

PLSAR winter training a success

By ROSE SAUER
Staff writer

PRIEST LAKE — Priest Lake Search and Rescue, Inc. (PLSAR) hosted the first Inland Northwest Search and Rescue Conference at the Inn at Priest Lake Jan. 25. More than 70 volunteers from Montana, Idaho and Washington attended the event.

According to PLSAR president Mike Nielsen, "Several significant agreements were reached during the conference for conducting and coordinating search operations."

Following the conference, PLSAR hosted 53 search and rescue volunteers from several units for three days of winter survival training and exercises near Camals Prairie, Priest Lake. Participants were trained by eight United States Survival Specialists winter survival skills, such as fire building, signaling techniques, and sheltering with emphasis on snow caves in four to five feet of snow.

Several of the participants, including Bonner County Undersheriff Charlie Dennis, slept in snow caves Saturday night that they had built earlier

in the day. Following three avalanche exercise scenarios on Sunday, PLSAR demobilized all personnel and equipment back to Search Control in Coolin.

"I was glad we had the participation we had," said PLSAR team leader Ted Tisdell. "Everyone enjoyed it and learned something, and that was our intent."

Although this year's training was similar to that of years past, the goals of the training were slightly different. According to Nielsen, the Federal Government has adapted a standardized set of procedures for all rescue teams called the Incident Command System (ICS), designed to offer a scalable response to incidents of any magnitude.

Using ICS, PLSAR effectively demonstrated the ability to mobilize personnel and equipment 15 miles into the wilderness, as well as to establish and operate a base camp for three days.

"This weekend was very successful. There were no injuries and lots of good training," said Mike Nielsen. "It was a big test for our team. I am really

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proud of my team leaders."

"This year's Winter Training Exercise was the most advanced and difficult challenge PLSAR has conducted to date. All training objectives were met or exceeded," said Nielsen.

A special thank you to the USAF 336 Training Group, which provided eight survival instructors, and the 36th Rescue Flight Helicopter and Crew of three for making this training possible. All of the USAF personnel were from Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane. Also, to Boundary NMP Snow Cat Services and Bonner County Sandpoint SAR Team for volunteering their services and providing transportation to and from the base camp.

PLSAR is always looking for volunteers who want to become a part of this organization. "We have different roles for all different kinds of people, depending on their interests," said Nielsen. PLSAR provides training for and supports a ropes rescue team, white water rescue, a dive team as well as a snowmobile team. For more info contact PLSAR president Mike Nielsen at 443-6603.



—Courtesy Photo

Priest River's, Scott and Olivia Low, are shown building a fire.