



Badlands Search & Rescue Service

"In Omnia Paratus"

SAR FACT SHEET

Definition of a Search and Rescue (SAR) Incident: The search for; possible medical care of; and evacuation of missing, lost, injured, deceased, or stranded person(s) located in a place that is not commonly accessible by highway vehicles or more standard emergency services. (Please note SAR in this context does NOT include "urban SAR" or collapsed structures.)

Agency Having Jurisdiction / Authority: The State of North Dakota has placed the duty to coordinate search and rescue on the chief law enforcement officer of each political subdivision. NDCC 37-17.1-28. Typically, this falls to the sheriff or agency having jurisdiction (AHJ). This is a long-standing unfunded mandate. Each sheriff coordinates SAR in their own unique way. Most counties have no SAR team, some (8) have dive rescue/recovery and/or snowmobile teams (2). Some delegate almost all this duty to the non-paid professionals; others combine fire and EMS to do the best they can as they are the only ones willing or available. Still, there are simply too many unknowns and areas for improvement in initial SAR response & missing person procedures, training, readiness, and abilities at the present time in North Dakota.

Collaboration With Other Entities: SAR teams work for sheriffs/law enforcement (agencies having jurisdiction) and with fire districts, ambulance services, and other emergency responders. If a SAR incident(s) exceeds the capacity of a county, NDDES is usually called to secure SAR resources from across the state, from outside the state, and to respond in a mutual aid capacity. If an incident becomes a state-declared disaster, the NDDES works to ensure the proper SAR resources are available. SAR teams can work closely with a host of State of North Dakota departments/agencies, the North Dakota National Guard, the Civil Air Patrol, the USFS, the NPS, and a great number of other for-profit and nonprofit entities, and local agencies, not to mention other first responders and the health care systems.

Non-Paid Professionals: The vast majority of SAR in the United States is performed by non-paid professionals. In North Dakota SAR members are always on call and must be experienced in the backcountry environments of our region; rock climbers, kayakers, snowshoers, mountain bikers, hikers, hunters, etc. These recreationalists are stewards of both our environment as well as the people who enjoy these wild places. SAR members each end up spending thousands of dollars out of pocket each year for personal equipment, for gas, and even lost wages when responding to SAR incidents and training.

No Charge For Rescue: There is a strong history and ethic in SAR to provide services free of charge. The 2018 United State SAR Supplement to the International SAR manual strongly discourages charging for SAR. There are many instances of individuals fearing a bill and attempting to self-rescue. This often causes more harm to themselves or others trying to help. There are numerous examples of people delaying a call for help because they fear a bill. This delay often creates more dangerous conditions for the SAR teams. Charging for SAR in Europe has been shown to increase the number of calls and may create a "duty to rescue"; thus stressing the SAR system further and increasing the risk to those involved.

Consider Funding Sources: One example that could be studied for North Dakota is that of the Colorado Search and Rescue Fund (C.R.S. § 33-1-112.5) (SAR Fund). Colorado formed the first statewide SAR Fund to help offset costs incurred by sheriffs for search and rescue. The SAR Fund is funded by mandatory fees on certain sportsmen's licenses and the voluntary Colorado Outdoor Recreation Search and Rescue Card. The fees were statutorily set at 25¢ per license in the 1980s and have not changed. This fund is not insurance to individuals but a fund to be used by sheriffs to reimburse costs associated with SAR or for funds for SAR training or SAR equipment. The SAR Fund hovers around \$400,000 annually. Some of the funds go to reimbursement for direct costs but the large majority goes for equipment and training for future SAR incidents. Every year the requests far exceed the funds available.

Funding and Governance. SAR teams are mostly self-governed 501(c)3 organizations, often with an internal board of directors. Most teams are self-funded through direct fundraising, grants, and donations. A few SAR teams receive funds from their county, others are forced to ask their members to pay membership fees or participate in various bake-sale-type events to keep their teams operating. Fire departments have historically handled SAR incidents as they have been the largest number of personnel, but many have realized that their taxpayers expect fire resources to be available for traditional fire services such as structure fires and motor vehicle crashes. Fire departments have learned that they can't afford the large number of people, equipment, and training necessary to execute successful SAR incidents while maintaining adequate "in town" staffing, readiness, and coverage expect of them.

Advances in SAR: SAR teams are doing their best to exploit new technologies and Badlands SAR and SARVAND are fortunate to have some extremely dedicated non-paid professional SAR members who ensure that North Dakota could stay at the forefront of SAR techniques. The United States Air Force is working to provide better techniques to search for cell phones that are outside of coverage areas, airborne UAVs and submarine ROVs (drones) are commonly being utilized by SAR teams. The Civil Air Patrol has cellular forensics teams and technology that can be utilized with very fruitful results for SAR incidents as well as aircraft available through request of the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center (AFRCC).

Challenges to SAR: As the number of SAR incidents increases, SAR teams, like all sectors of volunteer emergency services across the country, are reporting an aging of their membership with fewer younger people applying or staying for long terms. Retention of members is becoming concerning. Attracting new dedicated members seems to be growing more difficult. There are no individual heroes, very little fame, no fortune in SAR, and a very lengthy initial training period. It is a full-time effort to find dedicated community-minded responders, with a great deal of free time, who have the ability to deal with the psychological challenges (stress injuries), and the physically hard and dangerous work. These non-paid professionals must have the skills and experience necessary to be safe in the North Dakota outdoors while at the same time are humble enough to put his or her team first. With the increase in cell phone coverage and satellite communication devices, recreationalists are calling for help sooner and expecting rapid service. Many of these calls are appropriate, some are simply a strain on the system.

Document Purpose: Now, with some understanding of SAR and with the recognition that North Dakota's growing population is putting pressure on public lands you can understand that SAR is and will be under similar pressure. We support sustainable outdoor recreation, a healthy environment, and believe we are a stakeholder in the North Dakota outdoor recreation economy. SAR, in some sense, is the insurance policy or safety net upon which many outdoor industries and communities rely. SAR serves the residents; the communities; the outdoor industries; the tourists; and, in a very important way, preserves the unique North Dakota way of life. Our goal is to collaboratively engineer a better and more sustainable future for SAR in North Dakota.

As the current leaders of SAR statewide, we see what is occurring across the state and are concerned about the lack of a much needed SAR system statewide. SARVAND is seeking help to develop a new and possibly innovative SAR model. Our members have ideas, but SAR cannot do this alone. Like much of the outdoor recreation industry, SAR is interwoven with many different facets of North Dakota. In order to effectively evolve, SAR via SARVAND needs to be involved in the appropriate conversations and at the table with various industries, non-profits, and many levels of government. SARVAND believes that it is in North Dakota's best interest to have strong and stable SAR teams ready and able to respond for the current and future generations no matter where they may be needed in the state.