



SAR ALBERTA

# PROGRESS REPORT



SEPTEMBER 2024

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## BETTER TRAINED AND EQUIPPED

Members are already deploying with enhanced training, and we're working to equip them to ensure that they're never in situations anymore risky than they need to be, and so that they can respond to calls which they may have previously been unequipped or unqualified to respond to.

None of this would be possible without the government putting their trust in SAR Alberta, and providing us with the financial resources to help us grow. **Government's investment is saving lives and supporting communities**, and we're delighted to be providing a return on investment to be proud of.

## MEANINGFUL CHANGE

At the start of the 2023 wildfire season, we began putting provincial government funding to good use. We staffed up to a team of six, have a dedicated board, and continue to work hard at **growing our relationship with our primary tasking agency** in a hugely impactful way.

Today, our members are conveying that they **feel more supported by SAR Alberta than ever before**, and we're being told that recruitment is a lot easier with our support and with the knowledge that our members are seen as mobile assets, with a very real opportunity to be deployed throughout the province at a moment's notice.

**up 30%**  
member hours

**up 29%**  
incident response

**up 81%**  
disaster/wildfire response



# WHAT MATTERS MOST

## OUR VISION

- A safe, unified and effective search and rescue community in the province of Alberta that is valued by the public and government.

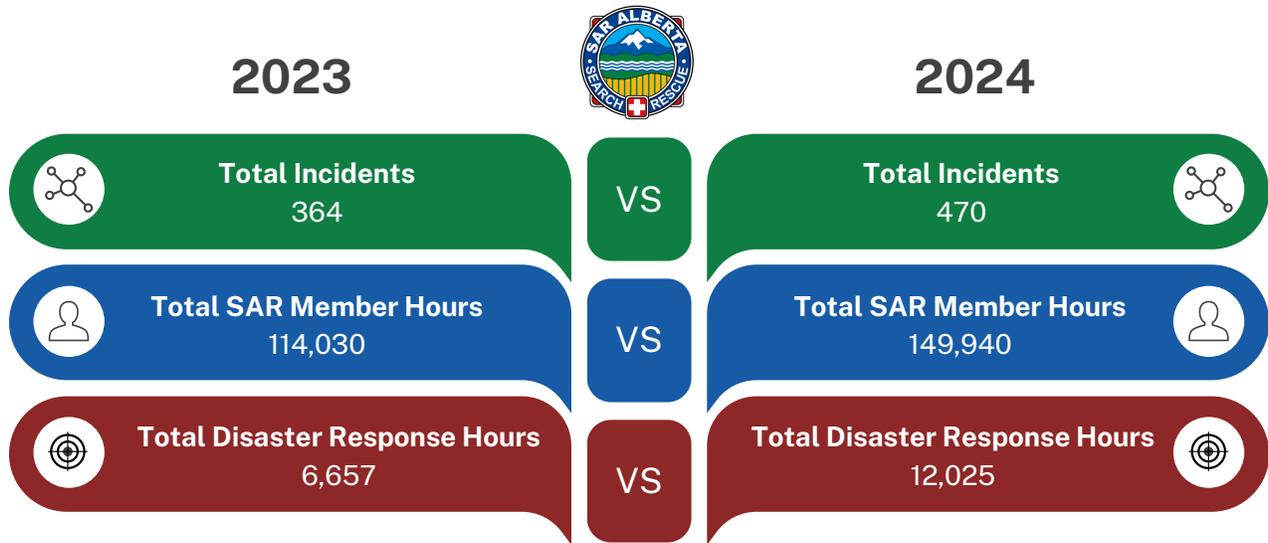
## OUR MISSION

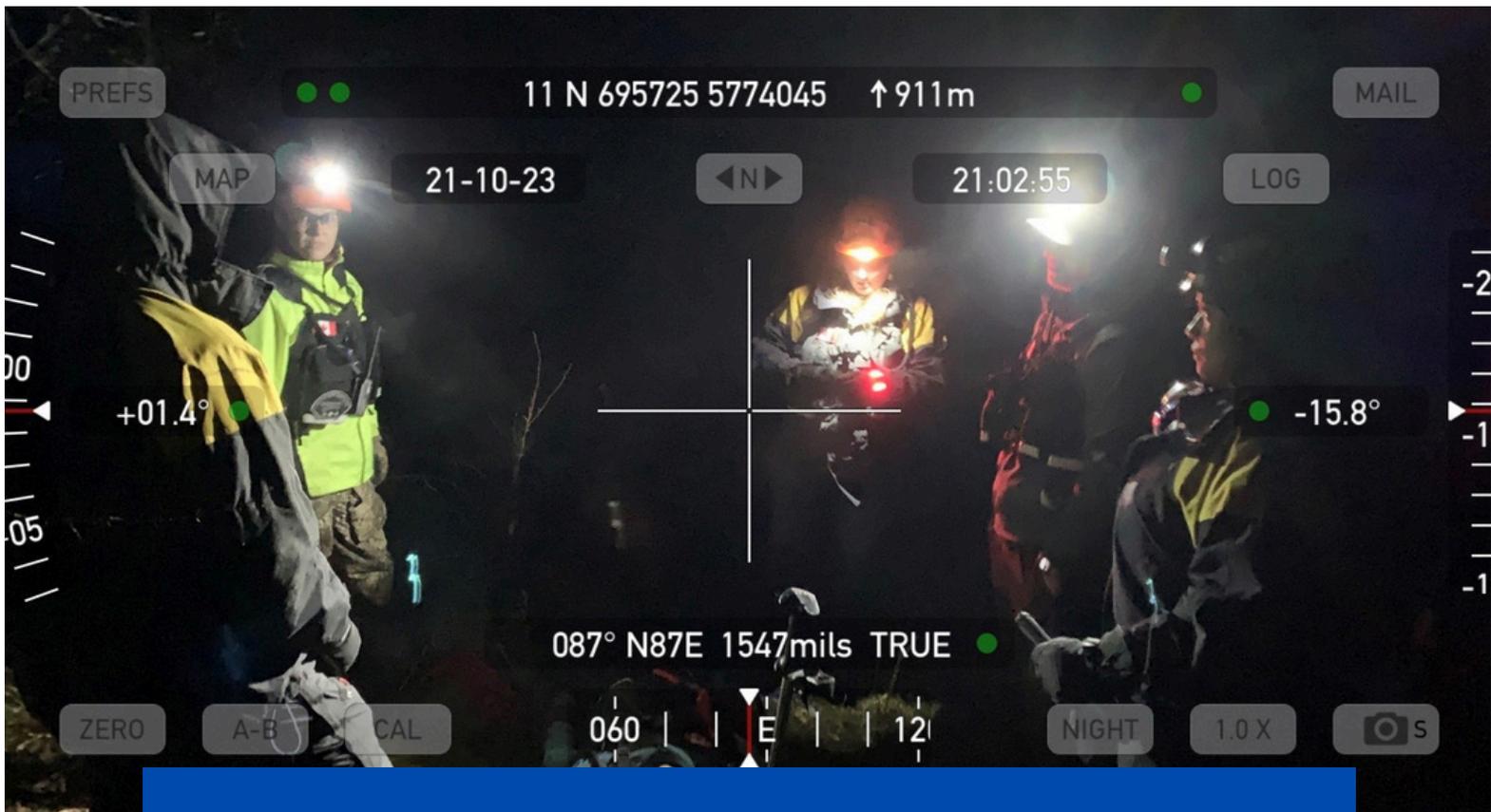
- To empower and represent the search and rescue community in Alberta by providing an exemplary level of service so others may live.



# YEAR TO YEAR COMPARISON

Comparing year over year, the impact of government support and funding is clearly visible. Continued sustainable funding will allow further growth and the **development of a world-class search and rescue service** to better support Albertans and tourists in our beautiful province.





# IMPROVING SAR TECHNOLOGY

## REAL-TIME MAPPING FOR TEAMS

Designed for search and rescue teams, CalTopo provides real-time mapping and assessments on an organizational scale. SAR Alberta has ensured that **every team now has multiple licences to use CalTopo** which is considered an essential platform for SAR managers.

## ADVANCED EQUIPMENT AND PLATFORMS

- Some teams have used equipment funds for items like **side-scan sonar devices** and **thermal monoculars**. Others opted for **Garmin GPS and inReach** devices and subscriptions.
- SAR Alberta is also in the process of rolling out training on the **SAR Command Assist** platform which speeds up and automates SAR incident paperwork.

# ENHANCING COORDINATION

## ONE CALL

The one call system is a process whereby any tasking agency can call one number and be connected to either disaster response, search, rescue and recovery or, as a SAR team, they can request additional resources.

Operated by STARS Emergency Link Centre (ELC) on behalf of SAR Alberta, one call lines are recorded and answered by highly trained emergency communication specialists (ECS).

## STARLINK

Using a maximum of \$80,000 from our government grant funding, we made a decision earlier this year to purchase Starlink hardware and 1-yr subscription for all of our teams which did not have it or, if they already possessed a Starlink, we purchased additional Garmin GPS units with inReach subscriptions.

While some of our member teams are still receiving the Starlink units, we already have **multiple reports of lives being saved** when they would've been lost had our teams not possessed a Starlink unit.



The decision to purchase the Starlink units for our teams has been called a "game-changer" and a "life-saver" by a number of our senior SAR professionals.

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"From a DEOC perspective, I can unequivocally state that the partnership and collaboration this season has been absolutely incredible. I really like where this is going and am excited for the continued engagement of our teams."

~ RCMP Inspector  
Chris Romanchych

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# PARTNERING WITH TASKING AGENCIES

## OVERCOMING BARRIERS

In the past, searches that required significant resources may not have taken place or may not have seen a successful outcome if they were under-resourced or not resourced at all. This same issue also limited how far north SAR teams could respond.

## TAKING A NEW APPROACH

For incidents that require a larger-than-local response, SAR Alberta and the RCMP's Operational Readiness and Response (ORR) unit have partnered together at a high "umbrella" level to resource and coordinate these types of searches.

This represents a **new approach and a best practice** which has proven to be very successful and would not exist without the staffing resources and training made possible by financial support from the Government of Alberta and collaboration with the RCMP.

# INCREASING DISASTER RESPONSE

## PROVINCIAL OPERATIONS GROUP

SAR Alberta recently formed the provincial operations group (POG) which allows teams and individual members to sign up if they are able to deploy to large scale incidents and disasters.

To date, there have been 17 incidents tasked through the RCMP K-Division Emergency Operations Centre (DEOC) with the average incident length being 84 hours.

**12,025**

hours provided by SAR members in disaster response

**\$336,824**

the value of 12,025 volunteer hours

**17**

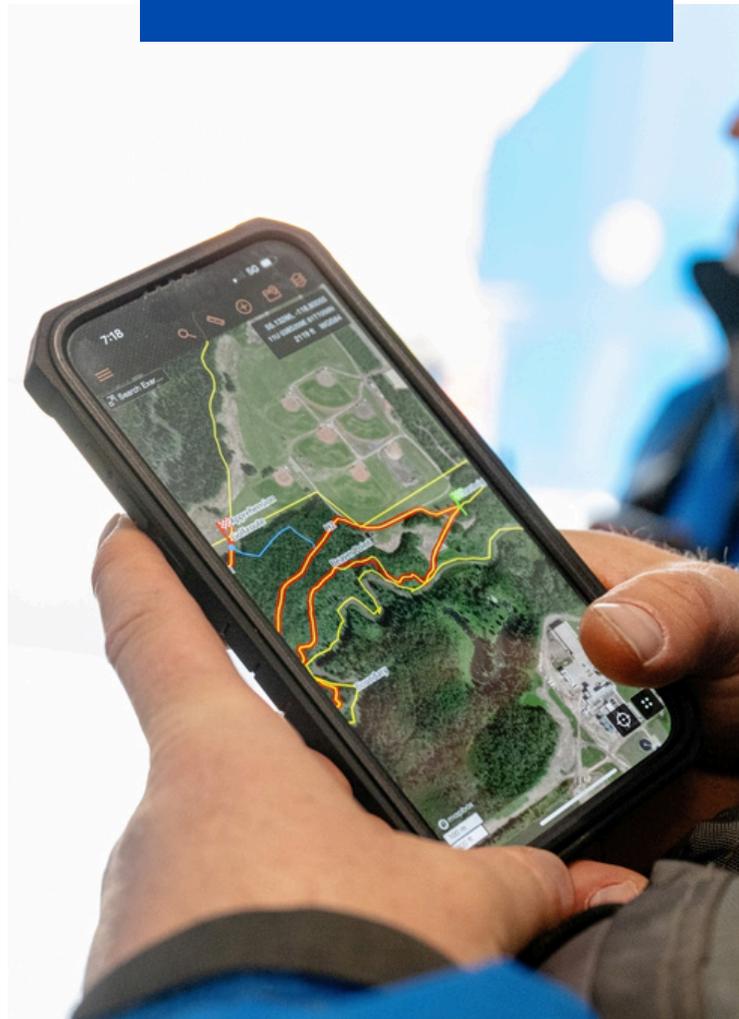
total wildfire deployments to date in 2024

**141**

POG members responded

**13**

teams responded to Jasper wildfire



# HELPING THE PEOPLE OF JASPER

“

"Remarkable working relationship. It was decided to let your teams take the lead because of your expertise and professionalism. Things worked out well."

~RCMP S/Sgt. Rodney Koscielny, Senior Troop N.C.O./Commander, Tactical Support Group (TSG) speaking on the Jasper wildfire evacuation efforts.

”

## UNIFIED RESPONSE

SAR members from 13 teams all worked seamlessly with the RCMP to handle the task of delivering evacuation notices in approximately half the time that the RCMP had allotted for this. Our SAR members knocked on EVERY single home and business in Jasper...twice. Members moved safely, quickly and with great accuracy and, in all, **more than 25,000 people evacuated successfully and with no injuries.**

Using CalTopo mapping, the command group was able to remotely monitor and track teams (for their safety) and provide real time information to the command post. CalTopo software was provided earlier this year to all SAR teams across the province, courtesy of SAR Alberta, as an initiative to help unify operations.





# DELIVERING TRAINING

Through consultation with teams, we have determined what training gaps exist and how best to fill them.

The following schedule provides a snapshot of what our provincially organized training efforts look like as we move the SAR community forward towards consistent standards.

| COURSE                                  | DATE                         |
|---|------------------------------|
| SAR BASICS INSTRUCTOR COURSE            | SEPTEMBER 7-8, 2024          |
| ALL TEAMS MEETING (TRAINING WORKSHOPS)  | SEPTEMBER 28-29, 2024        |
| CISM PEER MENTOR TRAINING               | OCTOBER 19-20, 26-27, 2024   |
| ICS-200 COURSE (ONLINE)                 | OCTOBER 19-20, 2024          |
| TEAM LEADER COURSE                      | NOVEMBER 2-3, 2024           |
| SAR BASICS INSTRUCTOR COURSE            | NOVEMBER 30-DECEMBER 1, 2024 |
| ICS-200 COURSE (ONLINE)                 | DECEMBER 7-8, 2024           |
| SEARCH MANAGER COURSE                   | JANUARY 18-19, 2025          |
| SAR MANAGER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT    | FEBRUARY 22-23, 2025         |
| SAR DISASTER RESPONSE INSTRUCTOR UPDATE | MARCH 15-16, 2025            |
| FIELD SKILLS SCHOOL                     | APRIL 4-7, 2025              |

# ENCOURAGING NEW SKILLS



## INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT

pipikwan pêhtâkwan

- \* pipikwan pêhtâkwan is an Indigenous owned, led and majority staffed public relations and engagement agency dedicated to amplifying Indigenous voices, truths and stories.
- \* SAR Alberta has contracted pipikwan pêhtâkwan to develop and implement a **comprehensive Indigenous engagement strategy.**

The SAR Alberta board, staff and teams look forward to learning more on Indigenous engagement through upcoming training sessions.



- \* By being AdventureSmart, outdoor recreationalists make informed decisions that help to reduce the **frequency, severity and duration of search and rescue incidents.**
- \* SAR Alberta supports the training of volunteer outdoor educators who present the AdventureSmart training to audiences that include schools, clubs and other groups.

## OUTDOOR EDUCATION

AdventureSmart  
Stats since January 2024

Participants

4066

Presentations

131

Presenter Hours

436.5



# BUILDING CAPACITY

## WELCOMING NEW RECRUITS

Since receiving government funding, we have staffed up to a team of six, built up our relationships with tasking agencies and, through these efforts, created an exciting new appeal to search and rescue. With more opportunities for training and deployment, new members are joining in numbers we haven't seen before.

This is vitally important to SAR so that we have enough volunteers to continue to deliver the same current service levels into the future. Recruitment and retention are critical to the sustainability of search and rescue.

|                    | 2021       | 2022       | 2023       | three year total |
|--------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------------|
| <b>NEW MEMBERS</b> | <b>135</b> | <b>224</b> | <b>328</b> | <b>687</b>       |

# CALCULATING THE REAL COST OF SAR

**\$10M**

what volunteer SAR services are worth per year in Alberta

## REALIZING OUR WORTH

If SAR Alberta were to allocate a volunteer wage of \$25/hour for the approximately 150,000 hours of time donated by our unpaid professionals over the last year, it would amount to \$3.75 million.

Given that many of our technical rescue experts, senior SAR managers, medical responders, and others would be billed out at a much higher rate if working in a paid environment, the total value then climbs to more than \$5 million.

Our experts come equipped with both personal gear and the necessary rescue gear, communications devices, medical equipment and more to get the job done. If we add in the cost of training, and the extensive cost of all the highway vehicles, OHVs, sleds, drones and boats, etc., that our teams collectively carry, and the value of what our teams bring to the table for training and incident response then the final calculation would **exceed \$10 million annually**.

These figures still do not show the real cost of SAR because they exclude the cost of SAR Alberta staff and administration, who play a crucial role in supporting and coordinating operations, provincial training courses and exercises, inter-agency relations, and all else that has been achieved as is evidenced throughout this document.

