

Who Pays for SAR?

TIPS FROM THE POSSE
By MARK RACKAY

If you pad around long enough in the great outdoors, odds are, it is going to happen to you. No matter how careful, prepared, physically fit, and aware you might be, something is going to go wrong. Mr. Murphy, of Murphy's Law fame will see to that.

Not counting mind boggling acts of idiocy, like driving past "Road Closed" signs, or driving up the mountain during a snowstorm, thinking it will get better the farther you go, accidents happen. A misstep causes an injury, the weather abruptly changes, you become ill, you just plain lose your bearings, or a combination of problems. Sometimes, you will be faced with a full blown, 3-alarm disaster, and you best batten down the hatches.

Search and Rescue (SAR) is always there, but what about the costs? Eight hikers in Alberta padded well into a well-marked closed area of Jasper National Park. The area near Pyramid Lake was closed because of wildfire. After some time, two of the hikers called 911 for rescue.

SAR responded with helicopter and medics. An on-site assessment by the medics found no injuries justifying the call for assistance. None were hurt or sick, just fatigued. SAR just loves calls like that. These people were just too tired to complete the rest of their hike.

The hikers got a rude



You never know when it is going to happen, but when things go wrong, it's good to know these fine folks are ready 24/7. (Courtesy photo/Mark Rackay)

awakening when the parks agency announced the members of the hiking party had a court summons, with their name on it. They face up to \$25,000 CAD in fines, each, for intentionally entering the well-marked closed area.

Fear of being charged in the wake of a wilderness rescue can be a dangerous thing. In a 2021 blog post, the Colorado Search and Rescue Association (CSAR) identified 18

cases around the U.S. and Canada where stricken wilderness travelers had put off calling SAR because they feared they would receive a heavy bill. Although none of them ended in death, one lost snowmobiler did delay his arrival to a hospital long enough that he lost his leg.

SAR teams in Colorado are made up of volunteers who contribute many hours in training and

missions. These teams never charge an individual who is lost or injured for their services. These organizations rely on public donations and grants to cover their expenses.

Most SAR teams have taken a position against charging for SAR due to the possibility that it could discourage stricken hikers, bikers, hunters, or other outdoor folks from calling for help. Besides risking their own lives, they also potentially put SAR teams in danger by increasing the chance that they'll need to rush to resolve a life-or-death situation in bad weather, at night, or both.

However, there are some circumstances where authorities may try to recoup the cost of a rescue from a subject. The states of Idaho, Maine, Colorado, Oregon, and Utah all have laws on the books allowing the state or county government to bill rescued people under certain criteria, typically when the individuals involved have ignored a closure. Another instance is when someone who ended up in trouble as a result of breaking the law, may face fines or other penalties, like the Alberta hikers.

In 1987, the State of Colorado created the Colorado Search and Rescue Fund. The purpose of the fund was to provide reimbursement to search and rescue organizations for expenses incurred in conducting search and rescue

missions in Colorado.

Dollars for the fund are generated through a \$.25 surcharge on hunting and fishing licenses, boat registrations, snowmobile registrations, and the registration of off-highway vehicles. Individuals may also purchase a Colorado Outdoor Recreation Search and Rescue card for \$3.00 a year or five years for \$12.00. The Keep Colorado Wild program also provides \$1.5 million annually to eligible counties.

It is important to remember that a CORSAR card is not insurance. Its purpose is to reimburse sheriffs for eligible costs incurred in a discharge of a SAR mission. The reimbursement is not available to individuals. With or without a card, SAR teams are going to come and look for you.

As of January 1, 2023, the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) took over the administration of this fund from the Department of Local Affairs. The fund reimburses local governments and SAR organizations for expenses incurred during SAR missions. It also provides grants for training and equipment for SAR teams.

The majority of searches in Colorado are not submitted to the fund for reimbursement because costs were minimal, or the mission was not eligible for immediate reimbursement. The reimbursement only covers certain

expenses and is not a dollar-for-dollar payback. Much of the costs are paid by the members and the organization directly.

In a nutshell, if you're in trouble in the backcountry, call for help as soon as possible to give yourself and your rescuers the best chance of resolving your situation safely. If you are just an outdoor person who got in trouble, and needs help, you won't be charged. Please, respect closure orders, don't mislead authorities, act responsibly, and your chances of facing a bill or a fine afterward are close to zero. Accidents happen, and you won't get a bill for having one. While you are at it, support your local Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. We are all volunteers, here for you in your time of need, and without you and your help, we could not exist.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for The Nautical Mile, and other saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a Director and Public Information Officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. Personal email is elkhunter77@icloud.com For information about the Posse call 970-765-7033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

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Soldiers convicted of poaching on Fort Carson and state lands

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

Colorado Parks and Wildlife concluded a poaching investigation Jan 5 against active duty soldiers responsible for poaching five mule deer on Fort Carson and one on state land.

The investigation began in November 2024 after a hunter contacted Fort Carson Conserva-

tion Law Enforcement Officers to report a mule deer buck that appeared to have been poached. The CLEOs called in CPW the organization with jurisdiction for all Colorado wildlife.

The responding CPW investigating officer found a dead buck partially processed and abandoned with select

cuts of meat removed and the antlers cut off. A second dead deer, a doe, was located approximately 100 hundred yards away, also partially processed and abandoned. Evidence at both locations indicated illegal poaching.

In fresh snow, the

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