



Lake County Sheriff's Office

2016 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, I am happy to provide you with another annual update on the successes, challenges, and opportunities experienced by the Sheriff's Office for the year 2016!



I'd like to start by extending an invitation to all citizens to submit an application to attend my 2017 Citizen's Academy. This Academy is a program designed to provide county residents with first hand information about how the Sheriff's Office works in an academy setting. It is a seven week course with an optional Saturday morning. Participation in the academy requires a commitment of one night a week for the seven week period. Classes will be held on Thursday evenings from 6pm - 9:30pm at the Sheriff's Office starting on April 20th, 2017.

Budget:

The Sheriff's Office was again negatively affected by lower certified property values, resulting in a cut of \$43,000 from the Sheriff's Office tax revenue from the voted Mill Levy. In combination with 2015, this makes \$237,000 total cut from that revenue, in addition to \$100,000 withheld by the County Commissioners to begin beefing up the budget reserve. We continue to make progress towards maintaining an appropriate budget reserve, regardless of the cuts and the great challenges these cuts have presented our Office. The overall budget for the Sheriff's Office is \$3.3 million. That's a pretty modest sum for an office that runs two separate divisions 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for 365 days per year with over 46 employees.

Administration:

The leadership of the Office remains much the same as it did when I last reported to you. Captain Joel Shearer oversees the Detention Facility and employees. Shearer also continues to assist me in further exploration of building a new facility. My Lieutenants, Jay Gillhouse and Fernando Venegas, have taken on their roles successfully, and have demonstrated that their leadership will carry our mission forward in a positive way. In addition to managing their respective patrol shifts, Gillhouse has been assigned quartermaster duties, and Venegas is acting as training coordinator.

The drug court that Undersheriff Woods was helping with in our last Annual Report is still in the works with 20th Judicial District Judge, James Manley. The Judge is hopeful this court will be created in the year 2017. A great deal of effort has been put into this project by many community stake holders and its implementation will hopefully help us lessen the high human cost that drugs have had on our community and families.

With the support of the Commissioners, Undersheriff Woods and Lake County Human Resources Officer, Jessie Going, have implemented a training program for county employees to create a more productive and helpful "company culture" within county government. The program is in its infancy but classes will be offered on a continual basis. The desired end-result is to increase employee retention and provide better services to the public.

Civil Division:

The Civil Division has undergone some changes in 2016 to improve the efficiency of our services. Longtime Civil Deputy, Dusty Seegers, now has dual roles. Seegers serves papers half of the time, and the other half of the time he provides assistance to the Detention Officers with Court Security in District Court. Deputy Sheriff's have stepped up to serve more papers due to Seegers' added responsibilities.



Former 911 Dispatcher, Dorothy Gilmore, was hired to assist longtime Sheriff's Administrative Assistant, Sophie Seegers. Sophie has very dutifully performed her job over the course of many years, but has increasingly needed help as her responsibilities seem to increase year after year. This has resulted in the Sheriff's Administrative Office being open all day as the assistants stagger their lunch breaks, and has increased our ability to serve our customers.

- LCSO Served 786 civil papers in 2016 (Compared to 829 in 2015)
- LCSO Issued 483 Concealed Weapons Permits in 2016 (Compared to 430 in 2015)

Meg Sherry was hired part-time to assist with our Property/Evidence storage as well as administering our Concealed Weapon Permit Program. Property/Evidence and the space required is always a challenge. This position is vital to ensuring that Evidence is properly stored to avoid problems in criminal cases and to make sure recovered property is returned to the proper owners. This position, in the past has been held by already existing personnel within the Detective Division or Detention Staff. However, increasing demands on those divisions and within Property/Evidence has resulted in the need to have a person tasked with this sole responsibility. Meg has already demonstrated that she will increase the efficiency of managing this very important task.



Detention:

Our Detention Facility currently employs 21 Detention Officers, including the Detention Captain, Joel Shearer. The makeup of the Detention Facility is largely the same as our previous Annual Report.

One major change in 2016 is how Court Security is administered. Court Security is one role of Detention Personnel. Previously, a Court Officer was assigned to administer this security detail. In 2016, our Court Officer took a position with the State of Montana, which resulted in a re-evaluation of Court Security. Recognizing that it would be difficult to replace this particular Court Officer, it was decided to make adjustments to this detail. The duty to administer this detail is now shared among the Detention Sergeants. Greater security measures have been put in place to monitor and control what kinds of items are allowed in the court room. This is to prevent unauthorized weapons or contraband from entering the courtroom.

As I informed you in the previous Annual Report, I would be remiss in not continuing to explore the construction of a new Detention Facility. The situation with the jail only deteriorates as time goes on and demands increase. This year we ran at 123% capacity and this is simply not sustainable.

In 2016, four Human Rights Bureau complaints were filed by inmates, but none resulted in any finding of fault on our behalf. Two of them were outright dismissed as having no cause. One was rescinded by the complainant, and a fourth resulted in an agreement between the County and an inmate regarding religious practices within the facility. This is largely due to a highly professional staff who are cognizant of the potential liabilities the facility poses the county.

The most challenging balancing act this office is faced with is the risk to public safety vs. the liability of the facility. If a person is a genuine risk to the public and we have the necessary reason to do so, we have an obligation to lock them up. However, the more over-capacity we are, the greater we expose ourselves to liability. The need to put dangerous people behind bars, if even for a short time, is not going away any time soon. Our study and exploration of this conundrum is ongoing.

Law Enforcement:

We currently employ 22 sworn deputies at LCSO. This is up from 20 sworn last year when the Annual Report was released. However, these numbers are still down from 25 sworn, 2 years ago, and for the 8 years preceding 2016.

I find it worth mentioning that a recent study of crime statistics in the State puts Lake County at the #2 crime rate in the 9 most populous counties, behind Butte/Silverbow. Regardless, the county only has the same amount of sworn officers as the county with the *lowest* crime rate of these counties which is Ravalli County. All told, law enforcement agencies in Lake County are staffed at 1.3 Officers/100k population*. This is the minimum number for the top 9 most populous counties, with most counties having 1.5/100k. **Because their crime statistics are not tracked by the State of Montana, crimes reported to Tribal Police were not included in the calculation of the crime rate, thus their officers were not counted when determining the Officer/100k ratio.*

The 22 sworn of the LCSO includes the Sheriff, Undersheriff, two Lieutenants, two Sergeants, two Detectives, a K9 Deputy, an agent assigned to the Drug Task Force, 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:

Investigations (Detectives/Deputy Coroners):

Due to changes in case assignment, the detectives worked less than half of the cases than in 2015. However, the outcomes of those cases were that they were more thorough and successful in their outcomes. Additionally, there were some cases that were very involved in 2016, including a homicide in Arlee. 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 patrol and detectives.

- Our two detectives investigated over 50 cases last year. This included 2 homicides, 26 sex cases, and 3 arson investigations.
- Deputy Coroners conducted 170 death investigations (200 in 2015), including 5 suicides (7 in 2015) and 5 motor vehicle fatalities (same as last year)



Photo credit to Nicole Tavener

School Resource Officers:

We still 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. I was happy to see the Valley Journal cover our SRO program in its first edition

of 2017 to recognize these Officers for their contribution to our schools and community!

<http://www.valleyjournal.net/Article/16737/Polson-grads-return-as-school-officers>

Patrol:

The 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, and compliance monitoring of sexual and violent offenders.

Our deputies kept very busy responding to over 2081 complaints last year (over 1800 last year) to include:

- 16 sex crimes
- 5 robberies
- 6 arson
- 119 assault crimes including 28 with weapons and 9 assaults on peace officers
- 129 domestic assaults, 9 of which an offender destroyed a communication device to prevent a 911 call
- 10 incidents of resisting arrest
- 8 stalking cases
- 106 burglaries
- 74 trespass to property or vehicle
- 267 theft/fraud
- 75 criminal mischief/vandalism
- 2 escapee apprehensions from other jurisdictions



- 92 DUI's
- 245 drug related cases

Notable cases in 2016 include:

- A June investigation into the homicide of, 18 year old, Richard Warner, whose body was discovered in a camper in Arlee - The body had been in this location for months but the scene was not discovered until someone moved the abandoned camper. An investigation by Deputies, Detectives, and Tribal Officers was conducted and the responsible parties, Cassandra and Stephen Seese, were located and arrested within a week of the discovery of Richard's body.
- A joint investigation on Thanksgiving Day with Montana Highway Patrol and Tribal Police regarding the Negligent Homicide of 3 year old, Phillip Shourds Jr., in Pablo - This was subsequent to a reckless driver, 17 year old, Chasen Curley, who was arrested for causing the death.
- One of our newest Deputies took on a very large-scale investigation of a puppy-mill in the Charlo area. A search warrant was executed, animals were seized, and the case resulted in the surrender of all of the animals and a prosecutorial agreement with the operators that essentially put them out of business forever.
- A request for a welfare check turned into a kidnapping investigation that involved the cooperation of the Billings, MT, Police Department - It was determined to be a case of human trafficking and resulted in the rescue of a female victim who had been lured away from her family by a known human trafficker.



Drug Related Investigations:

It was another big year for drug related investigations and arrests. Deputy Sciaretta, and K9 Max had another productive year, conducting 91 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 91 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:

- Half of these deployments were for LCSO investigations
- All others were assisting other agencies, MHP, Polson and Ronan PD, and Montana Probation and Parole
- 72 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 4 pounds of meth, and a kilogram of cocaine being located
- A pursuit by officers of a stolen vehicle led them to a residence where a search warrant resulted in the deployment of K9 Max and the location of numerous drugs and guns.



The Sheriff's Office has had an agent working with the Northwest Drug Task force since May of 2016 after a brief gap of not having an agent in this position due to manpower. In this time, this Detective has:

- Conducted over 50 narcotics investigations related to trafficking and distribution of narcotics in the Mission Valley and beyond
- 35 search warrants specific to these investigations have been executed by this agent with assistance from Tribal, Polson, and Ronan Police, in addition to Flathead, Missoula, and Cascade County authorities.

With the increasing level of methamphetamine and now heroin related criminal activity in Lake County, our Drug Agent and K9 Unit are very important tools for our enforcement efforts, and they did a great job this year!

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 person 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 of 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 2016, the volunteers of the Lake County SAR logged over 1100 hours of training. The unit consists of 40 active members. In 2016, Lake County SAR conducted 6 searches totaling 288 hours of search-related operations. We are proud that in 2015, the use of the Search and Rescue resulted in 6 persons' lives being saved.

Swan Mission Search and Rescue:

During the late 1950's, an increase in lost persons resulted in a volunteer organization being formed that consisted 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 the first emergency response unit 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 Lake County line to the Missoula County line, as well as the area from the Lake County line in Bigfork to the boundary with the Flathead Indian Reservation on the East Lake Shore of Flathead Lake. Our search and rescue hall, where we stage our operations, is located in the community of Swan Lake.



Members of our search and rescue team train bi-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 2016 we offered each member a minimum of 160 hours of in-house training as well as making unlimited outside training available.

In 2016 we had an active membership of 16 men and women who gave tirelessly of themselves on both trainings and call outs. During these call outs our members leave their families and jobs to assist those in trouble, never thinking about the sacrifices they make. We had more call outs this year than normal ranging from minor incidents to life saving situations. Our training prepares us for the unexpected.

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

Montana Law Enforcement Academy Graduates:

In 2016, the Sheriff's Office graduated four new Deputies from the Montana Law Enforcement Academy's Law Enforcement Officer Basic Course. The graduates were, Deputies, Christopher Clary, Taylor Bleazard, Korren Fehrenbach, and Steven Larson



Four Detention Officers graduated from the Montana Law Enforcement Academy's Corrections and Detention Officer Basic Course in 2016. The graduates were, Officers, Korren Fehrenbach, Chris Brasch, Shelley Ellerman and Rachael Pettit.



Promotions:

Ray Czak - Detention Sergeant



Personnel Recognition:

An overdue awards banquet was held in the fall of 2016, to recognize some of the exceptional work of our employees at LCSO. Numerous awards were presented as follows:

Officer of the Year Award - Lieutenant Jay Gillhouse - 2010

Certificate of Commendation - Detention Officers Dane Heckel and Bill Jacobs

Lifesaving Award - Lieutenant Jay Gillhouse

Certificate of Commendation - Dispatcher Christine Trogden with Honorable Mention to Katrina Baltz

Certificate of Commendation - Deputy Scott Sciarretta, and Dispatchers Shelly Wheeler, and Keith Dietz

Certificate of Commendation - Detention Officers Keith Miller, Dane Heckel, Bill Jacobs and Justin Snyder

Lifesaving Award - Detention Officers Kode Struble and Lanny VanMeter

Certificate of Commendation - Deputy Clay Shoemaker

Lifesaving Award - Tribal PD Officer TJ Haynes

Certificate of Commendation- Deputy Ryan Funke

Employee of the Quarter (County-wide) - Administrative Assistant, Sophie Seegers

Search and Rescue Members:

1st Annual Person of the Year Award - Donald Bohne

Lifesaving Award - For an April of 2015, 3 day long search in the Valley Creek area which located an injured young man who had been lost for 5 days without food, water or adequate clothing:

Don Bohne

Joe Broom

Fankie Brown

Mark Culp

Bryce Eldridge

David Elmore Ed Hendrix

Shelley Leprowes

Bruce McMillan

Victor Moldenhauer

Gabe Ouellett

Bob Perrine

Deanna Ponton

Stacy Violet

Michalle McMillan



Lifesaving Award - For a July of 2015 search of a 20 year old Kayaker on Flathead Lake

Jared Bell

Victor Moldenhauer

David Elmore

Gabe Ouellett

Public Recognition:

Citizen Recognition Award - Daren Incashola



Proposal by County Commissioners to rescind the PL280 agreement. The Sheriff's Position:

On January 11, 2017, the Lake County Commissioners had a public meeting to announce their proposal to withdraw from the PL280 agreement between the State, CSKT Tribe, and the County. This is a complicated issue, but I would like to communicate my stance with you as I have been asked by many citizens about my opinion:

First off, I want to state that I am against rescinding this agreement. For those of you unaware of the issue, I'll provide some background. PL280 was enacted by the US Congress in the early 1950's. This law allows state courts to have jurisdiction over Tribal Members on a reservation in criminal and civil matters. Back then, some states were compelled to take this jurisdiction on. Montana was considered a voluntary state, whereby the state and respective tribal governments within the state could enter agreements to partially or fully implement the PL280 law. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation entered into a PL280 agreement with the State of Montana in the early 60's. As it stands today, the State has jurisdiction over tribal members in felony criminal matters on the Flathead Reservation.

This means that the Sheriff's Office (and local police departments), often times with the aid of Tribal Police, conduct felony investigations of tribal members when necessary. These cases are adjudicated in District Court and prosecuted by the Lake County Attorney's Office. Offenders of these crimes are housed in the county jail (when necessary or possible). Misdemeanors and traffic offenses of tribal members are largely handled by the Tribal Police, though there are agreements in place to allow a tribal police officer to cite a non-member and for a non-tribal officer to cite a tribal member in non-arrest traffic offenses.

Essentially, there are two tiers of law enforcement locally, tribal and local law enforcement, and this works very well due to the cooperative effort of these entities and the accountability to local people. If PL280 is rescinded, it is my fear that this accountability will erode. This will add a third tier to local law enforcement and that will be

the Federal Government. With a rescinding of this agreement, they will assume jurisdiction over felonies committed by tribal members within the boundaries of the Flathead Reservation.

The reason for the proposal by the Commissioners is to draw attention to the financial challenges of Lake County. Though I agree that Lake County's financial problems need to be addressed, I don't believe withdrawal from PL-280 will help matters. None of the commissioners have suggested this, but I have been approached by many citizens regarding it and I wish to make clear that I don't believe the financial challenges of the county should be expected to be eased solely by the CSKT either. Rather, since the services provided locally are provided in lieu of the Federal Government, at a higher quality and a price far less than the Federal Government could provide them, the Federal Government should subsidize the county in much the same way PILT payments are made (payment in lieu of taxes).

Early in my term, I began a dialogue with Senator, Jon Tester, and Congressman, Ryan Zinke, about this issue. Senator Steve Daines was also contacted but has never responded to me which I find very disappointing. Thus far, little progress has been made, but the representatives who I've had contact with understand the issue, at the very least. I remain hopeful that local and federal partnerships will be able to repair this situation and that PL280 will remain the law of the land here. Please contact Tester, Daines, and our next Congressman, whoever that ends up being, in order to tell them how important this issue is to them.

Here's their contact information, including their local HQ:

The Honorable Jon Tester 724 Hart Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510-2604	Office of Sen. Jon Tester 119 1st Avenue N, Suite 102 Great Falls, MT 59401
The Honorable Steve Daines 320 Hart Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510	Office of Sen. Steve Daines 104 4th Street North, Ste. 302 Great Falls, MT 59401

In conclusion, I wish to state that I believe the Sheriff's Office is running very efficiently under my command. Feedback I have received indicates that my leadership has resulted in a level of stability in the Office that has not been seen in a long time. My administrative team is cultivating an environment of professionalism, accountability, and efficiency. I could not be prouder of the employees of the Sheriff's Office and the sacrifices they often make to protect our community. In a time when scrutiny of law enforcement is at a fevered pitch, I have great confidence in the abilities of this team.

Regardless of the budgetary challenges and the lack of an adequate jail facility, the future is bright for the Lake County Sheriff's Office, and we gain a little each day towards improving and providing even more dependable and professional services to you.

