Task force to Gov: Search, rescue improvements needed

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Task Force makes key recommendations to Governor about command and control, communications, training and resources This week Governor Ted Kulongoski received a detailed report from the Search and Rescue (SAR) Taskforce, which he appointed in January to review state laws, administrative rules and related policies to make recommendations for changes necessary to ensure proper coordination, communication and effective pooling of resources at every level of government during search and rescue operations. The report delivered today maintained that the primary responsibility of search and rescue should remain under the jurisdiction of the local sheriffs, and included a set of fifteen recommendations primarily focused on four areas: command and control, communications, training and resources. â€œOne position I held in January â€“ and hold today â€“ is that the primary responsibility of search and rescue should remain with the local sheriffs. They know their terrain, their county and have relationships with local volunteer organizations. They are the best officials to lead search and rescue missions,â€• the Governor said upon receiving the report. â€œThat said, I wanted the Task Force to review how the state can best support these local efforts, and this report offers a solid framework for how to move forward to ensure the state is serving its role in protecting the safety of Oregonians and our visitors.â€• Governor Kulongoski created the Search and Rescue Task Force by Executive Order 07-01 in January 2007 after several high profile incidents involving search and rescue operations in Oregon. The Task Force included 15 representatives from local, state and federal jurisdictions, including state legislators, officials from the Oregon Office of Emergency Management (OEM), Oregon State Police, General Public, Governorâ€™s Office, Portland Police Bureau, Oregon National Guard and volunteer search and rescue organizations. The final recommendations include:

Setting clear guidelines in multi-jurisdictional searches for command and control responsibilities;
Enhancing funding for the Office of Emergency Management (OEM);
Strengthening training, including on the applications of telecommunications technology, for search and rescue leaders;
Forming regional search and rescue councils
Establishing a State Search and Rescue Policy Commission;
Advancing public education and outreach about safety in the wilderness and search and rescue prevention.

â€œSome of the recommendations take legislative action, others have budget impacts, while others I can move forward through administrative action,â€• the Governor continued. â€œOur next step is to review the recommendations in detail and prioritize the ones that need immediate attention from the Legislature, while they are still in session, and create a roadmap for implementing the others.â€• Along with the recommendations, the report also includes background information and analysis of issues associated with previous search and rescue operations in Oregon, as well as areas that need further research and policy discussion. The Task Force also addressed the issue about whether the state should mandate the use of locator beacons in the wilderness. After much discussion, the Task Force concluded that encouraging voluntary use is the best policy for the state. â€œI want to thank the Task Force members for their time and service,â€• the Governor concluded. â€œI look forward to continuing this dialogue at the state level in coordination with our local, volunteer and federal partners so we can ensure the highest quality search and rescue operations for Oregonians.â€• Download a copy of the report.