

Search and Rescue has been a part of Whatcom County since 1955. The early cohort consisted of a group of friends with 4-wheeled drive vehicles and wilderness know-how who would assist the Sheriff's Department when asked. Currently, six distinct units, made up of over 200 volunteers, operate under the umbrella of the WCSAR Council. Those units have a range of specialties that include traditional foot search, snowmobile, dive, technical rope and swiftwater rescue. We also have a dog team, horse team, atv, communications and EMS teams

WCSAR is a 501c3, all-volunteer organization. SAR is a resource utilized by the Sheriff's Department, as well as other local emergency service agencies. All volunteers with SAR must complete a background check, as well as meet minimum core-competency requirements set by the State Department of Emergency Management. In addition to meeting the minimum training requirements, individual units have their own training and fitness criteria to ensure that all responders are ready and able to safely respond when called. Volunteers are not paid for their services, and are responsible for purchasing their own equipment and supplies, as well as pay for the cost to respond.

Common duties of SAR include traditional search in wilderness and urban environments, wilderness body recovery, wilderness first aid and pack-out of injured hikers and hunters, urban searches for lost children or dementia patients, evidence search, and scene safety. In addition to the traditional search, rescue and recovery activities, SAR has played a key role in past years during events that include flood rescue, delivery of PPE and food during the pandemic shutdown, severe weather transportation assistance for critical emergency and hospital staff as well as patients needing life sustaining treatment, and condition monitoring and situation reports during extreme weather events. SAR also provides safety patrols for events like Ski to Sea and the Lake Whatcom Classic, as well as wilderness safety education to schools and other organizations.

In 2022, WCSAR members reported over 17,000 volunteer hours. (Note, this number is likely much lower than actual volunteer time). These hours, if provided

by paid personnel from the Sheriff's Department, would cost the County close to \$500,000.00 in Direct Labor Costs. Add in the cost of benefits, equipment, specialized training and overtime, and the cost to the County would be well over \$1,000,000.00 every year.

The current SAR building, located at Northwest and Smith Rds, was paid for and built by SAR volunteers in the 1980's. Because the building is located on County property, ownership was turned over to the County upon completion. However, SAR has been responsible for all building maintenance and upkeep. In 2021, Whatcom County published an approved site plan for the new NW Annex that shows a drive-through coffee shop on the site of our current SAR building. In early 2023, a SEPA notification was sent out that included the same site plan, and indicated that the County would be tearing down the SAR building. (SAR was not included in the SEPA mailing list). At no time in the County planning process was SAR included in the discussion regarding plans for the NW Annex. It wasn't until April of 2023 that the WCSAR Council was informed that our building will be torn down in May 2024, giving us little over a year to find a new location and secure funding for its construction.

To date, we have secured donations that include a fully-serviced building site, engineering and permitting. But we lack the funds to construct the building itself. It is our request that the Whatcom County Council approve disbursement of the remaining \$1,110,880.00. A spreadsheet outlining how that money would be spent is attached. We are hopeful that the County will approve this request and ensure that WCSAR can continue to serve our community in years to come.