

Winter survival training begins this weekend for over 60 participants

Remote location near Whitetail Butte picked for exercise

By BRENT CLARK
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COOLIN — If you've ever been successful in starting a fire with 4 feet of snow on the ground and branches that have been soaked by the effects of continual snow, rain and wind for several months, then you might want to join up with the Priest Lake Search and Rescue (PLSR) team to show off your fire-starter skills.

This activity and others will be the center of focus for various agencies that are attending the winter survival course this weekend. It's too

late to sign up now to join these elite emergency responders, but they will be taking winter living to a new extreme.

This weekend, the PLSR, 36th Rescue Squadron and 335 Survival School from Fairchild Air Force Base, and members of the Bonner County EMS, Bonner County Sheriff's Office SWAT team, Bonner County Search and Rescue, Idaho Fish and Game, Spokane Mountaineers, and Priest Lake EMTs plan to convene near Coolin to bring their various disciplines and knowledge to the table for the two-day course and overnight campout.

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The members of the various agencies will be trained on Saturday afternoon in the finer points of winter survival. Topics include:

- Cold weather exposure - how to prevent and treat
- Appropriate clothing - choosing and keeping dry
- Food and water procurement
- Emergency shelter - making or finding
- Environmental hazards - protecting yourself from snow, wind, rain, terrain, and ava-

lanche hazards

- Fire starting
- Self-rescue - saving yourself
- Wilderness medical and rescue.

"We will be putting the skills we learned on Saturday to work on Sunday," said Bob Abbott, public information officer for the Priest Lake Search and Rescue Winter Survival Training course. "I'm looking forward to this. It's going to be big fun."

The exercise will be implementing the Incident Command System and also employing the National Incident Management

System that has been mandated by FEMA for all local, county, state and federal emergency responders.

"This is so that everyone the everyone is on the same page and works from the same template," said Abbott.

On Sunday, the search and rescue exercise will include a scenario that involves two snowmobiles that have collided in a head-on and the operators need medical treatment.

The participants will then locate and make an insertion point for a Fairchild helicopter that is planned to arrive, but will be based on the current

weather conditions to prevent jeopardizing the safety of the U.S. Air Force pilot and helicopter crew.

All participants attending the training will need to go to the Coolin BCSO substation to sign in on Saturday at 6 a.m. They will then be transported to the remote location with their pack, sleeping bag, and tent in tow.

Participants are to pack only what they will need, but they should also bring their GPS, snow shovel, probe, and avalanche beacon if available for the training.