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Continental United States NORAD Region – First Air Force (Air Forces Northern)

Office of Public Affairs

1210 Beacon Beach Road * Tyndall AFB FL 32403-5549

(850) 283-8080 * FAX (850) 283-3376 * DSN 523-8080

afnorthpa@tyndall.af.mil * www.1af.acc.af.mil * [twitter@1staf](https://twitter.com/1staf) * [Facebook@America's AOC](https://www.facebook.com/AmericasAOC)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AFRCC aids in AZ search for 55 stranded people

TYNDALL AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. –The Air Force Rescue Coordination Center here aided local and state first responders while searching for several missing individuals who were stranded near Flagstaff, Ariz.

Last week's winter storm brought several inches of snow, trapping 55 individuals who were hunting or looking for the perfect Christmas tree in the area. Local and state authorities worked closely to locate any stranded individuals trapped by the deadly winter storm.

The Arizona Department of Emergency Management requested federal assistance to help in search and rescue efforts.

AFRCC personnel responded Dec. 10 by coordinating aircraft from the Arizona Civil Air Patrol to overfly the Flagstaff area and search for the missing individuals.

"The Civil Air Patrol spotted eight of the stranded individuals and were able to help redirect ground crews to their locations," said Senior Airman Christopher Uppling, AFRCC search and rescue controller.

In total, 54 stranded individuals were rescued while one person was found deceased.

"Knowing that 54 people are now at home with their families for the holiday season in part because of the work that we do here is reward enough," said Lt. Col. Clifton Hicks, AFRCC director of operations. "On days like this, this is the best job to have in the Air Force, but it's also bittersweet for those who lost a loved one. Our thoughts go out to the family of the deceased hunter."

Civil Air Patrol, the official auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force, is a nonprofit organization with 58,000 members nationwide. CAP performs 90 percent of the continental U.S. inland search and rescue missions as tasked by the AFRCC and was credited with saving 91 lives in fiscal year 2008. Its volunteers also perform homeland security, disaster relief and counter-drug missions at the request of federal, state and local agencies.

The rescue coordination center directly ties in to the FAA's alerting system and the U.S. Mission Control Center. In addition to Search and Rescue Satellite Aided Tracking information, the AFRCC computer system contains resource files that list federal and state organizations which can conduct or assist in SAR efforts throughout North America.

As the United States' inland search and rescue coordinator, the AFRCC serves as the single agency responsible for coordinating federal SAR activities in the 48 contiguous United States.