

**FC C1C4CWASATCH-CACHE NATIONAL FOREST**  
**FC C1C4CSearch and Rescue Policy**

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**FC C1C2CBERNIE WEINGARDT, Forest Supervisor**

**FC C1C2CMarch 1997**

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**FC C1C2CPurpose and Scope**

This document establishes guidelines for search, rescue, and emergency medical Search and Rescue (SAR) Operations on the Wasatch-Cache National Forest. The Sheriff's Department of each County has the responsibility for search, rescue, and emergency medical activities within that County. The Forest Service role is one of cooperation and support. In some cases, the State Emergency Services Office may need to be involved (e.g., floods, landslides, chemical spills, earthquake, etc.).

In those cases where immediate action is necessary, the Forest Service will assume a lead role and activate SAR Operations pending Sheriff's Department involvement to prevent further danger, injury, suffering, or death. This lead role will be interim in nature, to be ended as soon as the Sheriff's Department can effectively take command.

More detailed procedures for implementing SAR Operations on each Ranger District are provided in documents that are subordinate to this policy. These documents are:

- 1.Ranger District Search and Rescue Procedures. These procedures outline to employees what their responsibilities and actions must be in search and rescue. They should include general SAR instructions for Forest employees, immediate actions to be taken when notified of a SAR situation, responsibilities of the District liaison, and lists of key individuals and resources available. Seasonal and permanent employees will need training each year on these procedures.
- 2.Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between Sheriffs' Departments and the Wasatch-Cache National Forest. MOU's are primarily intended to clarify responsibilities and liabilities for use of shared equipment in search and rescue operations for each District/County.
- 3.Cooperative Agreements on Law Enforcement between the Wasatch-Cache National Forest and local law enforcement agencies define working relationships and cost sharing responsibilities.

**FC C1C2CDefinitions for the Purposes of this Document**

- 1.The term "Sheriff's Department" refers to the elected Sheriff and Sheriff's Department Employees.
- 2.The term "Forest Service" refers to the USDA National Forest(s) and Ranger District(s) employees involved.
- 3.The term "SAR Operation" refers to any search, rescue, or emergency medical search and rescue situation occurring under the scope of this document.
- 4.The term "Emergency" refers to any situation where delay will result in unnecessary danger to, further injury of, unnecessary suffering by or death of a person.

5. The term "Liaison" refers to the Forest Service liaison assigned to the Sheriff's Department Incident Command Team (ICS) during a SAR operation.

### **FC C1C2CResponsibilities in Sheriff's Department Initiated SAR Operations**

In Sheriff's Department initiated SAR Operations, the Sheriff's Department will notify the Forest Service as soon as possible whenever SAR Operations occur on National Forest Lands.

IT IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT THAT NOTIFICATION IS MADE TO THE FOREST SERVICE WHEN THERE IS A SAR OPERATION WITHIN A WILDERNESS.

The Sheriff's Department may request logistical assistance from the Forest Service in terms of personnel, equipment and supplies if necessary when a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) exists between the Ranger District(s) and the Sheriff's Department. This assistance can include providing communication through the Forest Service communications system, furnishing qualified personnel and experienced guide service, providing transportation equipment, providing pack stock, furnishing maps aerial photos, and other, all as available.

The Sheriff's Department is responsible for media information releases, determining areas of limited access, logistical support (including air SAR Operations), and for the safety of all personnel involved. Forest Service employees and volunteers may only fly in helicopters and fixed wing aircraft approved by the US Department of Agriculture.

The Forest Service will have individual Districts initiate, as a minimum, a yearly coordination meeting with the Sheriff's Department, preferably in the spring before heavy visitor use of National Forest System Lands.

The Forest Service will have individual Districts designate a person to act as the Liaison between the Forest Service and the Sheriff's Department during SAR Operations. The Liasons role will be to assure the safety of Forest Service employees involved, provide requested logistical assistance to the Sheriff, and insure that SAR Operations comply with Forest Service policy.

### **FC C1C2CResponsibilities in Forest Service Initiated SAR Operations**

In Forest Service initiated SAR Operations, the Forest Service will assume an interim leadership role until the Sheriff's Department can assume the primary leadership role.

The Forest Service will notify the appropriate Sheriff's Department of any SAR Operation as soon as possible.

The Sheriff's Department will assume the primary lead role and the Forest Service will relinquish its interim role for any SAR Operation as soon as it is possible for the Sheriff's Department to take command effectively.

### **FC C1C2CNon-Wilderness SAR Operations**

The Wasatch-Cache National Forest has designated areas as non-motorized in its Land and Resource Management Plan (1985), and Travel Management Plans (Evanston, Kamas, Mountain View, 1988; Ogden, Logan, 1991). To reduce resource damage, the Sheriff's motorized vehicle SAR Operations will conform to the Forest and District travel planning direction. If exceptions to plan access are needed, Sheriffs' Departments will contact the appropriate District Ranger or Designee. Helicopters and over the snow machines will be allowed without prior notification or approval in non-wilderness.

## **FC C1C2C Wilderness SAR Operations**

As defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964, wilderness "in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." This definition is important as it establishes the basis for management actions in designated wildernesses.

Wilderness is must be managed to prevent degradation. The non-degradation principle seeks to maintain each wilderness in at least as a wild condition as it was at the time of classification. The non-degradation policy assures wilderness character is maintained.

Wilderness is managed to protect certain values: the user's experience, natural ecological processes, and a setting for scientific research. Frequently, this means we must manage the people, both individual users and other agencies that traverse, study, and use the wilderness resource.

The Forest Service encourages and supports strong local and state leadership in search, rescue, and emergency medical SAR Operations. Wasatch-Cache field personnel must be responsive to the public needs, particularly the protection of life and property. The Forest Supervisor (or Deputy Forest Supervisor) may approve the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport in Wilderness for emergencies "where the situation involves an inescapable urgency and temporary need for speed beyond that available by primitive means" (Forest Service Manual, 2326.1). On the Wasatch-Cache the Forest Supervisor has decided that motorized and mechanical access will be approved following the guidelines in Attachments 2 and 3. District Rangers and designated acting District Rangers may implement this Forest Supervisor's decision using the guidelines in Attachments 2 and 3.

This document provides decisions on guidelines for the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport. Usually a local manager does not have all the facts at hand when implementation of a rescue is necessary. It is better to err on the side of safety than to risk unnecessary danger to rescuers, or further injury or death to victims. The risk to rescuers of motorized/mechanical transport must also be carefully considered, eg., "Is the use of a helicopter a "safe" way to conduct this operation?"

To avoid the loss of time and what could be embarrassing public relations problems, the Forest Service must avoid a bureaucratic approach to securing approvals in emergencies. A most important factor is communication. The Forest Service will educate its employees to communicate expeditiously to obtain necessary approvals for conducting rescue operations.

Forest Service employees will also communicate externally about what wilderness is, how it should be utilized, and what activities are appropriate during SAR Operations in wilderness. This should be done at annual coordination meetings between the Forest Service and the Sheriff's Department.

## **FC C1C2C Wilderness SAR Operations Guidelines**

1. Contact should be made to the Forest Service or Sheriff's Department by either party as soon as possible when a SAR Operation is imminent or already going on.
2. The appropriate Forest Service Special Agent or Law Enforcement Officer should receive copies of reports from Sheriff's Departments regarding serious injuries or deaths on the National Forest.

3. The Forest Service must be notified as soon as possible for any search and rescue in a wilderness. Specific approval must be given for use of motorized and mechanical equipment within wilderness, (See Attachments.)
4. As a rule, no mechanical or motorized equipment is allowed in wilderness which includes helicopter use to land or fly low in the wilderness. Exceptions are made for life threatening conditions or death. These can be determined on a case by case basis by the Forest Supervisor or Deputy Forest Supervisor, or by District Rangers and designated acting District Rangers using the implementation guidelines developed by the Forest Supervisor in Attachments 2 and 3. In a case where a District Ranger (or designated acting District Ranger) implements a motorized access in wilderness, using the guidelines in this document, that implementation is considered a Forest Supervisor's decision based on the prior decision to authorize access contained in this document. Where motorized equipment must be used, the Forest Service and Sheriff's Department should be sensitive to potential impacts on natural resources and recreational experiences, BUT should err on the side of safety for employees, rescuers, and victims.
5. In all cases, the preferred mode of travel is by horseback or foot.
6. When possible, SAR Operations should be as unobtrusive as possible to minimize any potential degradation of the resource or the visitor's experience or both. In some cases, it may be useful for the District Ranger to place a Forest Service employee at the location of the SAR operation to inform the general public about the situation and why non-primitive methods in use.

**Attachment 1**

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RM5

**Approval Contacts for Use of Motorized and Mechanical Equipment**  
for Search and Rescue within Wilderness by County  
(3/97)

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**Name Office Work Telephone**

**Home Telephone**

**Jurisdiction**

Bernie Weingardt Supervisor's Office

(801) 524-3506

(801) 655-9892

Forest-wide

Pam Gardiner Supervisor's Office

(801) 524-6501

(801) 274-2296

Forest-Wide

Mike Sieg Salt Lake Ranger District

(801) 943-1794

(801) 944-9410

Salt Lake, Morgan, Davis,  
and Tooele Counties

Brian Ferebee Kamas Ranger District

(801) 783-4338

(801) 476-0533

Summit, Wasatch, and  
Duchesne Counties

Steve Ryberg Evanston/Mtn. View Dists.

(307) 789-3194

(307) 789-7610

Summit (UT) & Uinta  
Cos. (WY)

Ruth Monahan Ogden Ranger District

(801) 625-5112

(801) 745-1031

Box Elder, Weber, Rich,  
Cache, and Morgan  
Counties

Liz Schuppert Logan Ranger District

(801) 753-2772

(801) 752-0808 (Temp)

Cache, Rich, Box Elder  
Counties

## **Attachment 2**

### **Approval Guidelines for Use of Mechanical and Motorized Equipment for SAR Operations within Wilderness. (6-93)**

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This pertains only to those items requiring Forest Service approval, i.e., air drops, low elevation air search, and the landing of aircraft in wilderness, or the use of motorized or mechanical equipment in the wilderness. Over-flights are not an approval item, when they are above the FAA 2,000 feet advisory, but low elevation over-flight (aerial search) criteria should be essentially the same as landing criteria.

#### **Always Approve**

- 1.The search for those persons (young children, elderly persons, developmentally disabled persons, handicapped persons, etc.) who by virtue of their age, physical condition, mental condition, health or mental ability are in a life threatening situation and may be at extreme risk to serious injury or death because they cannot take care of themselves and/or make the rational decisions in the way that could be expected of a healthy adults.
- 2.There is good reason to believe the lost person will be placed in a life threatening situation as a result of a predicted adverse change in the weather, e.g., person was lightly dressed and snow storm is predicted.
- 3.The only potential rescuers are not physically capable of accomplishing the search without motorized or mechanical equipment.
- 4.When there is serious doubt concerning whether or not the situation is life threatening.

#### **Consider approving**

- 1.A close relative has died and the family has requested the person be located so they can perform a necessary function within uncontrollable time constraints.
- 2.When there is an external situation requiring immediate location of a person within the wilderness, e.g., immediate relative is in a critical medical situation.

#### **Never Approve**

- 1.There does not appear to be any real indications that the person is in a life threatening situation, e.g., person in good health, dressed for the situation, is slightly overdue.
- 2.Outside request is made to locate a person for non-critical external reasons, e.g., attend funeral of a friend, to make financial decisions, to see if a person is okay.

3. The specific requested method will result in serious physical impact to the wilderness and there are alternate methods that accomplish the objectives of the search without the impacts.

**Attachment 3****Approval Guidelines for Use of Motorized and Mechanical Equipment  
for Rescue/Medical Evacuation within Wilderness.****(6-93)**

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**Always Approve**

- 1.The rescue and/or evacuation of persons with symptoms of life threatening conditions: breathing or airway problems, serious bleeding, lack of circulation to limbs, mental confusion, paralysis of limbs or body, obvious broken bones, etc.
- 2.Whenever there is reasonable doubt as to whether or not the person's injury, condition or situation is life threatening.

**Usually Approve**

- 1.Injury is not life threatening, but delay in rescue or rescue transportation by hand litter or stock may result in additional injury or serious complications resulting from the initial injury, (e.g. a broken bone where the tissue damage resulting from the primitive transportation would cause or increase internal bleeding or a serious cut from a source with high potential for infection when the person is several days travel from a trailhead).
- 2.Injury is not life threatening but it is serious and the present and/or predicted weather would likely cause delays in travel that would make the injury life threatening.
- 3.Where the topography or footing is so hazardous that it will expose the injured person or the rescue team to a very high probability of additional or new serious injury (approval here might depend on the skill or experience of the rescue team).

**Consider Approving**

- 1.Removal of deceased persons where conditions may present risk to rescuers.
- 2.Removal of deceased persons when pack animals or litters are not available or when their use would be inefficient due to the evacuation distance or when their use presents hazards to the rescuers. We need to be sensitive to the grief of family members and friends, but pack animals and wheeled litters when available are effective ways to evacuate deceased persons and much less intrusive on the wilderness resource.

**Never Approve**

- 1.When the injury is not life threatening and the person can transport him or herself or be transported by non-motorized or non-mechanical means to the nearest logical point of rescue, e.g., simple fracture of arm, sprained wrist.

