Dive and Recovery

Most of the 40 lakes scattered throughout Apache County lie at altitudes of 7,000 feet or higher with waters cold and dark. As of 1991 the county was averaging about three drowning per year in its lakes and other bodies of water. The elevation, temperature, and visibility made the chances of rescue and body recovery difficult and dangerous. Trained dive personnel had to be called in from other parts of the state to handle these situations. Due to response times, under these circumstances underwater rescue was impossible.

Several successful cold-water rescues involving victims that had been under water for up to one hour were reported from other parts of the world, prompting Sheriff's Office personnel to form a local team that could respond quickly to a drowning in the local areas as a rescue/recovery team.

Organized in 1991

In 1991 the Apache County Sheriff's Dive Team was organized. Using monies from Arizona State Lakes Improvement Funds Grant of approximately $60,000, the Sheriff's Office purchased two boats and outfitted eight divers with gear and provided replacement gear for damaged or worn out equipment.

The Apache County Sheriff's Posse donated several hundred dollars to assist in the training certifications of the original dive team members. The Sheriff's Posse Search and Rescue continues to supplement the dive team with regular donations.

Reorganized in 2001

The Dive Team was reorganized in 2001 and now consists of 12 divers with several different certifications, including Open Water Divers, Advanced Open Water Divers, Dry Suit Certified Divers and Ice Divers.

Two trained boat operators assist the team. Volunteers are from the Apache County Sheriff's Office, the Apache County Sheriff's Posse, the U.S. Forest Service and Springerville Police Department.

Today

The Apache County Sheriff's Dive Team has responded and performed dives in rescue situations, body recoveries, stolen property recovery, evidence collection and underwater repairs for the U.S. Forest Service on their lake equipment.