Kane County Sheriff's Office
Sheriff Tracy Glover
971 E. Kaneplex Dr. Kanab, UT 84741
Phone: (435) 644-4916 Fax:(435) 644-2096

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse and members of the subcommittee. My name is Tracy Glover. I am the sheriff of Kane County in Southern Utah.

I am the president of the Utah Sheriffs' Association and one of three sheriffs that serve by appointment to the Utah Search and Rescue (SAR) Advisory Board. I am an elected member of the executive board for the Western States Sheriffs' Association where I chair the Public Lands committee. I am here today with orders to represent the sheriffs within each of those organizations.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak in favor of HR 9165 and to the unique challenges of Search and Rescue operations on public lands. Across the west, it is generally the county sheriff that holds primary responsibility for Search and Rescue. America's western sheriffs appreciate Congresswoman Maloy and the co-sponsors for recognizing a growing problem and trying to help us fix it.

To be direct, county sheriffs are seeing significant increases in visitation to public lands. Calls for rescue are growing and getting more complex. Domestic and foreign travelers are continually seeing new photos of spectacular landscapes on social media platforms and adding them as bucket list destinations. HR9165 will provide a mechanism for the federal government to provide financial support to county sheriffs through SAR grants to better serve visitors to our public lands.

I live in a unique and spectacular part of the country. From the 4,300 square miles in Kane County and the surrounding counties, visitors can access millions of acres of national parks, national recreation areas, national forests, wilderness areas and national monuments. Kane County has a population under 10,000 but is host to more than 5 million visitors each year.

When I started in law enforcement 28 years ago, Search and Rescue missions consisted of a jeep posse and a few people on horses riding out to find an occasional lost hunter. Over time, public lands have developed, been discovered and are managed for more recreation.

Sheriffs' teams are now spending most of our time with mountain rescue, technical rope rescue, underwater search and recovery and in helicopters hoisting people to safety. We have had to split our SAR teams up into separate disciplines and specialties that require unique training, equipment and expertise.

In the west, most of the land is owned and managed by the federal government. In Kane County for example, that federal ownership number is 85.5%. The statistics of our SAR missions is similar. Over 95% of our rescues are for visitors from out of our area. Over the past 10 years, our missions have significantly increased in both complexity and cost.. As you can imagine, technical rescue including aviation, mountain snow rescue, water rescue, and recovery requires specialized equipment, expertise and significant financial commitment.

In the state of Utah, we have seen a significant increase in helicopter rescue missions. I have included some statistics for the record, but in short, the missions have more than doubled over the past few years. Utah's sheriffs are now petitioning the state legislature to add a 3rd rescue helicopter to meet SAR demands at a cost close to 10 million dollars.

In business and much of government, logistics and resources are programmed out based on historic probabilities. In Search and Rescue planning, we must organize our resources for possibilities rather than probabilities.

A couple of quick examples:

A few years ago, my colleague Sheriff Matt English from Hood River County Oregon was faced with a large rescue mission. On a warm summer day on the Eagle Creek Trail off the Columbia River Gorge, a teenage boy set off a firework that started a large fire. In what is thought to be the largest rescue effort in Oregon history, Sheriff English had to quickly jump into action to gather enough resources to rescue 166 hikers that were trapped by a large and rapidly growing fire and get them to safety.

This operation required cooperation on a local, state and federal level at significant cost. Hood River County has only 24,000 residents but hosts millions of visitors to Mount Hood and the trails surrounding the Columbia River Gorge.

Last year in Kane County, we had a series of unseasonable flash floods in a canyon called Buckskin Gulch which is known as the longest slot canyon in North America. The floods washed several hikers miles downstream and forced others to high ground. We were fortunate to be able to pull 18 cold and injured hikers out of the canyon alive but unfortunately, in two separate incidents, four of the hikers perished. At a moment's notice, well-trained and physically fit teams of water rescue volunteers fought thigh deep quicksand with overhead air support from drones and helicopters to complete a very difficult task.

These are just a couple of extreme examples of how we as sheriffs must be prepared and ready for the possibility of what might happen on our public lands.

SAR is currently funded through a network of resources that combine to provide for the needs of sheriffs' SAR teams. In my county, county commissioners appropriate tourism tax money, PILT/SRS funds, general fund/property taxes, state SAR reimbursement funds, as well as donations to fund our operation.

As public land access, management, and visitation increases and becomes more complex, we must work together to find innovative ways to keep up. HR9165 will provide a vehicle to get a more robust cooperative partnership moving between the federal land management agencies and qualifying sheriffs that are most heavily impacted by public lands rescues.

America's Sheriffs are happy to work with Congress and excited to see this bill move forward and to get a program in place that will achieve such an important objective. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on such an important bill, I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Utah DPS Aero Bureau

2020 Helicopter Rescue Statistics
Total Missions: 284
People Found: 149
Hoists: 44

2021 Helicopter Rescue Statistics
Total Missions: 348
People Found: 139
Hoists: 50
BLM Flight Hours 280.3
USFS Flight Hours 280.6
NPS Flight Hours 87.4

2022 Helicopter Rescue Statistics
Total Missions: 538
People Found: 195
Hoists: 120
BLM Flight Hours 285.4
USFS Flight Hours 183.0
NPS Flight Hours 117.1

2023 Helicopter Rescue Statistics
Total Missions: 886
People Found: 293
Hoists: 131
BLM Flight Hours 362.6
USFS Flight Hours 172.9
NPS Flight Hours 120.4

2024 Helicopter Rescue Statistics
Total Missions: 906
People Found: 282
Hoists: 156
BLM Flight Hours 371.1
USFS Flight Hours 189.6
NPS Flight Hours 92.7

WESTERN STATES SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 825
Stevenson, Washington 98648
Telephone: 360-513-9500
www.westernsheriffs.org

2024 EXECUTIVE BOARD:
PRESIDENT
Sheriff Gary Bettencourt
Gilliam County, OR

VICE PRESIDENT
Sheriff Mark Dannels
Cochise County, AZ

SECRETARY
Sheriff Tracy Glover
Kane County, UT

TREASURER
Sheriff Brett Schroetlin
Grand County, CO

SGT AT ARMS
Sheriff Chip Kem
Stillwater County, MT

PAST PRESIDENT
Sheriff Corey Helton
Lea County, NM

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Dave Brown

State Representatives
Arizona
Sheriff David Clouse
California
Sheriff Tex Dowty
Colorado
Sheriff Kevin Armstrong
Idaho
Sheriff Sam Hulse
Kansas
Sheriff David Groves
Montana
Sheriff Leo Dutton
Nebraska
Sheriff Gene Samuelson
Nevada
Sheriff Ron Unger
New Mexico
Sheriff David Black
North Dakota
Sheriff Dean Wyckoff
Oklahoma
Sheriff Chris West
Oregon
Sheriff John Gautney
South Dakota
Sheriff Fred Lamphere
Texas
Sheriff Gerald Yezak
Utah
Sheriff Marty Gleave
Washington
Sheriff Clay Myers
Wyoming
Sheriff Ken Blackburn

November 15, 2024

The Western States Sheriffs' Association is an organization representing over 1200 Sheriffs across the western United States. Our organization has a long history of advocating for appropriate levels of funding from the federal government to help in offsetting the burdening costs of emergency response to lands managed by the federal government.

The federal government currently has management responsibilities for over 600 million acres of land. Most of this land falls under the management of the United States Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service. The county Sheriff maintains the primary authority and jurisdiction for emergency response to most of these lands which have experienced a significant increase in use over the past 30 years.

The opposing trend to the increased use of these public lands is the decrease in federal funds to assist sheriffs in their statutory duty to provide search and rescue services as well as essential law enforcement response.

HR 9165 takes a small step toward recognizing the financial responsibility that the federal government has to the over 3000 counties across the country, but more specifically to the counties and Sheriffs of the western United States.

The Western States Sheriffs' Association supports the passage of HR 9165 and asks that congress work to find additional, more direct funding mechanisms for Sheriffs who are struggling to meet the basic public safety needs of their counties when faced with vast expanses of federally managed lands demanding even greater resources and technical response capabilities.

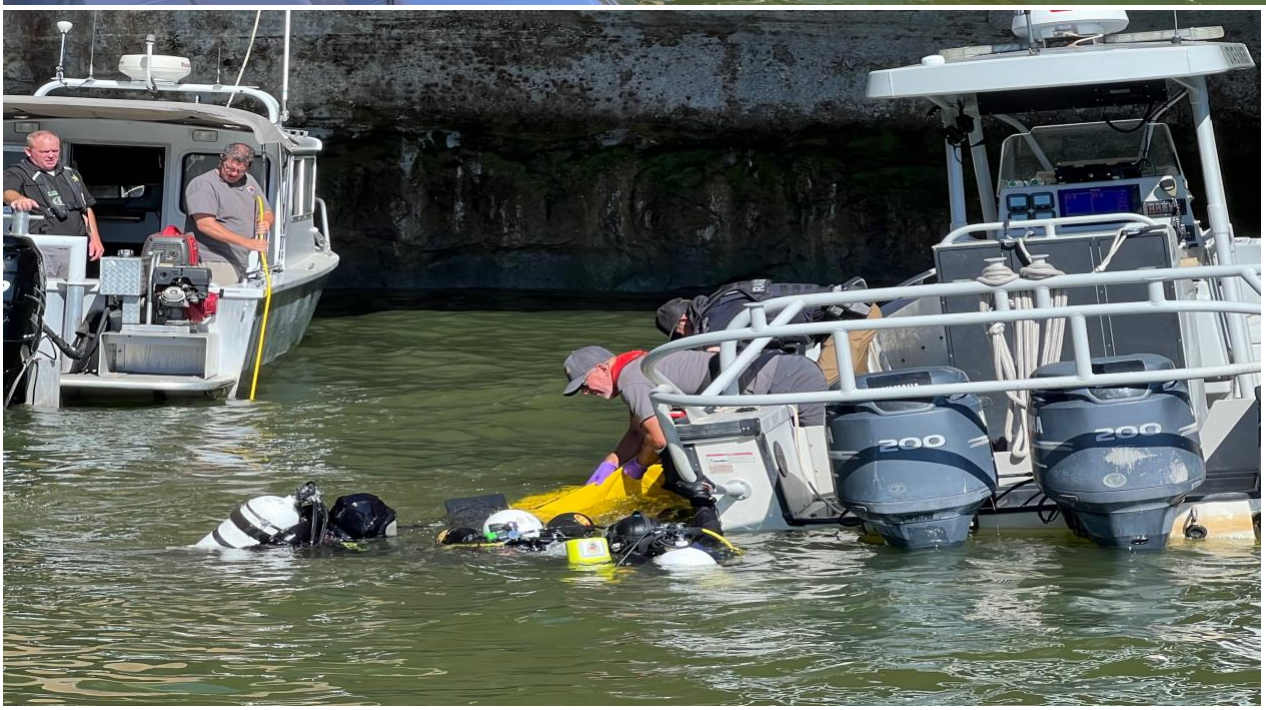
We stand ready to assist in long-term solutions to the funding issues facing America's western Sheriff and commit to work with congress and the land management agencies in moving toward an appropriate and sustainable level of funding.

Sincerely,

Gary Bettencourt, Sheriff
Gilliam County, Oregon
President, WSSA

UTAH

STATE RANGER


200
200