

SAR team rides waves



—Photo by SUZY STERNER

Members of the Priest Lake SAR completed a successful swift water rescue exercise in the Priest River near Green Owl Tavern on June 29.

By SUZY STERNER
Staff Writer

PRIEST RIVER - Members of Priest Lake Search and Rescue (SAR) geared up for a training session on swift water rescue techniques June 29 at Priest River.

Donned in a wet suit and life jacket complete with flotation

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—Photo by SUZY STERNER

Rafters drift down the Priest River as SAR team members train for swift water rescue.

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and escape devices, Roger Lindsey, lead instructor, set up a variety of scenarios for team members to experience.

The morning session focused on conscious, unconscious and injured victims stranded in swift water.

"In the afternoon we set up a scenario where a victim was stranded on an island," Lindsey said. "A zip line was attached to both sides of the river so we could transfer people and equipment back and forth."

Lindsey said rescuers must take advantage of every aspect of the landscape and equipment they have during a rescue.

"We use the current to reach and intersect the victim," he said as team members Ron Howell and Margy Hall successfully demonstrated the technique. "If a rescuer doesn't use the current correctly, a victim could be missed or the rescuer will work harder than necessary."

Since its inception in January 2001, SAR's 65 members have about 10,000 hours of training under their belts. Each month they conduct a training event on a variety of topics, including water rescue, first aid, CPR, maps and GPS. Through grants and community donations, members are also sent to train with experts in specific fields.

"A team member who is sent out to train with an expert, comes back and instructs the rest of the group," said Mike Nielsen, team leader. "The group of 10 here today is training to become a swift water technical rescue team."

Safety is always first whether the team of volunteers is responding to an actual emergency, or conducting a

monthly training session.

"It is a state statute that everyone have first aid and CPR training," Nielsen said.

"We also have a safety officer on shore and someone running a safety kayak during water training events."

Nielsen, a former law enforcement officer, enjoys working with volunteers. He said SAR is a manpower reserve for the area and responds when emergency services are needed.

"We heard the call and we answered it. We've been able to help about 20 people since our group went operational in September of 2001."

Goals for the future include enough funding to pay an instructor to train a low and high angle terrain technical

team.

"Right now, we don't have the technical expertise to make those rescues," he said.

The group would also like to hold classes to educate the public on safely enjoying summer and winter recreational activities.

"Dressing properly for weather conditions, abstaining from alcohol consumption and wearing a life jacket will help avoid potential problems," Lindsey said.