



# Search Tails

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MESARD Newsletter

## MESARD

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Found Spring!

**Maybe not yet Quinn** but the worst is behind us. The days are longer, the sun is warmer and we are all eager to shed our coats, both dogs and humans. We'll locate our muck boots and welcome mud season for the next month or two then we will be wondering where Summer is. Remember, there is no Spring in Maine!

**MESARD dog teams** responded to 20 search and rescue missions in 2010. Of those 20 searches, MESARD teams located four missing individuals. MESARD handlers volunteered 1,582 hours to search for lost and missing people and drove over 19,070 miles in response to search callouts. MESARD mainly responds to searches within the state of Maine, but in 2010, teams responded to a search for a missing 85 year old female with dementia in Waterville Valley, New Hampshire.



MESARD currently has 17 certified teams available to the Maine Warden Service and law enforcement agencies in the state. MESARD dogs are certified in one or more of the following: wilderness air scent, tracking/trailing, water search, human remains detection and article search. We currently have five new dogs on the team that are working toward certification in wilderness air scent and tracking/trailing.



MESARD's certification process is considered arduous by many, but it has shown over the years that the end result is a dog team that can effectively search in the Maine environment. Teams receive extensive training and must meet rigid evaluation standards to become MESARD certified. Both handlers and dogs must prove their proficiency as well as pass certification tests on a variety of realistic search problems. Handler training includes first aid, CPR, land navigation, radio communications, wilderness survival, crime scene preservation, the incident command system, ground search techniques and search organization.

By Kelly Pontbriand

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## MESARD Water Search Capabilities

By Deborah Palman



F-L Chip Wadsworth, Lisa Higgins, Deb Palman, Michele Fleury, Jay Holweger  
R-L Dan Pelliter, Troy Morey, Jennifer Fisk, Jim Bridge, Leslie Howe, Roger David,  
Nancy Troubh, Cindy Atwood and Irene Morey. Photographer Spencer Fuller

Over the years, MESARD has offered the service of water search for drowning victims. Although it is well known in the SAR dog community that dogs can detect victims under water, it is not common knowledge amongst the public or SAR dog user agencies. Water search is often a mix of opposing forces and desires: we want to be able to locate and recover the body, but sometimes deep water, weather and other hazardous conditions prohibit a search or recovery. If the area to be searched is relatively small, the search can be easy, but often the area is extensive and luck plays a big factor in passing by the area where scent is available. So water searching is often a time and effort intensive exercise without any guarantee of a conclusion. Even if the dogs indicate, there is little chance of immediate confirmation or reward for the handler because usually the earliest divers can respond is the next day.

Because of this and the availability of divers, boats and suitable water for training, MESARD's water search program lagged for a few years prior to 2010. A few of the older dogs had been certified in the past and responded to the few requests that were made. The last request I remember before the summer of 2009 was a request by Portland PD to check for the body of a man who was believed to have fallen off the Veterans Memorial Bridge into the Fore River. It was March 2009 and Portland PD picked a day with good weather and provided three seaworthy boats to work the area. All three dogs that worked the search, two from MESARD and one from Merrill Investigations, indicated that a body was present in the area under the bridge. Because of the bridge abutments and low water, the area could not be gridded with the boats, and due to strong currents, it could only be worked at slack tide. Because of the current and hazardous conditions, divers could not be used, so it remained a waiting game until May when the body was found floating in a nearby cove. This mission is typical of the frustration and risk to the handler and dog posed by water searching. Responses have to be balanced against the risk of the handler and dog being out on or near the water and the chance of a recovery.

With the donation of the MESARD boat in 2010, the availability and interest in water search training increased. By 2009, in addition to the veteran water dogs, MESARD also had a number of new dogs that had completed certifications in basic air scent and tracking and were now ready to take on specialized training. In the summer of 2009, we invited Lisa Higgins from Louisiana up to help us with our water search training. She gave us some great training methods to use and a lecture on her experiences in the south. MESARD refurbished our old water search equipment and manufactured new, so that we had two scent pumps that allow us to train with cadaver scent instead of divers. From the summer of 2009 on, some members worked hard on their cadaver and water work. Lisa was again invited back to a seminar Labor Day weekend in 2010, and was recruited to conduct shoreline certification tests on the teams she had trained with the year before. As a result, 12 teams were certified in the shoreline phase of water searching. MESARD divides water search certifications into two areas, searching from the shoreline and searching from a boat.

At the seminar, Spencer Fuller and Deborah Palman conducted boat search training and certifications, and, by the end of the weekend, MESARD had 6 teams that were certified to do water search from a boat. Searching from a boat is much more difficult than searching from shore because the dog is not free to move like they are on shore. When working a shoreline, the dog can work just like it searches for subjects in the woods. In a boat, the dog becomes dependent on the handler and boat driver to direct the boat, so the dog has to learn to indicate when it passes through scent rather than to be able to move towards the source of the scent. Searching from a boat also takes considerable "dog reading" skill by the handler.

MESARD teams still need practice training on large areas of water, but the work we did in 2009 and 2010 gives us the basic resources we need to respond to water searches in the future.

## MESARD News

**Our PFD's are hung up** and gathering dust, the boat lies quiet under it's blanket of snow. All we can do now is reminisce about our last water training with Lisa Higgins. Yes, remember Labor Day Weekend, September 3, 4 & 5, 2010? Let me remind you of all the hard work and fun we had. First, Lisa blew in ahead of another tropical storm. Didn't she bring one up with her from Louisiana in 2009? Because of the rain we had a brief intermission from training on Saturday so Lisa gave a slideshow presentation and talked about searches and search techniques. When the weather finally broke we got to continue Friday's work. Land/building HRD, young dogs getting familiarized with the new boat, the advanced water teams working scent from the boat and Irene doing daily fun obedience classes. Dr. David helped out with HRD at Cooper's Farm where Michele and Nya passed their advance cadaver certification. Other teams worked to certify on the boat. Debbie/Quinn, Michele/Nya, Dan/Aggie, Nancy/Spirit, Spencer/Moxie and Jennifer/Kierka had, by the end of the weekend, successfully passed their water certification. Also, all the teams that attempted the shoreline certification passed. One last accomplishment of the weekend was Leslie's Eron passing his CGC. We also welcomed a guest, a fellow SAR handler from Fredericton N.B, Penny Grant. Everyone had a great time! Special thanks goes out to Brad and Suzanne Billings for catering all of our meals for the weekend at Camp Winniaugamauck in Sedgwick (such a wonderful venue!) and to Troy and Irene Morey for all of their planning to make this event go so smooth.



**We'd like to welcome** two additions to our team. Caitlyn Farrar is our newest trainee and she brings with her Vendetta, a Malinois. Caitlyn's base will be in the southern part of the state. Caitlyn might be young in age but has already had many years of dog handling experience. She's shown Australian Shepherds in both Obedience, Agility and Rally-O. During her High School years she also had a Cert. Therapy dog. Caitlyn's plan is to train her Malinois in air scent. **Our newest K-9** on the team is Splash and he's in training with Nancy Troubh. Nancy will be the first to admit she's our oldest member of the team but try to keep up with Nancy and you might doubt that. Splash was whelped in August 2010 and his breeder is Barb Loree of Rio Ranch Golden Retrievers, Calgary, AB Canada and yes, Nancy went all the way out there to pick up her puppy (how many hours on a plane?). Check out the breeder's website at [Rio-Ranch.com](http://Rio-Ranch.com). They specialize in a social, family oriented Hunting dog.



**Other news** In January MASAR sponsored a "Lost Person Behavior" class in Bangor with Lt. Josh Stohl, (Ret.) Vermont State Police which the same class that was offered in southern Maine last Winter. MESARD had a large presence there with 10 members participating. The course is a culmination of statistics gathered from ISRID with over 40 descriptive categories of a lost person. Everything from dementia, young children, older children, hikers, despondence, off trail skiers, etc. The compiled statistics show patterns of behavior within the different categories and how each search should be planned and implemented. The class also gave insight into how search management works and what goes into the early hours of a search before the k-9's and ground pounders arrive at the scene. Later we broke up into small groups and were given a half dozen different scenarios based on actual cases. We then used our "Lost Person Behavior" tables to plan how best to use our available resources. By the end of the class everyone had a better understanding how to use different teams and deploy them affectively.



**Time warp  
1989,  
Guess who?**



## Scent of the Missing: Love and Partnership with a Search-And-Rescue Dog

By Susannah Charleson



Review by Cindy Atwood, DVM

I was given this book by a client who completely enjoyed it and felt I would too. It is an autobiographical story of Susannah's experience as a novice SAR dog handler in the urban and semi wilderness areas in and around Dallas, TX. She begins her own training as a flanker and once familiar with basic search procedures she is given clearance to acquire "Puzzle", a golden retriever puppy, for training as her own SAR dog. As with so many of our "best laid plans", Susannah finds that the road to successful partnership and teamwork with an independent and headstrong golden girl is full of twists and turns. I truly enjoyed learning how a different team, in a different part of the country handled training and deployment and I appreciated and identified with Susannah's description of honing her own abilities as a handler in reading Puzzle's vocalizations and body language. Susannah also includes many vignettes of searches in which she and her team participated which were interesting but left me wanting for more. Perhaps this is why I put the book down at some point only half way through and was slow to return to and finish it, unlike other stories I read in the process.

Susannah has a gift for using wonderfully descriptive prose throughout the book. There were many little stories including her past as a pilot who knew the ways of wind and weather and indeed flew on search missions. Also included were stories of home life as when Puzzle brings sweet puppy breath and major domestic upheaval upon her arrival to a house already occupied by 3 resident cats and 6 assorted small dogs. These were all certainly relevant but I did feel that she skipped around a bit from one scene to the next and this jumping around interrupted the flow of the story and did not allow me to become emotionally engaged or "hooked". The story seems to end a bit abruptly just as Puzzle and Susannah have completed their certifications and are setting off to begin their life together as a bona fide SAR team... perhaps this is the hook I felt was lacking before. Sequel anyone? I give this book a B.

## Beware of Bullwinkle



**Remember that likable**, dimwitted character of the 60's T.V animated classic "The Bullwinkle Show"? He wouldn't hurt a flea, would he? In some ways moose are still portrayed as likable, goofy animals that you might just stumble onto in the woods. Like the old saying goes, "You don't hurt them, they won't hurt you". Mostly true as they are herbivores. They won't eat humans but they don't want to be bothered by humans either. Where we run into problems with moose is usually when we encounter them with our dogs. Ask Debbie and Jim about a relentless young male that followed them during a search. A natural enemy with the Coyote and Wolf, a moose can't differentiate



between them and the common dog. The dog still possesses behavior that will worry and harasses a moose. Bark, circle, some may be bold enough to nip at the heel if they can. Moose are large and powerful, weighing upwards to 1200lb, can be 6' at the shoulder and they can strike and kill a dog in an instant. They are more aggressive when stressed during Rut season (Sept./Oct.), Calving (May/June) and late Winter when they are weakened from cold, snow and a dwindling food resources. How to keep a moose happy? Keep away from it. Not so simple to do as a searcher. Sometimes we can't help but come in contact with moose and deer. We have to search all our areas and this probably at one time or another will bring you and your dog face to face with an unhappy moose. Debbie's encounter showed how persistent the moose can be and she felt the moose was drawn to them because of her dog. He followed the team for a distance and wasn't put off by them leaving the area and seeking higher ground, he kept following. You can be assured that Deb had her dog secured and that it wasn't harassing the moose but the moose was going to escort them way out of his territory. What can we do to keep our dogs and ourselves safe when we stumble onto a moose? Recall, recall, recall. You need to get your dog under control quickly and without question. Thankfully most of us practice this with distractions just for this reason. Most typical dog owners fail at this and their dogs won't come when called. Keep practicing this, adding in the down stay and down from a distance with distractions and it might save their life someday. Once you have your dog leashed you want to move out of the moose's area. Don't turn your back on him/her. Back away, it's best if you can keep a tree between you and the moose. Then just hopscotch from tree to tree until you're way out of his way. If you don't see him, it doesn't mean he isn't still following you. Keep alert and control on your dog because he might still be following you. If his aggressive body language doesn't get you to retreat (hackles up, stamping feet, ears pinned, bluff charging) and you get charged and knocked to the ground, cover your head and face. I'm sure at this point your dog will be drawing the moose away from you with their barking. Lay there and don't give the moose a reason to come back to you. Then when you feel safe, crawl to cover. Thankfully incidences with moose with aggression are rare but always keep mindful when you're in their areas.

**GABE**  
1997-2010

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*Greatly missed by  
Spencer  
And the  
Fuller Family*

**“SERIOUS” SAR DOG**



H7Focusing LED Headlamp with VLT

**Gear Review, Coast H7 Focusing Headlamp**  
by Sarah Robinson

**I hadn't hidden** in the woods at night much less been on a night search for 7 or 8 years. But when I was asked to hide for teammates certification problem, I didn't hesitate, I simply pulled out my old headlamp and dusted off my flashlight and off I went. What I didn't count on was the effect of age--both on my old headlamp and on my eyes! I couldn't see a thing. I wondered if I really could return to SAR work. The Coast H7 Focusing LED Headlamp with VLT has turned out to be the answer. It's small size and light weight makes it easy to pack and comfortable to wear. It has an amazing 177 lumen output and according to manufacturer's specifications can project a beam up to 180 meters. All I know, and really care about, is that I can once again see in the woods at night. The LED lights gives you 4.5 hours of use out of 3 AAA batteries, which are attached to the back of the head strap. It fits comfortably on a hat or helmet. The headlamp can be adjusted from a wide flood beam to a focused spot beam, with no dark and hot spots typically associated with focusing flashlights and headlamps. This makes it as useful for sweeping the ground in front of you as you search as it is for looking down for compass or GPS headings. In addition to adjusting the headlamp beam, you can also adjust the intensity of the light--a further battery-saving feature. The headlamp itself also tilts up and down for further focusing refinement. Retail approx. \$60

**Thank you.....by Jennifer Fisk on behalf of the team**



Michele Fleury, Pres.  
2004-2011



Spencer Fuller, V. Pres.  
2004-2011



Jenn Rocheleau, Treas.  
2005-2011

**A huge thank you** for all of the hours Michele, Spencer and Jenn gave to the organizational part of MESARD, the highlights of which are recognized below. They worked very hard for the benefit of MESARD through some good and some very bad times. Now they can resume being just handlers.

Under Michele's presidency, we began the Flanker program which hopefully will give each handler accompaniment in the field. This will allow for a much safer deployment of our teams. Michele spearheaded having two water search seminars with Lisa Higgins resulting in many MESARD dogs certified for water. Some new cadaver standards were written and instituted giving us a professional stance.

Usually, the office of VP isn't very demanding but for Spencer this wasn't the case. From Europe, via cell phone, in our darkest hour, he was able to assume leadership and orchestrate how we would go forward through the weeks ahead. He also helped us to make the moves towards better GPS units and radios. He too, helped us towards a more professional level of performance.

The office of treasurer could be a daunting position, but Jenn made it look easy. We appreciate the diligence she exercised over our finances and her organization of the debrief session after the Savoy tragedy..

Our training director since 1984 has moved into the Presidency. Deb began training a small band of frustrating SAR wannabee novices. She persevered and victory came at Sukee Kennel when we all passed initial certification. She lobbied Warden Service to call her dog team and as skeptical as they were, they did. Without that piece, we would never be in the position we are today. We appreciate the sacrifices made by those who have served in leadership positions and are glad to give them a rest. "Of course, we are a small group so we may try to recycle you".

**Check us out online at [www.MESARD.org](http://www.MESARD.org)**