



The quest to enjoy the beauty of our north woods and the proximity to the BWCAW draws many to Cook County. Unfortunately, not everyone experiences the idyllic adventure they envisioned and occasionally there are tragedies to deal with. When that happens, a page goes out to the volunteers of the Cook County Search and Rescue (CCSAR) team for assistance. These are unselfish volunteers who will drop whatever they are doing to lend a hand to those in need.

Well today the tables are being turned and it is the CCSAR that is reaching out to the public for your help. We were recently called on to recover the body of a young man who drowned in Gillis Lake, about a 4-hour paddle into the BWCAW. This was already the second drowning we had up the Gunflint Trail since May.

Day one of the search was our SAR team paddling around Gillis Lake with an inexpensive side sonar unit and fish locators. We concentrated our search in an area as deep as 60 feet, though this lake has depths of 180 feet. We did find some clothing and personal artifacts but were unsuccessful on the first day. On day two, the St Louis County SAR team was able to assist us with their high-tech equipment and we were fortunate to make the recovery.

After working with St Louis County and watching them use their equipment it became very apparent that Cook County needed to upgrade to the 21st century. The location of the recovery was in an area that had been searched extensively by us, but with our limited equipment were unable to make any identification. Thus, we were severely handicapped in our efforts on day one due to inadequate equipment and the fact that St Louis County was unavailable that day.

An analogy that caught my attention was that back in the early days of firefighting they had bucket brigades. That process required a lot of hard work, was very inefficient and usually unsuccessful. So, what happened? Someone invented a pump and fire hoses!! That changed the game dramatically. Cook County still has buckets, St Louis County brought the pump and fire hoses. The silver lining in this story is that St Louis County is in the process of upgrading their equipment thus making the equipment they now use available at a significant discount.

The Gunflint Trail Fire Department is initiating a campaign to raise \$100,000. The items we would like to purchase include the ROV (remote underwater operational vehicle) that has sonar, a camera and a mechanical arm that is necessary for a recovery without having to deploy divers. We also would purchase a tow behind high resolution side sonar unit

that can decipher the difference between rocks, logs and human remains. Other items would be a Starlink portable communications unit that can be set up anywhere worldwide and connect us to the internet and phone service, an inflatable Zodiac style boat, motor, a small Honda generator and accessories.

The Sheriff's office is not a 501C3 and cannot do fundraising. Their revenues come from a budget process through the County. Cumbersome to say the least. The GTFD, however, is a 501C3 public charity; donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. The goal is for our department to raise these funds, purchase the equipment and make it available to Cook County SAR to be used county-wide. We can also assist other counties when needed as does St Louis County.

The CCSAR works under the direction of the County Sheriff's Office. They are a single department with two geographic divisions, one covering the Gunflint Trail and the other covering the rest of Cook County. Many of the members are EMS providers and/or also belong to the various fire departments in Cook County.

The frustration of watching my fellow volunteers working with buckets is one thing. Watching a grieving family desperately waiting for us to make a recovery that may never happen really amplified the need for this equipment.

There are two ways to make your contribution, big or small, to the CCSAR Equipment Fund. You can send a check payable to the Gunflint Trail Fire Department (GTFD) and mail it to:

7401 Gunflint Trail Grand Marais, MN 55604

Remember to indicate CCSAR Equipment Fund on your check.

Or... you can pay online at <HTTPS://gunflint911.org> Click the DONATIONS button on the left side. Next scroll down to the bottom of the donations page where you'll find a yellow DONATE button. Remember to add a note to indicate that your donation is for the CCSAR Equipment Fund.

The EMS volunteers in Cook County give of themselves without asking for anything in return. The bell rings and they answer the call, often requiring them to leave their families and their work. Sometimes these calls take hours and other times they may take days. All they ask is to have the proper tools to meet the needs of the emergencies they respond to. Your contributions are needed and greatly appreciated. Michael Valentini