

Maine Association for Search and Rescue

Meeting Minutes for 2 August 1998

Meeting is called to order at 16:04 hours by Vice President Al Martin in the absence of President John McDonough.

Present

Keith R. Heavrin Jr. - MESARD, Randy Armour - Lincoln, Mike Sawyer - Warden Service, Roger Guay - Warden Service, Al Martin - DIRIGO, Bob Baribeau - Mahoosuc, Dave Martin - DIRIGO, Rick Grant - Lakes Region, Tonya Grant - Lakes Region, Pat Dorian - Warden Service, Andre Robidoux - Mahoosuc.

Announcements

The 1998 Fall training exercise is scheduled for the third weekend in September and will be held at the Pineland Center down near Freeport and Gray.

The 1999 statewide spring training exercise will be scheduled for the last weekend in April instead of the first weekend in May. It is hoped to provide a schedule that will allow for inclusion of more of the state's southern volunteers.

Secretary's Report

Minutes are distributed for those who did not have a copy. After brief review, Randy moves to accept the minutes as written. Seconded by Pat and the vote is unanimous in favor.

Treasurer's Report

Pete Laveway is not present and no report has been submitted for this meeting. Financial report will be deferred till next meeting in October.

Fall Training Exercise

Dave Martin reports that the heavy search schedule in the last two weeks has delayed some work on the training exercise planning. Currently the exercise is planned for the third weekend in September and will be held at the Pineland Center. There is some chance that the state will be selling the facility in the near future which could very much complicate the planning. It is also noted that there is no water supply at the Center and water would have to be brought in.

Dave relates that he feels little need for a major stomp through the woods as a training exercise at this point because of the several large effort searches recently that have provided plenty of that. Dave suggests that we use the buildings at the Pineland Center for building searches and the surrounding wooded fringes and small copses of trees for doing short duration searches. It is thought to use Saturday morning for the outdoor exercises then do class room in the afternoon. Sunday would be scheduled for classroom and a possible return to the field.

Dave also says he is working to get a National Guard Black Hawk helicopter to come in for a demo and a familiarization exercise. Roger Guay relates that the prop wash on these helicopters is a lot stronger and more violent than one might expect. He relates that a recent experience with one saw large dead trees being blown over which could be a hazard for searchers. He also relates that a terrific amount of air borne debris is typical of operations around one of these helicopters. Dave will also contact the Brunswick Naval Air station to see if they can be involved in the training exercise.

The hope is to get Murray Hamlet, one of the best authorities on cold water drowning, to come in and do a session for Saturday night and Sunday morning. Dave will call to try to schedule time for him.

Keith offers that MESARD is willing to do a presentation for the group that gives definition on the role search dogs play in a search, how they do their work and how that relates to other resources fielded at searches. Dave asks amount of time needed for the class. One hour will do.

Keith relates the need for better clue awareness and memory of clues as pointed out by the Waite search where many people looked at footprint evidence of the victim and several different versions of what the track looked like were later to cause considerable discussion. Discussion about using photography to preserve the images. Pat brings forward the issue of searchers dropping things in the woods. These clues can be misleading and draws energy away from solving the search. It is suggested that training information be directed towards admonishing all searchers to drop nothing in the woods and if they do lose something, to report it to command. This will hopefully prevent confusion and possibly misleading evidence.

Keith suggests the training should include a module on navigation. The use of GPS units is becoming more wide spread and sometimes searchers are asked to use one when they may not have the rudimentary skills needed to do that. A basic use course would help. Roger relates that the UTM system of locating everything on a map is the way Warden Service is going to be doing this work from now on. It is simple and very accurate. Roger will address it in the navigation course material. Suggested that contacting Ron McClellan of Points North could be helpful. Dave relates he will try to get a mailing out to all teams within the next week or two.

The Waite Search

Roger starts off with remarking that the logistics of food supply on searches needs to be taken more seriously. There were numerous problems on the Waite search with food not being available to people who were coming in from the field late in the day. There were also issues with food quality discussed. Warden Service feels this needs to be done better. Pat asks if there might not be a chance for a volunteer group to do something with this aspect of searches. Pat speculates that perhaps an effort could be put together to build a permanent “ Feeding Trailer” or mobile kitchen that would travel with the overhead trailer to searches. The trailer could be staffed with volunteers at the scene. Trailer could stop on way to the search and stock up at the grocery store and then get periodic resupply. By staffing the trailer with SAR volunteers, it would be assured that food would be available for all fielded personnel at whatever time they came in. It is hoped that the quality of the food would be better too. Randy offers that Lincoln, as well as numerous other units he is sure, have support personnel who aren’t usually used in the field but would be willing to work at preparing food. Discussion of several possible options for getting a trailer or large van for this purpose. UPS truck change over happens around the first couple months of the year and one of these units could be acquired. Mike also recalls that wilderness had a trailer for sale here a little while back that could be used. Mike will call Wilderness and find out the status of the trailer. Keith allows that it probably wouldn’t require that much to set up a good kitchen in one of these units. Pat suggests that if the trailer were available as a resource, then local fire dept. auxiliary units or snowmobile clubs or rod and gun clubs could also be asked to staff the trailer during searches.

Roger relates that 4875 acres of land were searched at Waite as well as 170 miles of road, 75,200 acres of air coverage and 39 miles of shore line. The search management dealt with a hundred or more people a day and had as many as 220 searchers on the last Saturday. It is noted that there has been no evidence that puts the missing Tantemonico in the woods. All the evidence so far has been in the roadways. Several people relate that the overhead team did an outstanding, efficient and well organized job of planning and executing this search effort. The speediness with which resources were deployed and the comprehensiveness of the effort were appreciated. Roger feels the overhead team effort ran very smoothly and the personnel are getting skilled at the work.

Canadian teams responded with a lot of much appreciated help and had several of their big trailers at the search. It is noted that they work differently on searches than we do and some time spent in discussion with them would be constructive.

Pat suggests WS would like to find a way to start a data collection system for recording the volunteer effort. They would like to have a way for feedback from the volunteers to work towards improving the system

as well as building a pool of information that may work towards funding issues being improved. Pat points out that Forestry Service Hot Shot teams are paid when they have to be used. When he suggested some form of compensation for volunteers, he did not get a very favorable response. It is suggested that if we can document the expenses volunteers incur at searches we may be able to work towards some form of recapture from the state. Some discussion ensues about drawing up a unit information form that unit leaders would fill out. This form would be for all the personnel fielded by each unit and would list time, mileage and any other resources expended by their respective membership such as batteries, food, light sticks, or broken gear. It would also have a comments section and a place for remarks directed at problem-solving or improvements. Keith volunteers to draft a form for consideration. Mike says he would very much like to see an annual report generated by each unit that would list the yearly trainings being held.

Keith suggests that all base line intersection flagging should be marked with magic markers or pens to show the number and direction of the flagged base lines, especially where they intersect. This would help searchers a lot in locating the areas they are assigned to search. For example, following a given baseline out to the intersection of base line E-23 would be clear. Right now the sweep line flagging and other flagging that appears in the areas is causing some difficulty when the baselines aren't written on at intersections. It would also help prevent the inadvertent misdirection of a team searching in the wrong area, which has happened before, and thus leaving a gap in coverage when they return and report they finished the assigned area.

Mike Sawyer relates that Warden Service feels they have a serious problem with dealing with media issues. Correct information was in short supply and reports included descriptions of evidence that was not related to the missing subject.

Dave says we need about ten more volunteer SAR units in the state. He suggests that if Warden Service would call volunteers out more for the smaller searches, interest would be promoted and teams would be encouraged. No unit wants to train all year and maintain an organization as volunteers when they are rarely used.

Dave suggests that we need to be doing more critical separation searches and less grid type searches. He says that critical separation is a lot more effective and faster. He suggests a four-man team using critical separation can cover twice the ground as an eight-man team using grid search techniques and they would have the same POD. Dave relates that trained volunteers are being taught critical separation then not getting a chance to use it on searches. Pat offers that it is hard to use untrained volunteers with critical separation. Dave speculates as to how we could incorporate some educational and promotional demos for WS on this, perhaps in the upcoming fall exercise.

Southwest Harbor Search

Little discussion of this search effort on 7/20/98. Subject was found by divers 150 feet or so off shore in 51 feet of water in Echo Lake at around 2330 hr. Wardens were able to spot the subject's tan shorts in six feet of water just off the shore when they walked it after dark using flashlights. The daytime glare may have contributed to not seeing them earlier. Divers located the subject just off the ledges and swimming area at the bottom of the Acadia Mountain trail. MASAR member teams MDISAR and MESARD spent most of the day and late into the evening searching trails and areas along the shore of the lake.

Baxter State Park Fatality

Bob Baribeau and Andre Robidoux relate the recovery effort for a fatality in Baxter. The subject was climbing Abol Slide when he suffered either a heart attack or a stroke and fell. Several Mahoosuc Mountain Rescue personnel were stationed in the Park as part of the summer volunteer program. Andre relates that he had climbed the mountain in the morning and got the call for the accident late in the day. They went back up the slide and discovered a Park Ranger with the subject. A critical care nurse happened to be hiking in the area that day and was present to administer CPR but after 20 minutes no sign of life was detected. Bob relates that the operation went very well and that MASAR personnel was excellent. Several Lincoln SAR personnel were

present as well, reports Randy. A couple of Wilderness SAR personnel were said to have flown in from southern Maine on a private aircraft.

Rick Grant provides some information on a new company getting a start in Bangor and Portland. Life Flight of Maine is going to be providing a med-flight service . They will fly anywhere that is 30 minutes to a hospital and if they can get there in the “Golden Hour”. The aircraft they use have wheels and not skids so their application is somewhat limited. They will not land on more than a 7% grade.

The next MASAR Meeting will be held on Sunday October 4th at 1600 hours at Warden Service Headquarters in Sidney. Rick Grant moves to close the meeting, seconded by Randy, closed at 18:20 hours.

Respectfully submitted,
Keith R. Heavrin Jr. - MASAR Secretary