



NEWS RELEASE

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DATE: February 16 – 17, 2019
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15 People / 4 Dogs Brought To Safety After 8 Hour Night Snow Cat Rescue

Date/Time: Saturday – Sunday, February 16 – 17, 2019 8:54pm
Location: Crab Flats, Green Valley Lake
Incident: Snow Cat Rescue #19-034096

Summary: Just before 9pm last night San Bernardino County Fire received a report through the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department of several vehicles stuck on a remote forest service road in the area of Crab Flats near Green Valley Lake. While enroute additional information was received stating upwards of 15 individuals were stranded and needing to be extracted. At this point additional resources specifically designed to deal with snow conditions were requested.

County Fire Snow-Cats, similar to the machines often seen grooming ski trails, are used to navigate and access areas not accessible by standard vehicles or fire engines. Their design brings their weight displacement to less than one pound per square foot which allows them to travel through heavy snowfall while their low centers of gravity also allow the navigation of a variety of slopes. They carry rescue, medical, navigation and communications equipment designed for these austere environments. #SBCoFD maintains the largest fleet of public safety snow cats in Southern California. Snow cats from Green Valley Lake (SC95) and Fawnskin (SC96) were assigned.

Contact was made with the stranded group by phone where it was confirmed that 5 vehicles with 12 adults, 3 children, and 4 dogs were in need of extraction. No injuries were reported. The victims were advised to shelter in place as firefighters continued to make access.

An incident command post was established, and a plan was developed to try and make access from the Fawnskin side as well as Green Valley Lake. As SC95 made its way to the group they encountered a partially washed out road that would require improvements in order to pass. Battalion 132, the incident commander, requested a third snow cat from Lake Arrowhead (SC26). This newer model is configured in a way that would potentially be able to negotiate its way through the damaged portion of the road. Conditions at this point were clear, but as the incident progressed fog and light snow started to come in. Temperatures were in the mid to low 20's. Snow pack along most of road in the area was about 3 feet.

Meanwhile, Snow Cat 96 from Fawnskin was sent down the same route the stranded group took but was faced with a large tree obstructing the route. This forced the crew to back track and take an alternate route which was upwards of 13 miles to the stranded subjects. This would significantly delay the response time from the Fawnskin side.

Once the Lake Arrowhead snow cat arrived, they made access to the washed-out portion of the forest service road. Physical improvements were made by firefighters with shovels and sandbags which allowed SC26 to traverse the problem area and eventually make contact with the group.

Two different shuttle operations were put into place: The first placed nine individuals and two small dogs into the snow cat. The second carried the remaining six and two large dogs. Once all victims were extracted and arrived at the command post, they were put in contact with #SBSO deputies who assisted with transportation to Running Springs.

In all 8 firefighters, 3 snow cats, and one battalion chief were assigned to the incident. No injuries were sustained by firefighters or civilians.

Rescue operations were completed by 4:00 a.m. this morning.

San Bernardino County Fire reminds motorists to dress appropriately for winter weather and to carry additional food, water and blankets in their vehicle when traveling. Please follow all posted road closures. Snow packed trails and washed out roads create a hazard for motorists. Make sure your vehicle is in safe operating order with good tires. California Vehicle Code requires all vehicles traveling in the mountains during winter to be in possession of tire chains. Also, please be aware of mapping applications that may recommend unimproved routes or roads that are not maintained.

While we all enjoy the beauty and adventures created by fresh snow, oftentimes it's best to wait for the storm to clear before venturing into our local mountains. Please play responsibly.

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