

# VERMONT SEARCH AND RESCUE COUNCIL

## 2020 SEARCH AND RESCUE REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

### MISSION STATISTICS

In 2020 the Vermont Department of Public Safety was notified of 88 incidents meeting the definition of “search and rescue” as per Title 20: Chapter 112, Subchapter 002, § 1841. This is down somewhat from 2019 (97) and 2018 (110).

We continue to break down SAR team activity into two categories – incidents where at least one member of the VSP SAR team responded to the scene to help direct operations, and incidents where there was a report of somebody lost or missing but there was no SAR team response (“notify/monitor”). These latter calls all required screening and evaluation by VSP, but may have been handled by local resources, quickly resolved during the initial investigation phase, or determined not to warrant a response.

VSP SAR Responses: 21 (24 in 2019, 36 in 2018)

VSP SAR Notify/Monitor: 67 (73 in 2019, 74 in 2018)

Vermont had several multi-operational period search & rescue responses in 2020:

-3/7, Bolton.

A skier was reported to have not returned from a day of skiing at Bolton Valley and his car was found in the parking lot after dark. After an all-night search he was located the next day on a VAST trail in Stowe in good condition.

-5/1, Reading.

An elderly woman left a residence to walk to town and never returned. An extensive search involving 8 different agencies resulted in locating her the following day with no injuries.

-6/16, Sunderland.

A hiker on a remote section of the Long Trail suffered a medical emergency. Multiple agencies were involved in the rescue effort, which was ultimately accomplished with VSP requesting and coordinating assisting from New York State Police who evacuated the subject by helicopter.

-11/22, Woodford.

A hunter did not return at the end of the day and was reported missing. Searchers were out all night and he was located by a Game Warden the next morning as he was on his way out on a woods road.

Total calls by type of incident were as follows:

<b>SUBJECT CATEGORY</b>	<b># TEAM RESPONSE</b>	<b># NOTIFY/MONITOR</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
HIKING	5	31	36
SKIING	2	13	15
WANDERING	7	5	12
OTHER/UNCLASSIFIED	3	7	10
HUNTING/FISHING	2	4	6
RUNAWAY		3	3
WATER/BOATING		3	3
VEHICLE/ATV	1		1
SNOWMOBILE	1		1
DESPONDENT		1	1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>88</b>

## OUTREACH & EDUCATION

Outreach and education continues to be a focus of the SAR Coordinator's time, however many activities had to be scaled back this year due to COVID19 restrictions on in-person gatherings.

The most significant accomplishment was the creation of an online 'Vermont Basic Search and Rescue' (BASAR) course. This was modeled on a program that is in use in Maine, but customized to meet Vermont's needs. The intent is that people who complete the course will have met the competencies established by this Council for basic search and rescue training for the VSP SAR team. Encouraging others outside VSP to complete the course will help to standardize training and expectations for SAR responders statewide. As of 12/31 97 people have registered for the course and 35 have completed it. Some volunteer teams have decided to adopt this curriculum as required base level training for their members.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

Introduction to search and rescue training is required of all newly certified law enforcement officers in Vermont. The SAR coordinator continues to present this class on a regular basis.

## SAR DATABASE

The State has historically used 'DisasterLan' to track qualified search and rescue resources, however VEM is no longer using that software. The database is currently being maintained manually by the SAR coordinator and is kept current and distributed to the appropriate VSP SAR team leaders for their use when requesting qualified resources and making notifications as required by statute.

## VERMONT STATE POLICE SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAM

Lt. Anthony French remains as the commander of the VSP SAR team.

6 team members left in 2020 and 6 new members were added to the team in July. Their initial training has been completed and they are able to respond to callouts.

Training in 2020 focused on practicing and improving core skills such as land navigation, search techniques, rescue and first aid, and use of snowmobiles and UTVs. Due to COVID several trainings had to be held in smaller groups or even individually by working on improving familiarity with Vermont's backcountry, land navigation and documenting search areas. Unfortunately the statewide joint SAR training in September had to be cancelled due to COVID.

The team took delivery on a UTV and trailer (Homeland Security Grant) which will be housed in Westminster, This now gives the team better coverage in Vermont (Middlesex, Royalton, Westminster) with this equipment.

## SAR COUNCIL

We had two changes in Council membership in 2020. Fish & Wildlife representative Major George Scribner was replaced on his retirement by Major Justin Stedman. Peg Doheny from Jay Peak Ski Patrol also retired and Tait Germon from Killington was appointed to take her place in December.

### SEARCH AND RESCUE PARTNERS

Much of the on the ground SAR work in Vermont is done by volunteer groups and other professional responders and it is important to acknowledge their contributions. Many local EMS, Fire Departments and Ski Patrols have received specialized training and are valuable resources. Several of these have adopted the new BASAR class as required for their members. VSP continues to also work closely with State and Federal partners. A multi year project by the SAR Coordinator to produce SAR specific maps for use by first responders was completed in 2020 and those are in the process of being distributed to many of these partners.

### UAS IMPLEMENTATION

Vermont State Police now has a robust UAS (drone) program in place. 4 SAR team members are pilots and have ready access to the equipment if needed for search and rescue. The team continues to train, including a 3 day SAR specific training held this fall in Windsor. Several SAR missions have been flown, though no 'finds' have been made yet.

### PREVENTATIVE SAR

An important component of search and rescue is making efforts to prevent issues from arising the first place. There was an increased emphasis in this area this year with concerns about increasing outdoor use during COVID. The SAR Coordinator worked closely with the Green Mtn. Club, Vt. Forests, Parks and Recreation and the US Forest Service to present consistent safety messaging.

### SUMMARY

The number of responses to lost and missing persons in Vermont's backcountry continues to be relatively consistent from year to year, though it was a bit surprising numbers were down slightly this year. Statistics indicated that outdoor usage was up, and some of our neighboring states did see an uptick in backcountry SAR activity. It is difficult to quantify why we were down slightly in Vermont. We are hopeful that perhaps some of our proactive preventative SAR efforts are paying off.

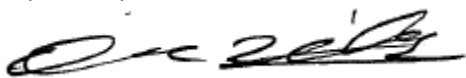
Communication, cooperation and coordination between all of the various SAR partners around the state appears to be excellent.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION

No recommendations.

This report was reviewed and approved by the Search and Rescue Council at its meeting on January 26, 2021.

Respectfully submitted,



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Marge Fish (Public Representative)

Lt. Anthony French (VSP SAR Team Leader)

Tait Germon (Ski Patrol Representative)

Drew Hazelton (Volunteer SAR Representative)

Tate Jeffrey (Volunteer Fire Service Representative)

Maj. Justin Stedman (Fish & Wildlife Representative)

Neil Van Dyke (Dept. of Public Safety SAR Coordinator)