committee shall have the option of permanently revoking a mounted team's certification in the following circumstances.

 - a) Death or retirement of a mounted search team member.
 - b) Serious misconduct on the part of a mounted team member, horse or rider, which endangers the operation or credibility of the SAR enterprise.

III. **Recertification**

- A. An equestrian SAR team must be recertified after 3 years.
- B. Recertification will be issued by the MASAR Standards Committee
- C. To apply for certification a person must do one of the following:
 - 1. Request certification in writing, as an individual, from the MASAR Standards Committee or
 - 2. Have certification requested for him or her by his or her unit's training officer.

IV. **Documentation Required for Initial Certification or Re-certification**

- A. The applicant must show the following for certification:
 - 1. Current MASAR certification as a Search Team Member in the State of Maine.
 - 2. Documentation that the horse has demonstrated in the presence of other riders that it is quiet, well-mannered, non-aggressive, and does not bite or kick.
 - 3. Proof that the team has passed all parts of the Performance Expectation Trials listed in Section V.
- B. The applicant must show the following documentation before re-certification:
 - 1. Proof of continuing training through one of the following methods:
 - a) Successful continuance of an "in house" training program administered by a MASAR-certified equestrian SAR unit. Written records from a unit Training Officer (or equivalent) or the President of a unit attesting to the successful continuance of such a program shall be provided to the Standards Committee before recertification.
 - b) Successful completion of a course or courses in equestrian SAR-related subjects which includes training exercises that encompass all the requirements of the Performance Expectation Trials in this standard. If this method is used for re-certification, written proof of successful completion must be furnished to the MASAR Standards Committee prior to the issuance of the certification. This method of re-certification is predicated on the existence and approval of such training.
 - c) Active participation in equestrian mounted activities that demonstrates that the mounted team continues to meet the requirements described in the Performance Expectation Trials. If this method is used for recertification, written confirmation from other than the certifying team member, of having successfully demonstrated the requirements, must be furnished to the MASAR Standards Committee prior to the issuance of the re-certification. This method of re-certification requires a written description of the activity and approval of such by the MASAR Standards Committee.

- C. A mounted team which does not recertify through one of the above procedures must complete the entire certification process.

V. **Certification Testing**

A. Basic Testing Conditions

1. Certification testing is the responsibility of the MASAR-certified unit in which the rider is a member.
2. A rider who is not a member of a MASAR-certified unit may request testing by a MASAR-certified unit or by an evaluation team selected by the MASAR Standards Committee.
3. All testing will be accomplished with the same horse and rider.
4. Mounted teams will not be required to test in conditions other than those in which they would be expected to search.
5. The Standards Committee reserves the option to independently test applicants with an evaluation team of its own choosing.
6. Before testing, the rider shall show that she or he is equipped with the minimum equipment for a basic ground searcher as recommended by MASAR.
7. The rider shall show that she or he is equipped with the minimum equipment for a basic mounted team as recommended by MASAR.

B. Performance Expectations

1. General Skills

Prior to taking part in any trail tests, the rider shall demonstrate his or her ability to manage the mount and equipment by doing the following:

- a) Safely unload the horse from a trailer.
- b) Tack the horse without assistance.
- c) Mount from the ground without assistance.
- d) Demonstrate that horse remains reasonably quiet while held by another person.
- e) Demonstrate that horse can be lead and handled by another person. Horse shall not push ahead.
- f) Demonstrate that horse accepts distractions and can be handled safely around such things as moving cars, motorcycles or ATVs, bicycles, backpackers, tents, gunfire, helicopters, chain saws, sirens, dogs, runners, and flagging tape.
- g) Load horse into trailer with no more than 1 assistant, in no more than 10 minutes.
- h) Demonstrate that horse is reasonably quiet in a trailer for at least 15 minutes.

2. Mount and Rider Trail Skills

- a) During a trail ride the rider shall do the following:
 - (1) Turn left and right and stop while remaining in control of the horse.
 - (2) Cross a stream.

- (3) Ride off trail in order to negotiate thick brush, fallen logs, or other obstacles.
 - (4) Stop and tie horse for at least 15 minutes. For the entire time it is tied, the horse shall not pull against the tie and shall remain reasonably quiet.
 - (5) Stop and locate a position on a map while remaining mounted.
 - (6) Locate exact position using a map and compass. This may be done while dismounted.
 - (7) Put on rain gear while mounted.
 - (8) Demonstrate that the horse can be separated from the herd.
 - (9) Demonstrate that the horse will walk single file and side by side with another horse.
 - (10) Demonstrate control while riding at all natural gaits of the horse.
 - (11) Demonstrate that horse will back up when asked.
 - (12) Take an object from one person and pass it to another rider while remaining mounted. Horse must remain calm.
 - (13) Demonstrate that horse can be ponied and can pony another horse.
3. Daylight Trail Ride
 - a) The rider and mount shall navigate a trail covering a distance of 10-15 miles, with several steep climbs and descents.
 - b) The pace is to be set at no less than 4 mph.
 - c) At that pace, the mount shall show a recovery pulse of 52 in less than 30 minutes.
 - d) The trail ride shall be completed in 3-5 hours.
 4. Night Trail Ride
 - a) The purpose of this test is to determine the comfort level of horse and rider when working under nighttime conditions.
 - b) The entire test ride shall take place during the hours of darkness, beginning no earlier than one hour after sunset.
 - c) The rider shall unload and tack the horse without assistance.
 - d) The team shall ride on a trail for approximately one hour, covering a distance of at least four miles.
 - e) The horse must show acceptance of headlamps, flashlights, rotating lights, and strobe lights.
 - f) The rider shall untack and load the horse in the dark.

VI. Evaluation Procedures

- A. Field Evaluation Team Requirements
 1. The certification testing shall be conducted by a Field Evaluation Team.
 2. The Field Evaluation Team shall, at minimum, consist of two

- people, one being a MASAR-certified mounted team rider or an alternative approved by the MASAR Standards Committee. The Field Evaluation Team may also include a person proficient in SAR who is not a rider.
3. The rider of a mounted team to be tested, or the unit of which that rider is a member, may request that the Field Evaluation Team consist of more than two people.
- B. Each member of the Field Evaluation Team shall use a separate evaluation form. Each form shall be signed by the evaluation team member after completion of each test.
 - C. Field Evaluation Team members shall document the mounted team independently and may compare their ratings only after the test has been completed.
 - D. Copies of all evaluation forms for successful tests shall be sent to the MASAR Standards Committee when certification of the mounted team is requested.
 - E. Evaluator instructions
 1. The objectives of the certification tests are:
 - a) Evaluation of the rider's ability to control the horse.
 - b) Observation of the horse's behavior to determine if it is safe and well mannered.
 - c) Evaluation of the rider's ability to search effectively as a member of a mounted team.
 2. It is the responsibility of the evaluators to ensure that the test location provides adequate opportunity to observe all elements of the Performance Expectation Trials.
 3. The Field Evaluation Team shall terminate the test if in their opinion it becomes hazardous to any of the participants.
 4. The Field Evaluation Team shall have discretion in the administration and evaluation of all portions of the test.
 5. During these tests the rider, in conjunction with his or her mount, must:
 - a) Demonstrate the ability to report clearly on a map the following information after searching an area:
 - (1) Areas and/or routes covered.
 - (2) Estimated probability of detection for the mounted team based on environmental and terrain conditions.
 - (3) Location of any clues encountered during the search.
 - b) Demonstrate the ability to work and control the horse in a variety of areas, terrain, and conditions.
 - c) Demonstrate adequate agility for wilderness search.
 - d) Show that the mounted team can be part of the overall SAR mission by demonstrating an understanding of the purposes of other SAR resources and the Incident Command System.

VII. Retesting

- A. At the discretion of the Examiners, a team may retest with minimal delay (not to exceed 60 days) if it fails either of the Performance Expectation Trials.
- B. If a team fails a retest the rider may appeal for another retest after a waiting period of not less than 60 days.
- C. Any mounted team may be retested only on successful appeal. Upon failure of a retest the mounted team shall have no right of appeal.
- D. A retest shall consist of only the failed parts of the previous test.

VIII. Appeals

- A. A team that fails any test in this standard may appeal the decision to the MASAR Standards Committee.
- B. A team that fails any test in this standard when that test is administered by the MASAR Standards Committee may appeal the decision to the MASAR Board.
- C. Appeals must be made in the following fashion:
 - 1. The appeal must be submitted in writing.
 - 2. The appeal must be postmarked no later than 15 days after the failed test(s) or receipt of the contested decision(s).
 - 3. A copy of the appeal must be sent to all members of the MASAR Standards Committee, or to the members of the MASAR Board of Directors in the case of an appeal of a decision of the MASAR Standards Committee.
 - 4. The appeal shall provide sufficient information for the Standards Committee or MASAR Board to make a decision. Such information may include but is not limited to:
 - a) Affidavits
 - b) Written statements of relevant parties, witnesses, and experts.
 - c) Complete description of the reason for the appeal.
 - d) The suggested remedy.
- D. The Standards Committee or the MASAR Board will have a total of 60 calendar days in which to investigate, obtain testimony (if necessary), question the parties involved, obtain outside professional assistance, or take other actions which the committee deems necessary and appropriate in the circumstances.
- E. The decision by the MASAR Standards Committee or MASAR Board will be written and sent to the appellant by certified mail (return receipt).
- F. The decision of the MASAR Board will be final.

IX. Acceptance and Amendment

- A. These standards will take effect immediately upon acceptance by majority vote of the MASAR membership present in conformance with the current MASAR by-laws.
- B. The MASAR Standards Committee may recommend amendments to the

MASAR membership as these standards are improved and expanded.

1. The committee will present suggestions for amendment in writing to the MASAR membership.
 - a) MASAR members will have 30 days during which to comment on proposed amendments.
 - b) Amendments will be discussed and voted on at the next scheduled MASAR meeting after the comment period has ended.
 2. Amendments will be accepted by a two thirds majority vote of the MASAR membership present in conformance with the current MASAR by-laws.
- C. Any MASAR Organizational Member may propose amendments by the same process outlined in Section VIII Part B.