

# Priest Lake Search & Rescue, Inc.

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Bonner County and the Priest Lake Area are unique, not just for their natural beauty and year-round backcountry attractions, but also for the multiple jurisdictions within the immediate Area; bordered by four counties, in three states, and Canada on the north. Priest Lake Search & Rescue, Inc. (PLSAR) was founded in 2001 recognizing this uniqueness, and the need for a highly skilled and well-disciplined SAR team at Priest Lake, initially. In 2014 at the request of the Bonner County Sheriff, PLSAR agreed to assist the Sheriff with his SAR responsibility for all of Bonner County; establishing detachments in both Sandpoint and Priest Lake.

**PRIMARY MISSION:** To provide an immediate response force of well-trained and properly equipped volunteers to assist persons lost, injured or in distress within Bonner County, and to serve the public welfare in any disaster or emergency, when requested by proper authority.

**NOTE:** PLSAR normally responds as a SAR Task Force, (under the Incident Command System providing its own communications and internal command structure), to assist the Incident Commander as directed. Field operations are normally conducted under the authority, direction, and liability protection of the County Sheriff's Office being assisted, per Idaho State Code.

## **GOALS:**

- ⇒ To develop and maintain a professional, general, and technical level of search and rescue services within Bonner County.
- ⇒ To assist the Bonner County Sheriff's Office with its Search and Rescue responsibilities as defined in Idaho State Code.
- ⇒ To assist the Sheriffs of those surrounding counties, with their SAR responsibilities, upon request for direct or mutual aid.

## **OBJECTIVES:**

- ⇒ To recruit, equip, and train members to a general and technical level of competence in search and rescue disciplines.
- ⇒ To raise funds to provide and maintain for general and technical rescue training and equipment.
- ⇒ To reduce the response time of SAR volunteers operating in Bonner County.
- ⇒ To improve and strengthen a positive relationship between citizens and businesses with the Bonner County Sheriff's Office.

**GOVERNING BOARD OF DIRECTORS** (All serve w/o compensation.)

Karen Dingerson, (Wildlife Photographer)

Jon Dodge (Outfitter) Deputy Commander-Sandpoint Detachment

Dory Miller (Retired, Legal Secretary) - PLSAR Secretary

Mike Nielsen (Retired, Law Enf. Cmdr.) - PLSAR President & Cmdr

Bill Olmo (Co-Owner, Tamrak Shopping Village) - PLSAR VP & Vice Cmdr

Tom Pell (Retired, USFS) Deputy Commander-Priest Lake Detachment

Peggy Smith (Retired, Motor Sports Dealer)

Gil Tumey (Retired, Boeing)

Ryan Wells (Mgr, Sandpoint Staples)

**MILESTONES IN THE HISTORY OF PRIEST LAKE'S VOLUNTEER SAR TEAM**

**JAN 2001** – Initial Formation Meetings

- ⇒ To consider forming a SAR Team at Priest Lake in order:
  - To provide a SAR capability with a one hour or less response time
  - To improve community relations with BCSO.

**MAR 2001** – Basic SAR Training began and continues monthly. Topics include:

- ⇒ CRP & Basic First Aid, Map & Compass, Crime Scene & Evidence, Firearms & Use of Force, Haz-Mat Awareness, Helicopter Operations, ICS, NIMS & NRP Procedures, Land-Based Search Management, Marine Boat Operations, Radio Communications & Procedures, Rope Rescue, Swift Water Rescue, Winter Wilderness Survival, Wilderness Medicine, and other disciplines.

**JUL 2001** - Priest Lake Chamber of Commerce Grant

- ⇒ The initial grant of \$21,500 was used to purchase communications and navigational equipment. This provided the team with basic communications and navigation capabilities, allowing it to operate independently of any other unit. This has been a key to the Team's successes.

**SEP 2001** – Operational

- ⇒ Priest Lake SAR Team (SAR District-1) successfully completed its first SAR Exercise, and was certified operational by the Bonner County Sheriff's Office.

**MAR 2002** – Priest Lake Search & Rescue incorporated under Idaho and Federal law:

- ⇒ To recruit, train, & equip SAR volunteers to assist law enforcement, and
- ⇒ For charitable IRS 501(c) (3) purposes. (Letter of Determination received.)

**JAN 2014** – PLSAR becomes a countywide asset:

- ⇒ At the request of the Bonner County Sheriff, PLSAR established Detachments in both Sandpoint and Priest Lake, to provide SAR capabilities to all of Bonner County. Both detachments provide mutual aid to each other during missions. In addition, the Team expanded its VHF Radio infrastructure countywide to support this new role. The new radio system utilizes GPS technology to allow Command to know the locations of all field units with constant real-time updates.

**To Present** – The Team conducts regular Basic Training for all members monthly. Technical Search and Rescue capabilities include:

- ⇒ Wilderness and Mountain Navigation & Rescue (all weather – all terrain capable)
- ⇒ Avalanche Rescue
- ⇒ Rope Rescue
- ⇒ Dive Recovery
- ⇒ Swift Water Rescue / Recovery

Members are trained in ICS, NIMS and Haz-Mat. The Team's command element has completed advanced training to allow it to serve as overhead within a Type-III ICS Team. This expands the team's role and capabilities to assist when first responder (Fire, Medical, and Law Enforcement) resources are overwhelmed and/or need additional support, (e.g., airplane/school bus crash, fire, flood, evacuations, or other major incident/disaster, whether man-made or natural.)

Through funding from the Idaho Community Foundation, and Priest Lake Chamber of Commerce Grants, as well as funds earned at the annual Huckleberry Festival, PLSAR has constructed a Field Command Post Trailer. This Trailer has solar and gas generator (10,000 watts) power and radio communications system to facilitate establish forward operating command and control centers for any incident. This CP Trailer with our

trained Overhead Team is available to assist any surrounding jurisdiction on an extended incident.

**The Future** – Contingent on funding and insurance, the team will:

- ⇒ Continue to conduct 3-Day Winter Survival Trainings in conjunction with the USAF SERE School and 36<sup>th</sup> Rescue;
- ⇒ Expand its existing technical rescue capabilities with more tech-trained members in both Detachments;
- ⇒ Develop a technical Back County Rescue Unit (BCRU) with skills similar to those of USAR Team, including Ropes, Full Swift Water Rescue, Ice Rescue, Collapsed Structure, Confined Space, and Trench Rescue.

**SUMMARY OF PRIEST LAKE'S SEARCH & RESCUE TEAM MISSIONS:**

Since becoming operational in September of 2001, the team has been directly involved in assisting numerous lost and/or injured persons, and with the recovery of several deceased subjects. Most have been in the Priest Lake area; however, the team has also assisted other SAR Districts at the request of BCSO. All operations and training are conducted under the authority and protection of the Bonner County Sheriff.

**2001**

**15 SEP 2001** – Assisted Priest Lake Ambulance with the rescue of two injured hikers on Binarch Creek.

**23 OCT 2001** – Dispatched to Clark Fork to assist Bonner County Sheriff with search for two missing hunters. Hunters walked out on their own prior to being located by SAR.

**27 OCT 2001** - Assisted the Priest Lake Ambulance with nighttime search and rescue of a severely injured hiker at Lion Head.

**6-7 NOV 2001** – The Ground Search Unit assisted Bonner County Sheriff with nighttime search and recovery of deceased subject south of Priest River near Vay.

**2002**

**1 JAN 2002** – The Snowmobile Unit conducted nighttime search and rescue of three missing snowmobile riders near Lost Peak.

**7 FEB 2002** – The Snowmobile Unit assisted Priest Lake Ambulance with recovery of injured snowmobile rider near Echo Bowl.

**7 APR 2002** – The Snowmobile Unit conducted nighttime search and rescue of two snowmobile riders near Indian Creek.

**17 JULY 2002** – The Ground Search Unit conducted search and rescue of three bicyclists who became lost, overheated and out of water near Gleason Meadow (West of Hwy 57).

## 2003

**14 FEB 2003** – The Snowmobile Unit conducted nighttime search and rescue of two subjects who were stranded in a pickup on a snowmobile trail near mile 29.5 Route 1, north of Upper Priest Lake.

**22 FEB 2003** – The Snowmobile Unit assisted with rescue of three and recovery of one deceased snowmobile riders caught in an avalanche near Echo Bowl. Also, assisted with a separate snowmobile back injury accident at nearly the same time.

**2 MAR 2003** – The Snowmobile Unit conducted a nighttime Search and Rescue of a stranded motorist on USFS Road 1019 near the Washington border.

**30 MAY 2003** – The Ground Search Unit conducted a search and rescue of a 2-year-old girl who had wandered off from her home near Pinto Point. She was found approximately ½ mile from her home, climbing a hill.

**03 JUNE 2003** – The Ground Search Unit conducted a search and recovery of a tractor driver who drowned while attempting to cross Granite Creek.

**26 JULY – 4 AUG 2003** – Provided more than 2,500 hours of security for the Hunt Creek Fire at three roadblocks, ICP, Base Camp, and Heli-base. The Team demonstrated its ability to operate 24 hours a day for extended (10 days) periods.

**8 OCT 2003** – Dispatched to assist a man stuck on the cliffs at Lion Head after dark. Subject walked out as team arrived.

**20 NOV 2003** – The Ground Search Unit conducted a nighttime recovery of the deceased pilot from a logging helicopter crash on a mountain near Bear Creek.

**28 NOV 2003** – The Snowmobile Unit conducted a nighttime search and transport of nine overdue/stranded hunters via snowmobile from the Trapper Creek area.

**28 DEC 2003** – The Snowmobile Unit assisted in the nighttime search and rescue of two missing snowboarders from Schweitzer Mountain Ski Resort.

## 2004

**14 FEB 04** – The Snowmobile Unit assisted Priest Lake Ambulance with the nighttime recovery and transport of two injured snowmobile riders in the Two Mouth drainage.

**7 MAR 04** – The Snowmobile Unit conducted a nighttime search and rescue of a lost snowboarder from Schweitzer Mountain.

**15 MAY 04** – Assisted Priest Lake Ambulance/EMTs with the search and rescue of four kayakers on Priest River below Outlet Dam.

**24 JUN 04** – Assisted Priest Lake Ambulance/EMTs by conducting a nighttime extrication of a seriously injured fall victim off the Granite Slide Cliffs above Lion Creek.

**31 JUL 04** – The Ground Search Unit searched Eight Mile Island for missing sail boater. Boat found run aground with no one on board. Flew surrounding area on 1 AUG 04, UTL subject. Later used cadaver dogs to locate a body 321' under water, but it was not the subject of this search. **OPEN**

**17 OCT 04** – The ATV Unit conducted night and day search and rescue of an overdue/missing hunter in the Pee Wee Trail System. Hunter was found and transported to his vehicle.

**30 NOV 04** – The Dive Unit assisted BCSO in a search of Lake Pend Oreille for a missing subject. Subject later found near Dover.

## **2005**

**22/23 FEB 05** – The Ground Search Unit conducted an 11-hour nighttime search and rescue of two missing snowmobile riders in the Selkirk Mountains.

**3/4 AUG 05** – The Ground Search and K-9 Unit conducted a search and rescue in conjunction with USFS and Boundary SAR below American Fall to locate a missing trail clearing worker. She was located and returned to her group.

**30 SEP 05** – The Tech-Rescue Unit was dispatched to Hope, Idaho, where they lowered an injured hunter by ropes, more than 1000' down a steep slope, where a USAF Helicopter (36<sup>th</sup> Rescue) hovering overhead extracted him.

## **2006**

**29 JAN 06** - The Snowmobile Unit recovered four crew members from a helicopter that had made a preventive landing (mechanical) in Jack Pine Flats during a training operation.

**11 FEB 06** – The Snowmobile Unit responded to Phoebe Tip to assist with a injured snowmobile rider. Subject was evacuated by helicopter.

**30 JUN 06** – The Dive Unit responded to assist Pend Oreille Sheriff's Office with a night time, river recovery operation. Subject found deceased two weeks later.

**20-21-22 OCT 06** – Ground Search Unit deployed to assist Pend Oreille Sheriff's Office with a search for a missing hunter near Monumental Mountain, WA. Subject was found dead.

**26 NOV 06** – Ground Search Unit located a missing hunter in Blanchard, Idaho and recovered the body.

### **2007**

**3-4 FEB 07** – The Snowmobile Unit assisted an injured snowmobile rider (RON) at Kent Lake and completed his extraction by snowmobile the following day.

**6 FEB 07** – Snowmobile and Ground Units searched a wooded area near Coolin for a missing person. (Subject later found deceased.)

**17 FEB 07** - The Snowmobile Unit located and assisted an injured snowmobile rider lost in fog above Echo Bowl.

**7 JUL 07** – The Rope Rescue Unit assisted PLEMTs and BCEMS with the extraction rescue of a hypothermic patient that had fallen out of a canoe near Binarch Creek, and had to be hoisted up two steep slopes in a litter to the ambulance.

### **2008**

**13 JAN 08** – The Snowmobile Unit located and returned two overdue riders that had mechanical breakdown on Beaver Creek

**20 JAN 08** – The Snowmobile Unit located and returned two riders that had been stuck in deep powder on Camel Prairie.

**28 JAN 08** – The Snowmobile Unit assisted in locating and returning two lost snowboarders that had gone out of bounds on Sand Creek at Schweitzer Ski Resort.

**21 MAR 08** – The Snowmobile Unit responded to assisted five overdue snowmobile riders out of fuel near Lime Creek.

**17 AUG 08** - Assisted the Priest Lake Ambulance/EMTs with the recovery/transport of a female injured on Lakeview Mountain.



## **2009**

**28 FEB 09** – The Snowmobile Unit recovered a deceased snowmobile rider and his snowmobile caught in an avalanche in the Trapper Creek Drainage.

**19 JUL 09** – A Quick Response Team assisted Priest Lake EMTs and Bonner County EMS with the ground extraction of an injured hiker at Lion Head using a single wheel liter.

**19 OCT 09** – A Quick Response Team located and assisted a diabetic hunter lost and disoriented near Mud Gulch.

## **2010**

**13-14 MAR 10** – A Snowmobile Unit Member observed an avalanche occur near McCormick Lake and responded. They located the victim using avalanche beacons, but he was deceased. The Snowmobile Unit returned the following day and recovered the body with the aid of a civilian helicopter.

**15 MAY 10** – A Ground Search Team located and recovered two young men that had fallen into Lion Head Creek and drowned.

**22 JUNE 10** – A Ground Search Team assisted by 36<sup>th</sup> RQF located and recovered an elderly Alzheimer patient in a field off East River Road.

**29 OCT 10** – Ground Search Team on ATV and snowshoes, assisted by K-9 Unit searched the vicinity of the Wigwams for a missing man. The search was suspended due to the depth of snow (30”) and will resume after break-up in 2011.

## **2011**

**26-27 JUN 11** -- Ground Search Team on ATV and vehicles assisted by 36<sup>th</sup> RQF searched for missing hiker in the Chimney Rock area. Searched also by private plane on 27<sup>th</sup> found footprints. Subject was found and brought to CP.

**16-17 JUL 11** – Missing hiker had been climbing either Mt. Ruthann or Chimney Rock. Air search initiated and observations were coordinated with ground units. K-9 team found missing person.

**2-3 AUG 11** – Two 14 year old minors reported missing near Upper Priest River. Both minors were found and in good health.

**28 – AUG 11** -- Continued ground search, assisted by K-9 Unit for the missing person in the vicinity of the Wigwams. Subject was not found.

**22 DEC 11** -- Located and rescued four missing Snowmobilers heading toward Sundance Mountain. Stuck in the snow and started walking out when they were found.

**27 DEC 11** – Rescued a missing grandmother and two grandchildren going to dinner at Sundance Mountain Lodge. Subjects were found with vehicle. Transported out by snowmobile. The subject's truck was stuck with a rear wheel over the bank, after trying to cross a water bar.

### **2012**

**27 MAY 12** – Elderly couple's car slid off 1013, hiking out via USFS Road 302 to HWY 57 for help. Search suspended.

**4-6 JUL 12** – Members in fix-wing aircraft located the raft from a person missing on Priest River below Binarch Creek Rapids. On the third day, Swift Water Rescue members located the body under the water several miles down stream.

**25 JUL 12** – Rescued 2 adults and 4 children stranded on East side of river near 8 Mile rapids.

### **2013**

**7 JAN 13** -- The Snowmobile Unit rescued an overdue rider whose machine was broken down. The person was hypothermic.

**2 FEB 13** – Snowmobile Unit assisted BCEMS with locating and recovering a deceased snowmobiler.

**28 FEB 13** – Rescued a missing snowmobiler near Camels Prairie warming hut. Subject was found and his sled was retrieved.

**18 APR 13** – HRD Dog helped Kootenai County Sheriff's office

**31 MAY 13** – HRD Dog helped Benewah County Sheriff's office

### **2014**

**9 JAN 14** – Rescued a lost snow biker near Mollies North of Priest Lake.

**2 FEB 14** – Snowmobile Unit rescued 7 overdue snowmobile riders in the Lost Peak to Soldier Bowl area.

**6 MAY 14** – Units from Sandpoint and Priest Lake Detachments assisted BCSO with locating and recovering the body of a missing subject near Rapid Lightening Road, north of Sandpoint.

**29 MAY 14** – Priest Lake Detachment searched for an over due dirt bike motorcyclist. Subject returned home during early morning hours, claiming to have been lost.

**21/22 JUNE 14** – Members on foot, ATVs, and trucks, from both the Sandpoint and Priest Lake Detachments, search overnight to find and rescue a missing kayaker who had flipped at Binarch Creek Rapids on the Priest River.

**19/20 SEPT 14** – Members on foot from the Sandpoint and Priest Lake Detachments conducted a four hour night-time trek into the Chimney Rock Basin; traversing the narrow ledge along the north and east face to rescue a mountaineer that had been struck and entrapped by a boulder in the talus field south/east of Chimney Rock. Rescuers freed the patient, rendered aid, built a fire, and assisted the 36<sup>th</sup> Rescue with the helicopter extraction of the patient after daylight.

**25/26 APR 15** – Members on ATVs and UTVs located and aided two elderly motorists who were trying to hike out, after they had become stuck in the snow on IDL Rd #1 north of Priest Lake.

**29 APR 15** – Members using 4x4 trucks located and returned two overdue bear hunters from Camels Prairie.

**19 JUNE 15** – Members assisted in locating and helping PLEMTs to recover a missing and injured parachutist near Soldier Creek.

**29 JUNE 15** – Members responded to assist BCSO with an autistic runaway that was subsequently located and returned to his parents.

**19 JULY 15** – Members and Cadaver K-9s searched for victim near Hope, ID. Three dogs detected scent and GPS coordinates were provide to BCSO who were able to locate the body on 30 JULY.

**27 JULY 15** – Members responded to Lion Head to search for over due hiker. Hiker was found walking out, one day late.

**10 OCT 15** – Members and K-9 units deploy to Round Top Mountain to assist BCSO with search and recovery of a missing third aircraft passenger. Results of the search were turned over to BCSO who confirmed the third passenger was cremated during the intense fuel fire, following the airplane crash.

**10 OCT 15** - While responding to the aircraft crash on same day and location, Members and K-9 units were requested to find a missing hunter on Round Top Mountain. The missing hunter (74 YOA) was located and returned to his wife along with his off road motorcycle.

**07 JUN 16** – Shortly after midnight, an overhead team responded to set up the Sandpoint Command Post and requested 2-Bear Air Helicopter assistance with FLIR to search for two women, who were two days overdue on Scotchman Peak. They were located, hoisted aboard the helicopter, and transported to safety.

**31 JUL 16** – Search Teams were deployed to Lucky Creek, Priest Lake to search for missing huckleberry picker. Her fellow pickers found her safe.

Missions Completed: 74   Persons Assisted: 103   Bodies Recovered: 17

**YOU CAN HELP:** The team is actively seeking new members, specialized technical rescue training, equipment, and grant donations. Priest Lake Search & Rescue, Inc., is a not-for-profit corporation with IRS 501(c)(3) status under IRS Code Section 170, organized for charitable purposes. The team is supported entirely by public grants and donations; it receives no property tax funding. For additional information contact the team leader, Mike Nielsen at (208) 946-7664 or e-mail: [tacmike@gmail.com](mailto:tacmike@gmail.com)