



**2024 Annual Report on  
Search and Rescue  
Presented to the 132<sup>nd</sup> Legislature Joint Standing  
Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife**



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## History

The Maine Warden Service is statutorily responsible for all inland search and rescue operations in the state of Maine for those individuals deemed to be lost, stranded or drowned. Title 12 §10103 sub-§11 requires the department to submit an annual report detailing services provided to individuals who do not pay a particular fee to the department for the provision of that service, including all search and rescue activities.

## Executive Summary

Maine Warden Service Search and Rescue Reports are compiled annually from July 1st to June 30th of each year. Last fiscal year, there were 490 Search and Rescue calls for service (CFS). This synopsis includes all Search and Rescue (SAR) Calls for Service (CFS). These CFS may only last minutes and end with the missing person arriving home before a game warden arrives on scene, or they could last days or even months with no resolution.

## Statistical Overview

Maine Warden Service search categories are aligned with the International Search and Rescue Database (ISRID) categories and definitions with a few specific to Maine. This database includes searches that fall into 31 search categories. SAR Appalachian Trail, though broken out is a subcategory of SAR Hike. Maine has a high amount of boating activity, so we have decided to keep this category separate from other “water related” SAR categories. Water related SAR often are drowning victim recoveries, not necessarily for someone that fell or was thrown from a boat. The difference between SAR Suicide and SAR Despondent is the victim’s fate. Victims that have been found alive are recorded as despondent, and victims found deceased are generally recorded as suicide. Both categories are closely related and will be merged into one category.

SAR data is compiled through the SAR Coordinator, Captain Josh Bubier and Greenville Headquarters Office Specialist April Collins.

- Maine Warden Service responded to 490 Search and Rescue related calls for service (CFS) in Fiscal Year July 2023 to June 2024 (FY24.)
- For the fifth year in a row Hiking remained as the number one search category and Watercraft searches remained at number two. Searches for individuals with Alzheimer’s and dementia in FY24 moved into the third spot. Snowmobiling had previously seen a steady increase in searches and had been the third highest category in the past two years, however FY24 saw snowmobiling drop out of the top 5 altogether. This can likely be attributed to the very poor snowmobiling season we had across the entire state last winter.
- Weather is one of the biggest factors affecting when Search and Rescue operations occur. When the temperature is very high or very low and when there are extended periods of precipitation people tend not to go outdoors as much.
- In FY24 June, July and August all evenly recording 66 searches respectively. October was once again a busy month for the Warden Service as it was the next busiest month behind June, July and August with 45 searches. The least busy month was December, which only had 21 searches. Since the 2013-2014 December has remained as the least busy month for searches.

## Detailed Statistics

### SAR Costs

There was an increase in SAR costs from FY23 to FY24. However, the SAR costs have been between \$400,000 and \$500,000 four out of the last five years.

The total costs of SAR to the Warden Service for FY24 was \$482,667.67. This cost is slightly higher than the previous year's total which was \$437,640. The cost is also the highest amount in the past 7 years. Our current three-year average is now just over \$430,000 per year.

Most years, search and rescue spending is a result of the number of complex searches to which we respond to and require additional resources. Costs for each SAR mission are tracked and then compiled for the year. Boating or other Water Related searches generally hold the top spot for the most expensive searches. The reason being is that these searches most often require the use of the dive

team to search for a drowning victim underwater. Not only is it expensive to dive for drowning victims, but the duration of these searches can be a week or longer due to the slower, methodical methods needed to thoroughly search for the victims.

TOP 20 IN COSTS FY 2023/2024		
\$64,619.63	SAR CRIMINAL	24W008240
\$15,261.83	SUICIDE	24W008241
\$15,187.56	WATER RELATED	24W008242
\$13,621.78	DESPONDENT	24W008243
\$11,473.22	GATHERER	24W008244
\$11,231.66	WATER RELATED	24W008245
\$10,707.99	MENTAL ILLNESS	24W008246
\$10,554.17	ALZHEIMERS	24W008247
\$10,534.85	CAMPER	24W008248
\$10,483.65	MENTAL ILLNESS	24W008249
\$9,341.74	HUNT	24W008250
\$6,971.25	WATER RELATED	24W008251
\$6,899.00	ALZHEIMERS	24W008252
\$6,869.28	ATV	24W008253
\$6,123.87	HUNT	24W008254
\$5,790.51	HIKE	24W008255
\$5,784.10	HIKE	24W008256
\$5,547.41	HIKE	24W008257
\$5,441.31	SNOWMOBILE	24W008258
\$5,255.43	ALZHEIMERS	24W008259

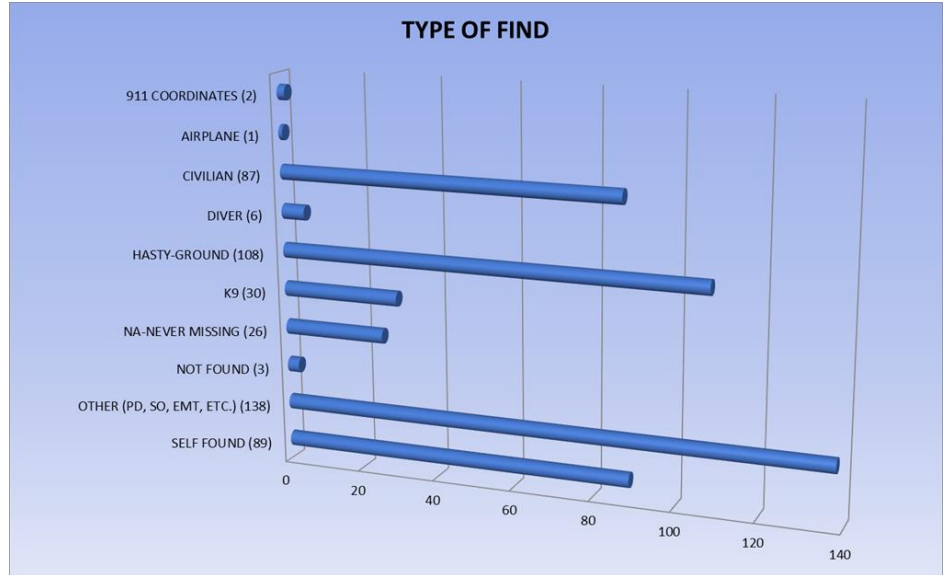
FY	Number of SAR per FY	Cost per FY
FY 23/24	490	\$ 482,667.67
FY 22/23	477	\$ 437,640.85
FY 21/22	491	\$ 372,908.97
FY 20/21	533	\$ 432,805.32
FY 19/20	417	\$ 262,629.37
FY 18/19	423	\$ 358,478.41
FY 17/18	435	\$ 339,583.98

Non-Consumptive User	#SAR	TOTAL PER CATEGORY	Consumptive User	#SAR	TOTAL PER CATEGORY
ABDUCTION	0	\$ -	ANGLER	11	\$ 3,547.99
AIRCRAFT	1	\$ 114.92	ATV	12	\$ 14,196.61
ALZHEIMERS	45	\$ 60,421.54	BOATING	65	\$ 18,498.78
APPALACHIAN TRAIL	16	\$ 15,934.38	HUNT	26	\$ 27,847.51
AUTISTIC	14	\$ 7,303.82	SNOWMOBILE	17	\$ 11,514.91
CAMPER	4	\$ 11,993.84			
CHILD 1-3	9	\$ 4,764.56			
CHILD 4-6	8	\$ 5,287.61			
CHILD 7-9	4	\$ 1,332.76			
CHILD 10-12	2	\$ 217.80			
CHILD 13-15	27	\$ 10,291.09			
CLIMBER	0	\$ -			
DESPONDENT	21	\$ 26,031.87			
GATHERER	3	\$ 11,871.64			
HIKE	110	\$ 50,595.99			
HORSEBACK	0	\$ -			
MENTAL ILLNESS	7	\$ 23,536.71			
INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY	3	\$ 226.77			
MOUNTAIN BIKER	2	\$ 1,188.30			
RUNNER	1	\$ 98.85			
SAR WORKER	3	\$ 762.94			
SAR -OTHER	3	\$ 685.15			
SNOWBOARDER	0	\$ -			
SNOWSHOER	1	\$ 74.04			
SKIER-ALPINE	2	\$ 2,480.39			
SKIER-NORDIC	1	\$ 220.18			
SUBSTANCE ABUSE	10	\$ 11,779.29			
SUICIDE	11	\$ 30,871.55			
URBAN ENTRAPMENT	0	\$ -			
VEHICLE 4WD	18	\$ 9,501.52			
WATER RELATED	32	\$ 54,854.73			
SAR CRIMINAL	1	\$ 64,619.63			
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>\$ 407,061.87</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>\$ 75,605.80</b>
			Total Searches		490
			Total Amounts		\$ 482,667.67

**Resources Used**

The Maine Warden Service tracks the primary search method that was used to locate the lost or missing person. The “Hasty Search” is the most effective and most utilized tactic that results in a find. This tactic involves quick searching in high probability areas that will most likely find the lost person. Hasty searches accounted for 120 finds during FY24. “Self-found” is a

category that generally occurs very quickly after a person is reported lost or missing. The lost person or persons generally figure out where they are and report back to the caller before we arrive on scene. The “Other” category is a catch all and could be police or fireman that located the person before wardens arrived or cell phone coordinates were used to locate them, and they were assisted by dispatchers. Specialized search resources like K9, Divers and

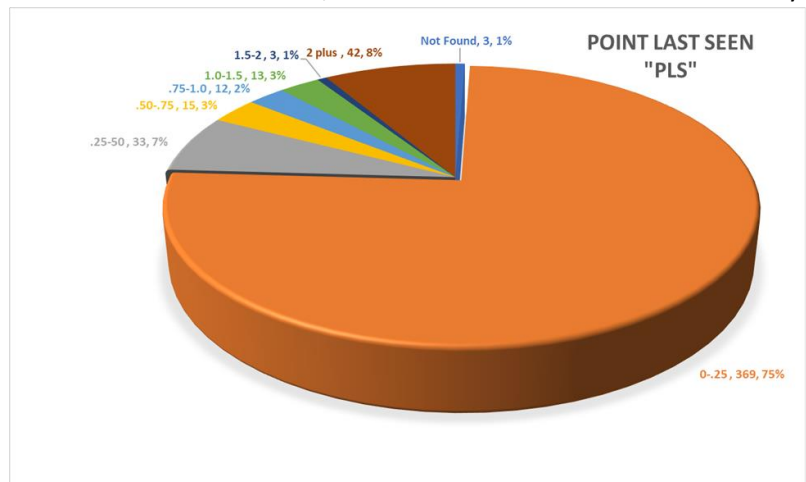


Aircraft accounted for 30 finds. These specialty team resources train year-round, and searches are often in difficult to outright dangerous conditions. There are many individuals who are located by a K9 “just in time” as they were in very poor condition due to a medical condition or exposure to cold and wet weather.

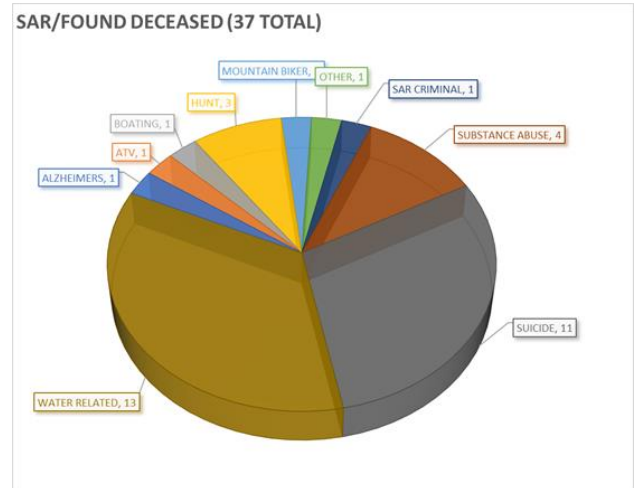
**Time, Distance & Survivability**

This past year, June, July and August all evenly recorded 66 searches. October was once again a busy month for the Warden Service as it was the next busiest month behind June, July and August with 45 searches. The least busy month was December, which only had 21 searches. Since 2013-2014, December has remained the least busy month for searches.

The data to the right depicts a straight-line distance measurement from the best Point Last Seen (PLS) that a dispatcher or warden can obtain at the time to where the subject was located. As has always been the trend, the majority (75%) of lost people are found within a quarter of a mile from the PLS. 87% of lost people are found within 1 mile from the PLS. Searching a mile on land or water takes a considerable number of resources, time and effort to do effectively.



The chart to the right shows the number of individuals who were found deceased by the category they were in. There are three categories which given their nature, the subject being found deceased is not a function of not being found soon enough (i.e., Dying from exposure, medical reason, injury, etc.) These categories are Watercraft and Water-Related (subjects drowned), and Suicide (subjects killed themselves) which accounted for 26 of the 37 individuals found deceased. When you exclude the 26 individuals who were found deceased that were outside of our “control” we located 98.6% of missing persons alive.



**Location by County & Warden Service Division**

We track searches by the county and warden division they occurred. The top three counties are Oxford (59), Penobscot (56), and Piscataquis (54). All of these counties are consistently in the top three from year to year. The countless miles of hiking trails in these counties and the other outdoor recreational opportunities that exist explain their consistent appearance in the top three.

Though not as vast as some of the other divisions, Division A includes parts of Sagadahoc County, Androscoggin, Cumberland, York and Oxford counties and includes a good majority of the state’s population. Northern and western Oxford County also has many hiking trails, many of which are extremely difficult. Combining the higher population and some of the State’s most difficult hiking trails results in Division A having had the most searches in 2023-2024 with 154.

