January 1, 2023

PTSAR Frequently asked questions

The intent of this document is to introduce you to Pine Tree Search and Rescue (PTSAR), give you some background, answer questions, and help you prepare for what you could be called to do. I will use a frequently asked question format.

What is PTSAR?

Prior to the formation of PTSAR the search and rescue team covering southern Maine was the York County Emergency Response Rescue Team (YCERRT) which was managed by the York County Emergency Management Agency (YCEMA). At that time the team had specialty teams within it and included high angle, swift water/dive, K9, and ground search teams. Over the years swift water/dive activities were moved to local fire, Maine Warden Service (MWS), and state police dive teams. K9 teams are now coordinated by Maine Search and Rescue Dogs (MESARD), and high angle rescue opportunities are few and far between in southern Maine and are now handled by local fire crews who are able to respond more quickly than volunteer teams. YCERRT slowly became smaller and smaller. There was an attempt to revitalize the team and there was momentum building when on 2012-05-04 the YCEMA chose to disband the team.

With the encouragement of our local Game Warden, Rick LaFlame, a few of the YCERRT team members decided form a new team. Bryan Courtois, Larry DeHof and Dan Pierce spearheaded getting the word out and attracting potential team members. On 2012-07-25 a meeting was held at Cabela's in Scarborough and PTSAR was born. At later meetings officers were elected and bylaws were drafted and approved.

With few exceptions, ground search and rescue activities in Maine are conducted by, and under the direction of, the Maine Warden Service (MWS) within the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. Volunteer search and rescue organizations within the state generally belong to the state umbrella organization, Maine Association for Search and Rescue (MASAR). MASAR develops standards for Search and Rescue (SAR) units and members, provides professional training, networks among teams, and activates certified SAR teams upon request from the Warden Service.

On 2012-09-11 PTSAR became a MASAR certified Unit. On 2013-01-23 PTSAR received 501(c)(3) status.

Maine has fourteen SAR teams throughout the state. PTSAR’s primary field of coverage is "southern" Maine but will get dispatched anywhere in the state we are needed. Because of our proximity to New Hampshire, we are also on call with the New Hampshire Fish and Game

What is in it for me?

Good question. If you are seeking glory, you may as well stop reading and not bother joining. There is no room for people who want attention. We are asked to do a job that is

quite often done in difficult conditions such as heat and or cold, winds, dark, thick brush, bugs, mud, snow, etc. You will not be on television and will not be interviewed by the news; if you are approached by either you are to refer them to the Communication Officer. You will get a thank you from the MWS if they have time. You will get a thank you from the team leader and the family of the person we are looking for will be thankful, but may not see you to say it in person. Most people who do SAR work are doing it to help out. Most are avid outdoors people who are helping their peers. We do also get many calls for people who are despondent, or suffer from dementia or other mental illness.

We sometime get discounts on some outdoor gear and occasionally pizza.

How much does it cost?

Most people who join PTSAR will already have most of the gear they need. If you hike, hunt, backpack, or spend time doing things outside you will most likely already have all of the clothing and things you would want in your ready pack.

There is no “uniform” required or authorized. However, we do encourage team mebers to wear blaze orange shirts, vests and hats in the field. These identify us as PTSAR team members and work to effectively locate each other when searching in dense cover. Most members add patches and name tapes to their outer garments. These identifiers are available at nominal cost. We do have poly pro team shirts available at cost.

Optional, specialized pieces of gear we use are two-way radios and Global Positioning System (GPS) units. We have had good luck with the Baofeng UV5R or UV82 radio which will cost about $40 on Amazon, or less on eBay. While we do routinely use GPS, the MWS will supply them if needed and you do not have one of your own.

Annual dues are currently set at $20.00 per year.

What does it take to join?

All it takes is a desire to help and be part of PTSAR. Fill out the application, available on our website, www.pinetreesar.com, send in your dues ($20.00) and get started. After reviewing your application we will send you information to MASAR’s on line Basic Search and Rescue (BASAR) course. The intent is that you will go through the material at your own pace and the on line material combined with your own personal experience and team meetings and trainings you would eventually be prepared to take the field skills test as one step to being a MASAR certified Search Team Member (STM).

In order to be a MASAR STM applicants must complete a detailed training course as well as demonstrating proficiency in both day and night navigation and survival including building a shelter and building a fire. You must also pass a fitness test, have current first aid and CPR, complete the ICS-100 course, and get a letter of recommendation from a

unit officer. Full requirements and check lists can be found in the Standards section of the MASAR website. www.mainesearchandrescue.org

What do my dues get used for

Your dues cover administrative costs for running the team. These include dues to MASAR, the pinetreesar.com domain and email, registration for the trailer, patches, stickers, costs associated with the team annual meeting, and other expenses. We do not do fund raising and membership dues appear to be sufficient to cover our needs.

How often do we meet or get called for a search?

We try to meet once per month and try to find a balance between indoor classroom type meetings and actually getting outside to practice the skills we use. We do not have a minimum number of meetings or trainings that must be attended. We understand that members have a life and other commitments such as school, jobs, family, and other things competing for your time. If have time for PTSAR, great, if not that is OK as well. We feel that the bigger the pool of potential resources, the greater our chances of being able to field a useful team. That said if you are constantly absent from meetings and trainings you are less likely to be called for a search. We need to know who we are working with, so if we don't know you, you will not be called for a search.

In addition to our SAR activity when called out by MWS through MASAR, we also provide stand-by SAR assistance to Baxter State Park (BSP), usually one or more weekends each year. These weekends are pre-scheduled – We travel to the park and stay overnight, camping in the park at a site set aside for us on Togue Pond. This duty allows us to spend some time within the park while assisting BSP Rangers with late, lost, or injured hikers and visitors.

How long does a search last?

Searches can last minutes to several days, weeks, months, or years. We work closely with the MWS and they try to give us as much notice as possible that we may be called. It is not uncommon for us to be notified of a search in process only to get notified a short time later that the person we would have been looking for has been found. We also get called to searches that are a long distance from where we live and we have no idea how long they will last. When we respond to a search we should be prepared to be self-sufficient for 24 hours with what is in our ready pack and ideally should show up with the ability to spend the night and continue searching the next day if needed. That said if we get called and the search goes into a second day and you can't stay, you are not obligated to stay.

What is provided at the command post?

You just never know. A lot depends on the infrastructure in the area and the support staff at the command post (CP). There have been times when we arrive at the CP to find that we have flush toilets, hot coffee, and breakfast sandwiches. When we returned

to the CP after our initial assignment we were given sandwiches, cold drinks, and places to sit in a warm building. At the end of the day the townsfolk had turned out and supplied us with more food than we could eat and we were offered places to spend the night. We have also had nothing at the CP except what we brought with us. The further the search area from home, the more you should expect to bring and could include a tent, cot, portable stove and cooking utensils, food, extra water, changes of clothes and overnight gear. You may find a hotel and local restaurant or you might pitch a tent.

What level of fitness is required?

There are a couple basic fitness tests that MASAR uses, the most common is the pack carry which consists of covering 2 miles with a 25-pound pack in under 30 minutes. However stamina seems to be on equal ground as speed. We could be tasked to hike a series of trails looking for a lost hiker, or we could spend hours pushing through thick brush doing a grid search, or if the person is found we may be asked to assist in carrying the person out.

What should I do to be ready for a search?

Pre-planning is key. Have your ready pack packed and ready. Have your overnight bag packed and ready. Have a talk with your boss, child care provider, spouse and family about being called for a search. Have things in place before you get called or have a plan ready to act on. Be prepared for just about anything. You can always pull gear out of your pack once you get your assignment. You should be part of the solution and not part of the problem.

How will I get notified of a search?

You will get a message to your phone or email, whichever you identify as your primary contact. When you get the call for a search you should reply as soon as possible that you are able to respond. You then may get information about a team gathering location and time to car pool or caravan to the search area.

You will also get reminders of meetings and trainings sent to your secondary contact. If you use your phone for everything, all communication will go to your phone.

For more information please refer to the Dispatching Policy.

Can I be involved if I do not want to go into the woods?

Yes! There are many tasks that need to be done that do not include actually going in the woods. Managing the team web site, and Facebook page, and dealing with administrative tasks and record keeping take time. If you actually go to the search you could be tasked with shuttling people and dogs to and from their search area, running errands for the Incident Commander, such as getting pizza, etc. These roles allow one to belong to and actively participate in PTSAR without becoming a Certified Search Team Member.

How do I get time off from work?

Sec. 1. 26 MRSA c. 7, sub-c. 4-D chapter 329 protects **certified** MASAR team members from discrimination, or discipline by their employers for time lost due to responding to a SAR incident. There are specific details that must be met and the employee must supply certain documents to their employer for the law to be applicable. Contact either the team president or secretary for details.

Can I post pictures of what we do on social media?

NO! The MASAR Social Media policy is quite clear. You may not, under any circumstances, post pictures or any other details of a searc. You may re-post, with no additional comments, any official post from the IF&W, MFS, or other official agency. You are welcome to post pictures and comments of any PTSAR training or meeting.

For more information:

Resources

Pine Tree SAR website	www.pinetreesar.com
Pine Tree SAR Facebook	Pine Tree SAR
MASAR website	www.mainesearchandrescue.org

Acronyms

BASAR	Basic Search and Rescue
CP	Command Post
CPR	Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
GPS	Global Positioning System
ICS	Incident Command System
MASAR	Maine Association for Search and Rescue
MEMA	Maine Emergency Management A
MESARD	Maine Search and Rescue Dogs
MFS	Maine Forest Service
MWS	Maine Warden Service
PTSAR	Pine Tree Search and Rescue

SAR	Search and Rescue
STL	Search Team Leader
STM	Search Team Member
YCERRT	York County Emergency Response Rescue Team
YCEMA	York County Emergency Management Agency