## STAFF REPORT

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| **Agenda Item:** | 4 | **Name:** | Nick Bowman |
| **Proposed No**.: | 2019-0291 | **Date:** | July 22, 2020 |

**SUBJECT**

A Motion acknowledging receipt of the King County Sheriff’s plan to increase staffing for the marine unit during peak recreation months in order to reduce safety issues by increasing the number and frequency of river patrols, as required by the 2019-2020 Biennial Budget Ordinance, Ordinance 18835, Section 21, Proviso P5.

**SUMMARY**

The proposed motion and attached report responds to the requirements of Ordinance 18835, the 2019-2020 biennial budget. Section 21, Proviso P5 of the adopted budget obliged the Sheriff’s Office to transmit a report detailing a plan to increase the number and frequency of river patrols by the Sheriff’s Marine Unit during the months of June, July and August.

In accordance with the proviso requirements, the report cites challenges with increasing the number and frequency of river patrols, describes the current marine unit staffing levels and inventory, and details a plan for directed patrols along key shorelines and rivers in unincorporated King County.

**BACKGROUND**

The adopted 2019-2020 biennial budget included a proviso which read:

*Of this appropriation, $100,000 shall not be expended or encumbered until the sheriff transmits a plan to increase staffing for the sheriff marine unit during the peak recreation months of June, July and August in order to reduce safety issues by increasing the number and frequency of river patrols.*

*The Sheriff should file the plan and a motion required by this proviso by May 1, 2019, in the form of a paper original and an electronic copy with the clerk of the council, who shall retain the original and provide an electronic copy to all councilmembers, the council chief of staff and the lead staff for the law and justice committee, or its successor.*

The King County Sheriff’s Marine Unit deploys specially trained and equipped Deputies that are responsible for water-related law enforcement, investigations, rescue and recovery work. The Marine Unit’s operational areas include the Puget Sound, Lake Washington, Lake Sammamish and other lakes, ponds and rivers throughout the unincorporated areas of King County, cities / towns that contract for service and any other jurisdiction that requests specific assistance. According to the Sheriff’s Office website, the Marine Unit provides a variety of water related services including: patrol of waterways, emergency response and rescue, safety inspections, hazard removal, victim recovery and investigation, swiftwater, flood and ice rescue, buoy placement and maintenance and spill response and containment.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**ANALYSIS**

Ordinance 18835 required the Sheriff to transmit a plan by May 1, 2019 that would detail options to increase staffing for the marine unit during the peak recreation months of June, July and August in order to reduce safety issues by increasing the number and frequency of river patrols. The report identifies the challenges with increasing the number and frequency of river patrols, describes the current staffing levels and inventory for the Marine Unit, and details a plan for directed patrols along key shorelines and rivers in unincorporated King County.

Marine Unit Staffing Challenges

According to the report, the biggest challenge to expanding river patrols is the limited number of deputies who can be assigned to this body of work within KCSO’s exiting budget. As most deputies are already fully utilized in their current assignments, the report states that KCSO has a very limited number of deputies who can be redirected for river patrols. An additional challenge exists in the fact that each river is unique in its access points, distance from a KCSO precinct, and the specialized equipment which may be needed for officer safety. Furthermore, additional deputies cannot simply be assigned to river patrols without specific river safety training, which given staffing constraints would likely need to be done on overtime incurring additional expenses beyond KCSO’s current budget. Lastly, the Marine Unit has marine patrol contracts with nine cities on two lakes further reducing the available time for patrols along rivers.

Despite these challenges however, the report notes that KCSO is committed to leveraging existing Marine Unit and patrol resources to increase its presence at locations receiving the most resident complaints and those which pose the greatest safety concerns.

Current Marine Unit Staff Levels and Equipment Inventory

As of April 2019, the report states that the Marine Unit is staffed with four full time-deputies who actively patrol Lake Sammamish and Lake Washington, and in rare cases, respond to calls for assistance within the Puget Sound. There are also one full-time sergeant overseeing the unit and six ancillary deputies with marine training and equipment that can be called in for marine work on overtime.

In terms of vehicles and equipment, the report notes that the Marine Unit has only one 21 foot Jet Boat capable of patrolling river waters and only with limited usage in low water conditions which are prevalent during summer months. The report further notes that, in low water conditions, the Marine Unit is reduced to using swift water rafts which can be drifted down the river one-way and which are not ideal for river patrols.

Directed Unincorporated Patrols

The report determines that, within existing resources, KCSO can staff river shorelines in Precinct 2 (North) and 3 (Southeast) for the forty-two weekend days and holidays during the peak months of June, July and August. This would include one hour of on-duty, directed patrol along the rivers in Precinct 2 for both dayshift and swing shift, on Friday through Sunday and the holiday weekends of July 4th and Labor Day. In addition, the report states that Precinct 2 and 3 Commanders will coordinate one, extra duty emphasis patrol per month for June, July and August. Emphasis operations will utilize uninformed and plain clothes employees to investigate violations and issues which diminish public safety.

The report provides the key river areas identified for emphasis, including:

* Flaming Geyser State Park on the Green River;
* The Cedar River along Maple Valley Hwy West; and
* The Snoqualmie River along SE Fish Hatchery Rd.

The report concludes stating that if additional Marine Unit FTEs or overtime funding is provided, KCSO would be able to conduct more regular emphasis patrols, though would still be limited by river water level conditions. Should additional funding be allocated for this purpose, the report notes that KCSO would develop a revised emphasis plan commensurate with the funding levels provided.

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Proposed Motion 2019-0291 (and its attachments)
2. Transmittal Letter

**INVITED**

1. Troy Olmsted, Criminal Investigation Division Chief, King County Sheriff’s Office

1. <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/sheriff/about-us/enforcement/specialized/marine-patrol.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)