

SEARCH & RESCUE IN NORTHERN SASKATCHEWAN



D.P. (Don) Dunk 306-922-8219 P.A. Sk.
980-8068 (cell)
Printed 2009

Part 1

Managing Searches in Northern Saskatchewan For RCMP Detachment Commanders and others

Managing a search in Northern Saskatchewan is a bit different than doing so in the Southern more habited regions. In the North especially in the sparsely settled areas factors such as geography, travel routes and methods, cultural differences and a diverse economy make managing a search a different challenge. This course material is designed to help Search Managers that have had little or no experience in conducting a search in Northern Saskatchewan.

Some advantages of searching in Northern Saskatchewan.

Because of dense bush and rock and hostile terrain most travel is along river and lake waterways. There are only a few major roads with only a few side roads that are passable. Most lakes have a cabin on them somewhere and often are good magnets to check. There are relatively few people traveling so sign cutting and mantracking and using a dog are often good resources. Communities are relatively small with low populations so house to house searching is feasible. Another advantage is that in smaller communities everyone practically knows everyone else. That can be a good thing or not so good.

Most searches will involve people who are overdue. Overdue means they have not arrived because they encountered circumstances they cannot readily overcome. Circumstances include, running out of gas, vehicle or mechanical breakdown, vehicle getting stuck, encountering severe weather and unable to travel due to darkness. The initial circumstance unfortunately often leads to other complications. Running out of gas in winter can become life threatening especially if any occupants decide to walk for help and encounter further problems like darkness or exposure. Most overdue persons require assistance.

The next most likely search will be for a lost person, often a hunter, berry picker, a trapper or boaters. These people often only plan to be out for the day and while they may have matches or a lighter, a knife and a bit of food, they rarely are prepared for sudden severe weather, darkness or being in the woods for an extended period of time. Most lost persons are found less than 5-6 miles from their departure point. Many walk out on their own.

Abductions, foul play, Alzheimer's, despondent persons are some categories that do not commonly involve searches in Northern Saskatchewan unlike the Southern Urban centers. Searches for a subject involving alcohol do happen, however, the search manager generally becomes aware of the situation early on. Hypothermia is probably the greatest danger the subject faces.

What the heck is SCORPA ???

SCORPA is an acronym for the six step process used for and during an incident

Size up the situation

Identify **C**ontingencies

Determine Goals and **O**bjectives

Identify needed **R**esources

Build a **P**lan & structure

Take **A**ction

SCORPA is really a common sense approach to any incident.

Size up the situation - What is happening here? What is the nature of the incident? What are the 5 W's ,
What, Where, Why, When, Who.

Contingencies – what could make things worse ? Weather? Darkness? Thin ice? No gas available? No communications?

Objectives – strategy, assignments, investigate, confinement, search

Resources – what do you need, where are they, how do you get them and how long until they arrive ?

Plan – make a plan, how are you going to do this, who is doing what, where and when ?

Action – carry out the plan, get people going, continue to collect and evaluate information. Now repeat the cycle beginning with Size up the Situation.

INITIAL STAGE – learning of missing or overdue person or persons. 3450 form and open a file #
When you first learn of a lost or missing person the most important document to complete is the 3450 form. Take some time to get complete information. You will be amazed how important this will become later on. Be sure to designate or acquire an RCMP Detachment file number early on. This is the magic number that all costs are billed to so they can be billed to Sask Justice and NOT the Detachment

ASSESSING URGENCY - SCORPA – will you be the Search Manager?

Go through the SCORPA process and assess the urgency of the search, what resources you have readily available to carry out your plan and decide if you really want to take the time and effort to manage the search or to have a Search Manager appointed to take over the responsibility of managing it for you. AS DETACHMENT COMMANDER YOU STILL HAVE THE FINAL RESPONSIBILITY AS THE INCIDENT COMMANDER. However, during the search, normal day to day work still carries on. Often during a search the detachment will be asked to assist with such things as interviewing potential witnesses and family, doing press releases, or if foul play is suspected the detachment may be doing background intelligence work and other police matters, or if the search ends in tragedy the detachment will be directly involved.

HOW A SEARCH IS MANAGED

Search is an emergency – call up all the resources asap –try to keep the search time and area to a minimum.

Most searches that are acted on immediately **seldom extend beyond 24 hours**. In fact most are less than 10 hours in length. **The reason is a quick response** so the search area is smaller. A quick response also keeps the costs down because as time passes and the search area enlarges the cost to search goes up dramatically. Think of a search being like a forest fire, the longer you wait they usually only do two things, get bigger and more expensive.

4 STEPS BEFORE SENDING ANYONE TO SEARCH

Step 1- GET A SUITABLE MAP.

If you don't have a map check with The Ministry of Environment if possible. For small search areas a 1:50,000 map has good detail or a 1:250,000 map can work as well.

Step 2 – ESTABLISH LKP , PLS, OR IPP

LKP – Last Know Point – this is the most recent point indicated by a positive, no doubt clue. For example: the subjects vehicle at a trail head, subjects tracks leading from his cabin, the subjects boat trailer.

PLS – Place Last Seen – the most recent sighting of the subject by a witness. Hikers met the subject on the trail, the place where subject purchased gas, the place where subject seen fishing.

IPP – Initial Planning Point – where you will start the search, either the LKP or PLS.

Step 3 – ESTABLISH A SEARCH AREA – THEORETICAL, STATISTICAL, SUBJECTIVE AND DEDUCTIVE.

Theoretical – given the time and distance the subject could have traveled. A circle around the IPP.

Statistical – how far have other subjects traveled under similar conditions.

Subjective – using limiting factors to evaluate where to look or determine high probability areas.

Identify dummy checks, Magnets, natural barriers, terrain features, physical limitations,

Deductive – "search is a classic mystery" a process of reasoning to deduce probable conclusions. A boat crossing a lake runs out of gas, what was the wind speed and direction, use this to deduce which side and how far off track to search.

Step 4 – DO A COM OR COMMUNICATION CHECK

DO THE COM CHECK – call anyone you are aware of along or near the intended route. Phone the tourist camps, check with Northern Radio if a nearby trapper has a radiophone, call family in nearby communities, if aircraft involved have Flight Services try to call if applicable. Be sure to leave a message to call you if subject appears and your contact number.

4 TASKS FOR SEARCHERS TO DO

STEP 1 - DO A ROUTE CHECK

- a. The principal is to have a crew cover the intended route as soon as possible looking for clues.
- b. If time permits try to coordinate an aircraft with spotters on board and possibly a ground crew or two in boats, vehicles, skidoos as the case may be. If possible have some type of Air to ground communication. FRS or GMRS portable radio will work with the aircraft in a 3-5 mile range. An earpiece for the portable radio in the aircraft helps.
- c. Are you able to have a crew start from the intended destination and work towards the LKP
- d. On the map or a second map mark the area or route or section of route you have assigned to be searched. (use the alphabet to designate) Make photocopies for each crew.
- e. for a night search consider twin engine aircraft such as a Navaho, Baron, Cessna 310. Try to have as many spotters on board as convenient. The pilot should not be spotting. Look for fires, hopefully a signal fire which is three fires. Have crews GPS location for inspection during daylight. Have them mark on a map any they find.

STEP 2 – SEARCH ASSIGN AREAS AND DO CONFINEMENT

Using the map try to identify natural confinement boundaries. A river, lake shore, muskeg, etc. Consider a trail block, putting two people in a tent or vehicle on a trail to block the subject. Consider having someone doing roving confinement by patrolling in a boat up and down a shoreline, or someone on a skidoo patrolling a section of road.

STEP 3 – DO DUMMY CHECKS

Dummy checks- local bar, subject's home, girlfriend/boyfriend place, neighbours, work place, etc. Make a list and have someone physically check them out.

STEP 4 - CHECK FOR MAGNETS,

Magnets –(things that attract) communication towers, trappers cabins, portages, water falls, make a list and have them checked out possibly as crews pass nearby.

4 THINGS THE SEARCH MANAGER MUST DO BEFORE SENDING OUT SEARCHERS

1 – Make sure everyone has signed in

This is critical for liability issues and it is one way to know and control who is involved.

2 - Brief searchers before they leave

- a. description of subject
- b. area they are to search
- c. how long they are expected to be out
- d. what to do or handle clues
- e. how and when they are to report ops normal
- f. what safety gear must be used, life jackets, helmets, etc
- g. what hazards may be encountered
- h. what to do when subject is found

3 – Provide some form of communication

If possible provide some sort of communication for each crew. If no radios available set a time that they must return to base by. Perhaps they can call from a nearby tourist camp or community. If using a sat phone have them call in every 30 minutes or every hour. If applicable advise crews that if aircraft circles them 3 times return to base.

4 – Make sure everyone is suitably dressed and equipped for the mission

There may be liability issues if people are sent out without proper clothing. More likely is they will not complete their task and come home early.

4 THINGS THE SEARCH MANAGER MUST DO WHILE THE SEARCH IS ON

1- Provide public information - media and information board

The family and public have the right to know what is happening. Control the situation by holding regular public briefings or scheduling press releases. The best is to have an information board posted where the public has access. On this board have the subject(s) picture(s) vehicle picture, a description of the subject, a summary of what has been done, a list of resources available and phone and contact numbers, and the weather forecast.

2- Authorize expenditures

Contact suppliers; make arrangements for obtaining services and collecting invoices.

3- Maintain a search log

Use some sort of notebook, make a note of the time and what you did as a log entry. One trick is to use the last page to make a separate note of people you called and their phone numbers because after the search you will have to call them back to advise them the search is over.

4 - Stay at the Search base until relieved by another Search Manager

4 THINGS THE SEARCH MANAGER MUST TO DO WHEN SUBJECT IS FOUND

- 1- **Determine condition of subject**- notify medical aid or coroner as applicable
Be concerned about moving a subject who is severely hypothermic or injured. Consider air evacuation.
- 2- **Notify the detachment commander or superior**
- 3- **Notify the family**
- 4- **Notify the other searchers and any standby resources**
This may take some time if communications are difficult. Be sure to keep the Search Base attended until the last crew member has **signed out**. You do not want to go searching for a searcher.

4 THINGS A SEARCH MANAGER MUST DO AFTER THE SEARCH HAS ENDED (SUBJECT FOUND)

- 1- **Debrief crews as they return – everyone signs out**
It is important to have returning crews tell their story. Ask what went well, what did not go well and what could be done differently next time. Write this down.
Get every one to sign out. How many signed out that didn't sign in, anyone missing?
- 2- **Complete the GSAR form** (what the heck is a GSAR form?)
- 3- **Collect all bills**
- 4- **Send GSAR form, 3450 form and bills to Sask Justice.**

Part 11

How to actually do a search in Northern Saskatchewan – Step by step

Preparation

- A. Complete the **3450 form** – get a feel for what has happened –
- B. Contact the Hasty Team. If you are the Search Manager, get a notebook and start your Search Log
- C. Call CASARA (Civil Air Search And Rescue Association) if a spotter aircraft can be used. Give them a “heads up” as it takes some time to get ready. Phone **1-306-425-9994** for the Provincial Dispatcher.
- D. If possible get suitable people to help. Designate someone as

Logistics (they call for searchers, aircraft, resources, transportation, radios, food etc.)

Planning (they get maps, look after any GPS’s, have medical on standby, look after documentation, sign in sheets)

Operations (they look after assigning crews to tasks, staging areas, specialty teams, and air operations)

If there is no one available – you are it!

- E. **Get a suitable map,**
 - 1. Mark on the map the **LKP, PLS** and **IPP**
(Last Known Point, Place Last Seen, Initial Planning Point)
 - 2. If there was an intended destination draw a line on the map from **LKP** to **destination** along the intended route.
 - 3. **DO THE COM CHECK** – call anyone you are aware of along or near the intended route. Phone the tourist camps, call family in nearby communities, if aircraft are involved call the Air Company or have Flight Services (La Ronge) try to call if applicable.
 - 4. Divide the route into 3 or 4 sections preferably geographically that are easily recognizable on the map and on the ground. These segments can be assigned to one or more resources to search. Use the alphabet to designate ie: sector A
 - 5. If it is a lake or river search divide into segments.
 - 6. Mark on the map any magnets or attractions (tower lights at night?)
 - 7. Draw or highlight on the map any natural boundaries surrounding the intended route. You are trying to establish confinement

* remember you are looking for the vehicle or conveyance and any signs of it.

- a. If looking for a vehicle, highlight all roads and trails that are accessible
 - b. If looking for a boat on a lake use the shoreline
 - c. If looking for a skidoo use lakes, rivers, portages, they are not likely to go through heavy bush, use sign cutting to see where subject may have left the area
 - d. Set up roadblocks, trail blocks, and use roving confinement if required.
8. Make a list of places, locations to do dummy checks. Ie: local bar, subjects home, girlfriend/boyfriend place
 9. Draw on the map a 1 mile circle around the **LKP** and the intended destination. If the route check does not reveal anything, or you find the conveyance and no subject, this circle is a high probability area which you may want to check when able. This pertains mostly to people who are on foot.
 10. Set an **OPERATIONAL** period. This is commonly the time of day when you want to have completed the tasks you need to do, route check, dummy checks, and magnet checks. Usually you want to have this done by the end of daylight. Summer time may be 10:00 pm or in winter 5:00 pm. This is the time you want to have aircraft back on the ground, searchers back at base etc. The next period commonly begins at day break, again 04:30 am in summer or 09:30 am in winter. **During the night** aircraft can be sent up to look for fires, searchers equipped with lights can operate, etc.

Planning Stage

1. With the preparation stage completed including a com check, you must begin to make a plan. Fixed wing aircraft are used for most searches, wheels, skis or floats as applicable. A call to the Provincial CASARA dispatcher will put their resources on standby. They have trained spotter crews and aircraft available currently from Stony Rapids, Battleford/Meadow Lake, Prince Albert and La Ronge/La Loche. The cost for CASARA is billed directly to Sask Justice. You may also charter aircraft from the nearest Aviation company. Collect the bills for the flying and submit with the rest to Sask Justice, who will pay for flying. If due to weather, changing seasons, need to extricate, or as a cost factor, a helicopter may be obtained by a request. The same applies for a request for a Military Helicopter from Cold Lake or a Herc with SARtech's. Those costs are covered.
2. Remember all search costs authorized by the Search Manager are paid by Sask Justice. All charges are to be billed to the file # of the Detachment and **are not to be charged to the RCMP.**
3. You are at the stage to plan a **route check**
 - a. The principal is to have a crew cover the intended route as soon as possible looking for clues.
 - b. If time permits try to coordinate an aircraft with spotters on board and possibly a ground crew or two in boats, vehicles, skidoos as the case may be. If possible have some type of Air to ground communication. FRS or GMRS portable radio will work with the aircraft in a 3-5 mile range. An earpiece for the portable radio in the aircraft helps.

- c. Are you able to have a crew start from the intended destination and work towards the **LKP**
- d. On the map or a second map mark the area or route or section of route you have assigned to be searched. (use the alphabet to designate) Make photocopies for each crew.
- e. for a night search consider twin engine aircraft such as a Navaho, Baron, Cessna 310. Try to have as many spotters on board as convenient. The pilot should not be spotting. Look for fires, hopefully a signal fire which is three fires. Have crews GPS location for inspection during daylight. Have them mark on a map any they find.
- f. As hard as it is to do, the biggest favour you can do for yourself is to number each crew, write down their names if possible and what you assigned them to do. Better yet if you can write down the time they depart and return. Get someone to help you. This is possibly the hardest part of managing the search.

You are at the stage to plan for **dummy and magnets checks**

- a. Dummy checks- local bar, subjects home, girlfriend/boyfriend place, neighbours. Make a list and have someone physically check them out.
- b. Magnets -communication towers, trappers cabins, portages, make a list and have them checked out possibly as crews pass nearby.

You are at the stage to plan for **containment and confinement**

Using the map try to identify natural confinement boundaries, a river, lake shore, muskeg, etc. Consider a trail block, putting two people in a tent or vehicle on a trail to block the subject. Consider having someone doing roving confinement by patrolling in a boat up and down a shoreline, or someone on a skidoo patrolling a section of road.

You are at the stage to plan for **a media contact**

You may want to check with the RCMP media people, or you may want to do your own with the local community TV or radio station. This would be to ask the public to be on the look out for the subject and give a description and a phone number to call. If you need skidoos, boats, quads etc you may want to ask the public for volunteers.

You are at the stage to plan for **special units**

You may want to consider bringing in a Search Dog, the RCMP Dive team or other special units. Remember travel time is a big consideration.

Some Cautions

- a. If possible avoid having close family members as crew members. This is not always possible. Sometimes a family member can be utilized as a guide for a crew if they are familiar with the route. Family members are better utilized in a Logistics role.
- b. Choose carefully who you send out as crews. Be sensitive to things such as family feuds, people of questionable motivations, and those with reputations of “Knowing the area”. Just because the area is on a person’s trap line does not mean they know what it looks like from the air or what the country is like 2 miles to the side of their trapper trail. Be cautious of people who “Know the lake”, “they have lived here for years.” They may have lived there for years, but how well do they really know the lake?
- c. Most people living in Northern Saskatchewan especially trappers do not have, or know how to use a compass, and what good is a compass without a map? A number of people have a GPS but do not currently know how to use it. On a search is not a good place to try to relearn how it works.
- d. Decide how to handle clues. If they are small, bag and tag and GPS location and bring to Search Base if able? One must be cautious of what a clue really means. An ice cream pail with berries in it may or may not be from the subject even though a witness said the subject had an ice cream pail when they were last seen.
- e. Subjects are not always cooperative. More than half will not light a fire, respond to calling or sound attraction, make a signal for aircraft or even wave. A police siren is a poor sound attraction. (is subject afraid of police)
- f. **Being lost is not a rational state of mind – do not expect the subject to do rational things!**

Getting ready

1. **Assemble your resources or search crews.**
 - a. make sure everyone has signed in on some sort of sign in sheet
 - b. never send anyone alone if possible – use units of 2-3 persons
 - c. send 2-3 skidoos, quads or boats as a unit. Boats should have a driver and 1 or 2 observers. 2 people on a skidoo or quad is not recommended. A single vehicle should have at least one person along.
2. **Brief each crew or resource**
 - a. description of subject
 - b. area they are assigned to search – provide a photocopy of map
 - c. how long they are expected to be out
 - d. ask how much fuel each vehicle or conveyance has

- e. what to do or how to handle clues
 - f. how and when they are to report ops normal
 - g. what safety gear must be used, life jackets, helmets, etc
 - h. what hazards may be encountered
 - i. everyone must search safely, no one is to jeopardize their safety for another
 - j. what to do when subject is found
3. If possible provide some sort of communication for each crew. If no radios are available, set a time that they must return to base by. Perhaps they can call from a nearby tourist camp or community. If using a sat phone have them call in every 30 minutes or every hour. If applicable advise crews that if aircraft circles them 3 times return to base.
 4. Make sure everyone is suitably dressed and equipped for the mission
 5. Contact local stores or gas stations and make arrangements for fuel and oil, spare batteries and food as required for the searchers and for the Search Base.

Start Searching

Do a com check with any radio equipment, be sure people are on the right frequency, batteries are good and spares available, does the operator know how a sat phone works, do they have the numbers to call.

Not doing a com check before leaving is the most common serious error made on a search. Send search crews on their way, calmly, do not rush, safety first!

If you have an **Operations** person, they will keep track of the crew's progress, locations and receive any reports as they come in.

As Search Manager, as clues come in you must evaluate them and determine validity. If a clue strongly indicates to look in another area – you can send available resources to that area – have the rest of the resources continue their assignment until completed. Do not send all your resources to the new area immediately.

Remember some of the Crucials of Search Management

- Search is a classic mystery
- Search for clues, and the subject
- Search Management is Information Management

During the Search

Now is a good time if you have not done so, to put up an **information board**. This ideally would be a cork board or piece of plywood where information is posted; such as a picture of the subject, a description of the vehicle, a summary of what has been done, a list of resources available and phone numbers. This should be in a place where the public has access.

The media should be contacted. They are useful if you need more volunteers or specific volunteers. They can alert people in the general area to be on the lookout for the subject.

The best media is the local community TV or radio station. Contact the RCMP Media people for a press release.

Get together with the Plans Chief, Operations Chief, and Logistics Chief (if they have been appointed) to draw up contingency plans for the next shift of searchers or for the next Operational period. If resources are enroute from a distance ensure they can be briefed upon arrival and have a demob plan in place for when search is ended. Basically how are people getting home and who have you previously contacted that need to be notified when the search is ended?

When Subject is found

1. Determine the condition of the subject. Can they be moved? What are the risks? Is medical attention required? Is a helicopter required? Does a SAR Tech need to parachute in? Is a Coroner required?
2. Notify the Detachment Commander or Superior Officer
3. Notify the family
4. Notify the other searchers and any standby resources
5. debrief crews as they return –have skidoos, boats, etc refueled - everyone signs out
6. complete GSAR form
7. collect all bills , send GSAR form, 3450 form and bills to Sask Justice

If Subject not found

1. If a complete Route check, dummy and magnet check is completed and nothing substantial turns up, ask for assistance.
2. At this point a full scale all out effort will be ramped up and resources from all over will appear.

SOME COMMON PROBLEMS

Spontaneous converging volunteers

When a search occurs, volunteers often come to the Search Base to offer to help. Depending on the circumstances some volunteers can be utilized in helping with Logistics. On occasion without warning you may get a huge flux of volunteers over running the Search Base or worse heading out to search areas uncontrolled and endangering themselves.

Some ideas to help control the situation are :

- Appoint someone to "sign in" all the volunteers. Have this person set up a sign in station at a location removed from the Search Base, perhaps the community hall. Quickly make a form and photo copy it that asks for name, phone numbers and what skills or resources they may have, boats, skidoos, etc.
- Contact any stores and gas stations nearby and advise them that no one is to charge anything without your authorization.
- If band members are involved contact the Chief or someone in charge and ask them to send only 2 or 3 people to the Search Base to "help plan" any activities they are contemplating. Most times the Band will undertake to pay the expenses for their members to participate, if a band member is missing.
- If possible ask any volunteers that are leaving to search on their own to at least tell you where they are going and to report to you when they return.
- Contact the local media and ask that they broadcast a message that volunteers are not needed at the present time but they can leave their name at the sign in location.
- If hundreds of volunteers appear (and they have) contemplate having the band or local government set up a suitable temporary camp site away from town or the search area. A place where the Spontaneous Converging Volunteers can assemble and be controlled in some manner. Most of them are there for the free coffee and any food they can acquire. The camp takes on a life of its own and suffers the same problems as any other community however, it may be easier to monitor than having 100 people invade a small northern village.