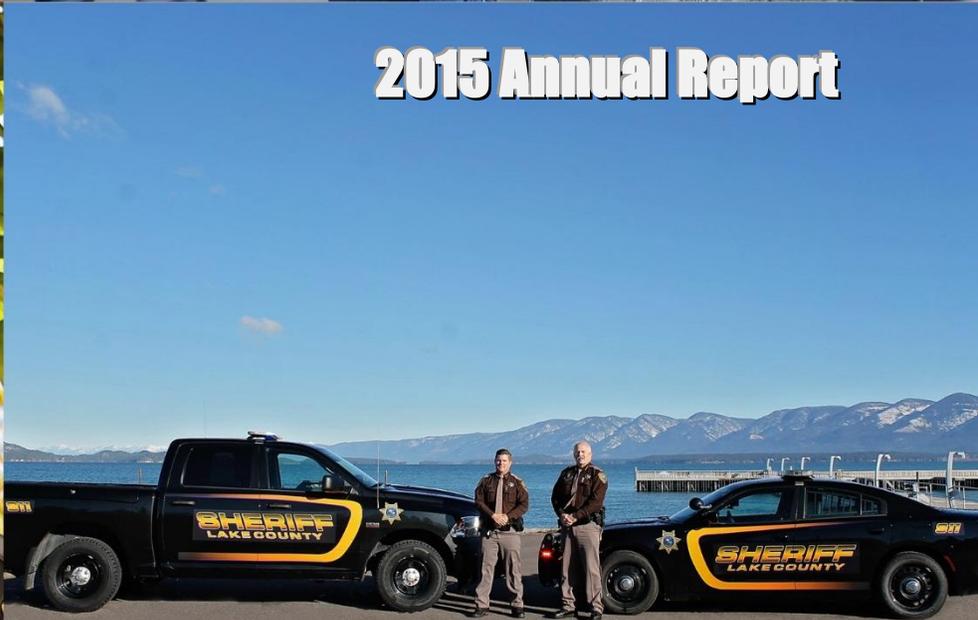




# Lake County Sheriff's Office



# 2015 Annual Report





# Lake County Mission Statement

The Mission of the Lake County Sheriff's Office is to enhance the quality of life in our county by working in partnership with the community we serve. We strive to promote safety, enforce the laws, and safeguard the constitutional rights of all people.





Citizens of Lake County, it is my privilege to have served you in the first year of my first term as your Sheriff. We are well into 2016, my second year, and I felt compelled to share with you the many successes and challenges of this office since I began my term in January of 2015.

### **Budget:**

I will begin by presenting the "boring" side of our office by discussing the overall budget picture.

The Sheriff's Office was negatively affected by lower certified property values, resulting in a cut of nearly \$190,000 from the Sheriff's Office tax revenue from the voted Mill Levy. In addition to this, the Lake County Finance Director has identified that budget practices prior to my administration were not in accordance with best budgeting practices. Specifically, a budget reserve has not been maintained to fund the Sheriff's Office for the first 1/3 of the fiscal year (from July to November).

As it has been explained to me, historically, the Sheriff's Office would "borrow" this operational budget from the county budget and pay it back once budgetary dollars were made available as property taxes are collected in November. As a result, I have begun saving money towards this "reserve fund," which can be up to 1/3 of the yearly budget, with an initial \$200,000 being applied to this reserve fund. Essentially, I started my first term with \$390,000 less than previous Sheriffs. However, the initial \$200,000 was reduced in order to cover operating costs. We are and will continue to make progress, but as you can understand, this is very difficult given the already tight budget we operate on. The overall budget for the Sheriff's Office is \$3.8 million. That's a pretty modest sum for an office that runs three separate divisions 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for 365 days per year with over 60 employees.

### **Administration:**

The leadership of LCSO has gone through some changes over my first year with the retirement of long-time employees in management positions. The retirement of Captain Luc Mathias resulted in the promotion of Detention Corporal Joel Shearer to this position, which oversees the detention facility and 911 center. The oversight of Lieutenant Mike Sargeant over the detectives and deputy coroners was transferred to the Undersheriff, and Sargeant was utilized as a patrol supervisor. The transfer of the Captain's position to a non-sworn position, and utilizing the Lieutenant as a uniformed



officer allowed me to keep the shifts full, as we are now having to operate with 3 less uniform positions than in previous years due to budgetary constraints.



Deputy Ben Woods was appointed Undersheriff in October, replacing James Atkins, who has returned to work for Polson Police. I have also appointed Woods to represent the Sheriff's Office on a multi-disciplinary core-team that is currently in the beginning phases of trying to create an Adult Drug Court in Lake County, under the guidance of District Court Judge, James Manley. These courts have demonstrated across the state they can be effective in reducing recidivism for drug offenses of offenders that are selected to participate, and I have no doubt that if this program is implemented in Lake County, they can help make a difference here as well.

Upon the retirement of Lieutenant Sargeant, I created an additional Lieutenant position and promoted Deputies Fernando Venegas and Jay Gillhouse to these positions, in order to provide this vital leadership to our two patrol squads. . The end result is that we are able to provide as many uniform personnel as possible, with a supervisor on each shift, resulting in the ability to maintain the same level of visible patrol service to the county within our budget.

### **Civil Division:**

The Sheriff's Office employs one full-time Civil Deputy, Dusty Seegers, who has worked for LCSO for nearly 30 years. His wife, Sophie Seegers, also a nearly 30 year employee, fulfils dual roles, as my administrative assistant as well as the civil administrative assistant. I have made no changes to this very efficient division of the office, but here are some statistics of interest:

- Civil papers include Executions/Sales where we are attempting to collect money for a Judgment Creditor, Tax Executions, Writs of Assistance for Eviction, Subpoenas, and other court orders
- We processed 829 civil papers in 2015
- The Civil Deputy receives over 3 papers per day, with each averaging 4 attempts to serve each paper. This equates to about 13 attempts per shift
- The Admin Assistant also assists Captain Joel Shearer in the issuance of Concealed Weapons Permits, of which we granted 430 in 2015

### **911 Dispatch:**

The Sheriff's 911 Center employs one part-time and 13 full-time dispatchers. This includes two line-supervisors, and a Terminal Agency Coordinator who provides specialized records services related to law enforcement databases. The 911 center runs non-stop, 24/7/365. In addition to answering calls and dispatching law enforcement, fire, and medical services, dispatchers are charged with a number of other duties. This includes entering warrants, orders of protection, pawn records, and providing security monitoring of courthouse surveillance cameras. Our dispatchers are generally the first contact the public encounters with our office when they require services. They are a busy, multi-tasking, dedicated bunch, and they professionally handle thousands of calls per year, many of which are very emotionally difficult for even the most seasoned of

emergency service professionals. Calls to our center were in excess of 35,000 last year. That is over 2500 calls per dispatcher! And this number does not even represent administrative calls placed to the non-emergency number that don't require a dispatcher to log an actual "call."

In my first year, it was identified that the schedule of this particular division had an inordinate amount of scheduled overtime. This was due to an emergency schedule that had been previously implemented a few years prior due to a shortage of man power. With sufficient man-power, and negotiations with the 911 Dispatchers Union, we were able to eliminate this scheduled overtime. This saved the county tax payers, without too unduly affecting the pay of our employees.

In addition to our employees, another important component in the 911 Center is technology. In 2015, our dispatchers dealt with a myriad of technological challenges including an updated phone system and an update to a law enforcement database. These two software changes resulted in widespread problems over the course of many months, which our dispatchers handled with grace and professionalism. Additionally, the planned power outage in October of 2015, posed many challenges to our center with some computer systems failing. However, the resolve of our dispatchers ensured that there was no interruption to the services they provide our county.

In April of 2016, the County Commissioners passed a resolution moving the dispatch center from my command to that of the Office of Emergency Management. I did not support the move, as I believe it will eventually cost the county more money to manage and I don't believe this cost increase will result in any net improvement of dispatch services to the county. Regardless of the decision, we look forward to continued cooperation and service between the Sheriff's Office and the 911 Center.

### **Detention:**

Our detention facility employs 19 Detention Officers. This includes 4 Sergeants, a Transport Officer, a Court Officer, and a Control Officer. One of the Sergeants fulfills multiple roles as Sexual and Violent Offender Registrar, and Evidence Technician. I focused a lot of attention on this division in my first year and the facility is running as efficiently as it possibly can. Many changes made in the division are due to promoting Joel Shearer from Corporal to Captain. Shearer's intimate knowledge of the detention facility resulted in some improvements to security, which has resulted in a lessening of risk and liability, given the facility we have:



- An additional security door was placed in the main lobby to create a barrier between the holding cell and the visiting area
- Improvements were made to the security of the kitchen staff
- Enough female detention officers were recruited and trained that we now have a female officer on every shift. This has alleviated the need to have a 911 Dispatcher leave their duty station to assist the jail in pat-down searches of female inmates. This greatly reduced risk to the Dispatchers who are not trained detention officers

- A restructuring of job positions within the Detention facility has also resulted in all shifts being evenly and efficiently covered 24/7/365
- In 2015 the detention facility experienced a 15% increase in arrests based on the previous 10 year average

The detention facility poses this office numerous challenges. This is mainly due to the design and size of the facility in relation to the needs of the county. In the late 90's the ACLU was victorious in a lawsuit against Lake County regarding conditions in the jail. Among many things, one result was a reduction in the amount of allowable inmates given the facility design and size. The capacity now stands at 42 whereas, up to 80 or more would be housed prior to the lawsuit.

It is not uncommon for people who are charged with non-violent felony crimes to be issued a citation and simply released, as though they were ticketed for jay-walking. As is often the case in drug related crimes, the defendant does not show up for court, resulting in a warrant for their arrest. However, even those with warrants are not arrested due to the lack of jail space to house them. Additionally, it's important to point out that a majority of our criminal cases are drug and/or alcohol related. Burglaries and thefts allow addicts to feed their addiction, and violent crime is often the result of the unpredictability of those under the influence, or are committed in relation to drug activity. Methamphetamine is proving to be Lake County's most problematic illicit substance.

One thing I have done to help alleviate detention population problems is to prioritize the shipment of inmates sentenced to state prison out of our facility to make room for others in our community who need to stay here. Though the county is paid \$69 per day by the state to house these sentenced offenders, I wish to put our community safety ahead of offsetting operating costs by housing state inmates.

Undersheriff Woods, Captain Shearer, and I have toured two recently constructed detention facilities, one in Gallatin County and another in Nez Perce County, Idaho. Recognizing the lack of jail space puts our community at risk, and the current facility does not fit the needs of inmates, or staff, we are beginning the exploratory phases of approaching you, the public, to gain your support for the construction of a suitable detention facility. It is my goal to construct a jail of which a modern design would allow for safer and more efficient use of staff per inmate, far less risk-management than our current facility, and provide for the ability to follow justice through, rather than allowing felony offenders to walk free.

If this occurs, we wish to build a facility that will serve Lake County's needs for the next 40 years or more. As your sheriff, it would be irresponsible of me to continue ignoring the problems, and potential liability posed by our current facility.

### **Law Enforcement:**

We currently employ 20 sworn deputies at LCSO. This includes the Sheriff, Undersheriff, two Lieutenants, two Sergeants, two Detectives, a K9 Unit, and three School Resource Officers, with the remaining nine assigned to uniform patrol. The Lieutenants, Sergeants, and K9 Unit also work uniform patrol. Eight of our sworn personnel are also Deputy Coroners. I will break down each division to explain how the year affected them:

## **Detectives/Deputy Coroners:**

Our two detectives primarily concentrate on crimes against persons cases. One of the changes in my administration has been that more property crimes are being handled and investigated at the patrol level in order to allow our detectives a lighter case-load to more thoroughly concentrate on major cases, such as felony assaults and sex crimes. This results in higher case solving or resolution. We have 8 deputy coroners who work a rotating on-call schedule to investigate deaths in the county. They are comprised of sworn personnel from every division of the office, patrol, SRO, and detectives. Detectives and deputy coroners handled a high number of cases last year, many of which were very challenging.

- Our two detectives investigated over 120 cases last year. This included 60 sex cases
- Deputy Coroners conducted over 200 death investigations, including 8 suicides and 5 motor vehicle fatalities

## **School Resource Officers:**

We currently have one full time deputy stationed at Polson Schools, one at Ronan Schools, and one who serves



St. Ignatius, Charlo, and Arlee Schools. Our SRO's provide security for the schools, special events, and engage in many educational and public outreach programs at the schools. I am very proud of how responsibly our SRO's provide services to our most valuable asset, our children, and how seriously they take their job. With the assistance of other deputies and detectives, the SRO's have been conducting training with school staff on how to respond, or react to a major violent act in the schools. I



I believe their mentorship has resulted in a greater awareness and preparation

of staff to better handle a major incident of violence at one of our schools if something, God forbid, were to happen.

## **Patrol:**

Our patrol division consists of two squads working four separate 12 hour shifts to provide for 24 hour coverage. Each shift has 3 deputies, including a supervisor, either a Sargeant or Lieutenant. They patrol the 1600+ square miles of Lake County and respond to calls for service. They also assist with civil process.

Our deputies kept very busy responding to over 1800 criminal acts last year to include:

- 15 rapes
- 11 robberies
- 4 Arsons

## Lake County Sheriff's Office 2015 Annual Report

- 92 felony assaults, including 9 aggravated domestic assaults, and 8 assaults on peace officers
- 9 incidents of resisting arrest
- 126 domestic assaults
- 11 stalking cases
- 114 burglaries, including 4 aggravated burglaries involving assault
- 305 cases involving possession, distribution, or production of drugs
- 112 DUI's



Notable cases included numerous vehicle pursuits involving felony offenders, the arrests of 7 people involved in numerous burglary cases in the Polson area. The apprehension of a wanted offender who shot at a Tribal Police Officer, the apprehension of robbery suspects, numerous other burglary suspects both in-progress and subsequent to investigation and forensic science. Our deputies work long and busy shifts to provide responsive services to the county and I wish to personally thank them for their dedication.



It was also a big year for drug related investigations and arrests. On that note, Deputy Sciaretta, and K9 Max had a busy year, conducting 102 K9 deployments. The K9 is deployed to search for indications of drugs or drug paraphernalia when an officer develops reasonable suspicion that drugs or drug related items are present. This is typically as a result of a vehicle stop, though of those 102 deployments, 19 were not for vehicles. Oftentimes, these other searches are of buildings as a result of search warrant service, or conducted at the request of Montana Probation and Parole. Here's the rundown and a couple of notable cases:

- Only half of these deployments were for LCSO investigations
- All others were assisting other agencies, MHP, Polson and Ronan PD, and Montana Probation and Parole
- 83 of the deployments were for vehicle drug searches, with 90% success rate in locating drugs or drug related paraphernalia
- K9 Max was deployed on a vehicle and with his positive indication, a search warrant was granted. The subsequent search resulted in 44 grams of meth, 1/2 gram of heroin, and a firearm being located
- K9 Max was deployed on a traffic stop that, again, resulted in the execution of a search warrant that netted over 40 lbs of marijuana
- An MHP K9 Unit was responsible for locating over 49 kilos of cocaine in a Canadian man's vehicle. LCSO also assisted with this investigation



With the increasing level of methamphetamine related criminal activity in Lake County, our K9 Unit is a very important tool for our enforcement efforts, and they did a great job this year!

### **Retirements:**

In 2015, LCSO saw the retirement of longtime and dedicated employees. I wish to extend my appreciation for their years long service, and congratulate them on retirement:

- Captain Luc Mathias served LCSO for 18 years in many capacities. Mathias had been a Deputy Sheriff, Sergeant, SRT Commander, and retired as the Captain over the detention facility and dispatch center.
- Mike Sargeant served LCSO for 20 years. Sargeant had been a Deputy Sheriff/Coroner, Detective, SRT member, and Undersheriff when Bill Barron was Sheriff. Sargeant retired as Lieutenant, a capacity he served in for over 8 years.
- Tony Buff served LCSO for 17 years. Buff had been a Detention Officer, Deputy Sheriff/Coroner, Reserve Deputy Program coordinator, K9 Deputy, and Search and Rescue Coordinator. Buff retired as a Patrol Sergeant.
- Lonnie Erickson served LCSO for 18 years. Erickson had been a Detention Officer and retired as a Detention Sergeant.



### **Swan/Mission Search and Rescue:**

During the late 1950's, an increase in lost persons resulted in a volunteer organization consisting of individuals who were familiar with the area. In about 1960, this group became the Swan Mission Search and Rescue. A



need for rapid response and medical treatment lead the SMSAR to become one of the first emergency response units in the Swan Lake area. We operated as the sole provider of first responder medical assistance until the mid 1980's when the Bigfork QRU began to provide that expertise.

The group's Mission Statement reads "Swan Mission Search and Rescue is a group of volunteers who are dedicated to searching for and rescuing persons in time of need. Our mission is providing life saving services through a highly trained and professional rapid deployment unit that is on call at all times".

Today SMSAR operates primarily within the Swan and Mission Mountain Ranges, which includes the Swan Valley from the Flathead County line to the Missoula County line, as well as the area from the county line at Bigfork to the boundary with the Flathead Indian Reservation. Our search and rescue hall is located in the community of Swan Lake where we stage our operations.

Members of our search and rescue team train monthly in a variety of life-saving skills. We pride ourselves in being professionally trained in swift-water/river rescue, rope rescue, avalanche, ice rescue, wilderness first aid, GPS, and land navigation. Our members are extensively trained in the use of ATV's snowmobiles, snow bikes, avalanche transceivers, personal watercraft, boat operations, dirt bikes and river rafts. In 2015 we offered each member a minimum of 148 hours of training.

For the year 2015 we had an active membership of 14 men and women who gave tirelessly of themselves on both trainings and call outs. In 2015 we had 6 call outs, with one lasting nearly a week. During these call outs our members leave their families and jobs to assist those in trouble, never thinking about the sacrifices they make.



We are a “family” that works together for the benefit of those in need. We also provide mutual aid to Swan Lake Fire and Bigfork Fire Departments as well as to any agency requesting our assistance.

### **Lake County Search and Rescue:**

Lake County Search and Rescue was founded in 1970 by Bill Phelps, recognizing a need for having trained emergency response personnel available in the event of lost persons incidents. The volunteers of the unit were trained in navigation and medical response to help aid lost persons back to safety.



The mission statement of Lake County SAR : Lake County Search and Rescue is dedicated to providing professional ground, air, and water search and rescue support based on our education, training and capabilities to the Sheriff's Office and the citizens of Lake County. Our goal is to find and/or locate, render aid, and provide quality professional and expedient services to the citizens of Lake County and other surrounding counties who are in distress or need of help, making sure to minimize the injury, damage or property, and loss of life. We are there to help educate the community to minimize risks that pertain to being lost, and to help provide professional body recovery services as needed. "Lost and Then Found" is our motto that we live by each and every time we are called upon by the Sheriff's Office.

Lake County SAR covers 1200 sq miles and trains on a weekly basis in all areas of study to help in the aid of rescue, such as: Ropes, man-tracking, use of ATV's and boats, ice-rescue, incident command, horse use, K-9 tracking, avalanche rescue, mapping, navigation, and lost person behavior. We take pride in the skills of professional conduct, logical thinking, and quick decision making when it comes to deployment of resources at our disposal.

In 2015, the volunteers of the Lake County SAR logged over 1100 hours of training. The unit consists of 40 active members. In 2015, we conducted 12 land searches, 18 boat searches, many watercraft safety checks, and a high

amount of boat-tows due to faulty mechanical problems experienced by citizen boaters. We are proud that in 2015, the use of the Search and Rescue resulted in 6 persons' lives being saved.

**Promotions:**

Ben Woods –  
Undersheriff



Fernando Venegas-  
Lieutenant



Jay Gillhouse –  
Lieutenant



Justin Snyder -  
Detention Sergeant



John Todd -  
Detention Sergeant



Joel Shearer -  
Captain of Detention  
& 911 Center



Don Armstrong –  
Detention Sergeant



### **Academy Grads:**

Korren Fehrenback and Christopher Brasch graduated from Corrections and Detention Officer Basic #134 (Photo Shown)

Dorothy Gilmore, and Chanona Greiff graduated from Public Service Communications Basic #70

Michael Hingiss graduated from Public Service Communications Basic #71



### **Personnel recognition:**



Patrol Sergeant, Mike Carlson - reached 20 years of service with LCSO. Carlson joined our office in 1996 and is credited with implementing the Field Training program we currently utilize at LCSO. He continues to provide leadership and guidance to our deputies and his longtime service to the county is much appreciated.

Patrol Sergeant, Glenn Miller - was recognized for saving the life of a child who had ingested dangerous medication. Due to the remote area of the incident, Miller recognized the exigency of getting the child to medical professionals as quickly as possible. Rather than waiting for the Ambulance, Miller loaded the child into his patrol car and rushed to meet the Ambulance.



### **Public recognition:**

Greg Gardner - an Irvine Flats resident, was given a commendation from the Sheriff for assisting a Deputy Sheriff in the apprehension of two felony offenders who had led law enforcement officers on a chase involving LCSO deputies, Tribal Police, Flathead County Deputies, Montana Highway Patrol, and air support from Two Bear Air. The suspects were located by Gardner on his property and held at gunpoint until the arrival of a lone deputy. Gardner continued to provide cover for the deputy who placed them under arrest.



Isidra Perez - a Ronan resident, was presented with a commendation from the Sheriff. Perez was present at a daycare when a non-custodial father and accomplice arrived, attempting to take his child from the day care. While the daycare owner kept the suspect out of the residence, Perez acted quickly to ensure that all children were safely barricaded in the residence. Though the suspect committed felony acts of violence upon the daycare owner, no children were harmed or subjected to witnessing the violence. The daycare owner was able to defend herself and chase the suspects away.



Shayne Pierre - a Polson High School student, was recognized by the Sheriff and awarded a meritorious service award from Montana Highway Patrol, for his actions stemming from a crash between a drunk driver and a school bus. After the drunk driver slammed into the stopped bus at a high rate of speed, Pierre acted quickly to ensure the safety of the children riding the bus as well as the injured driver who caused the crash.