

# DEPARTMENT PROFILE

## WINTER FIRE DEPARTMENT



By Pete Wicklund

Photos by Fred Loomis

**D**on't let the name of the community fool you. While winter is definitely a key season for this community in Sawyer County, Winter, Wisconsin offers plenty to those who love the outdoors and the North Woods year-round.

Natural amenities such as the Flambeau River State Forest and the Tuscobia State trail draw hundreds to the area each season and ready to assist resident and visitor alike is the Winter Fire Department.

The department has a massive 306-square-mile service area that includes the Village of Winter (one square mile), the Town of Ojibwa (25.7 square miles) and all 279.5

square miles of the Town of Winter, the largest township by area in the state.

For that big of an area, population is sparse with just under 1,000 year-round residents in the Town of Winter and about 250 each in the Village of Winter and the Town of Ojibwa.

All that geography is served by one fire station located in the village.



group that already provides a countywide Search and Rescue Team, is working to form an AMR EMS team to assist the ambulance service.

The county association also jointly owns an airboat, ideal for shallow waterways and when lakes freeze over in the winter. The unit has been called to assist near and far, even once as far away as Iron County's Turtle Flambeau Flowage to help search for an ATV that went through the ice.

Winter firefighters are trained as hazmat techs (that assist the regional team based in Superior), cold-water rescue, confined space and extrication. With the Tuscobia trail that attracts many ATV riders and snowmobile riders to the area and with annual ice fishing and hunting excursions, the department is ready to respond with its Kubota track UTV. That vehicle is also ready to respond with the Search and Rescue Team.

"Hunting season is a busy time because there are so many people in our area. Everybody and their brother wants to come up north," Holm said.

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Assistant Chief Larry Falk

Fire Chief John Holm says the department used to have a second station in the Connors Lake area, but it was closed several years ago as membership there dwindled.

The department of 23 volunteer members responds to about 60 fire calls per year. EMS for the area is provided by Sawyer County Ambulance. Holm notes that the county fire association, a very active

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With state Highway 70 running right through the middle of the Village of Winter and numerous other state, county and local roads, vehicle wrecks are an ever-present hazard. Winter F.D. is ready to respond with its brush truck that carries extrication tools and foam.

In the last year, the department has already notched some significant calls.

“We get our share of interesting stuff,” Holm notes. “This year alone, in one month, we had two fatal crashes.”

The department recently experienced its first arson case in about 20 years. Holm said a guy burned a barn full of hay but was caught on video surveillance.

Last winter the department rescued a dog that got away from an Illinois family and fell through some ice.

One year ago, on Labor Day weekend, Winter F.D. had a search and rescue for a missing man, Norbert A. “Tony” Danzman. Unfortunately, as of this



A/C Larry Falk points out the 306-square-mile service area

writing, Danzman still had not been located.

“The sad thing it seems that whenever we train on something, that’s the kind of call we end up with,” Holm said.

As of this writing in mid-July, there had not been many significant recent fires, Holm said. But with so much



Winter has 23 volunteer members (12 of whom were present at our photo shoot)

area to protect, water supply is always a key concern. The Village of Winter has a hydrant system and dry hydrants are located at the boat landings on Lake Winter, Connors Lake and Fishtrap Lake and at a bridge located halfway between Winter and Connors Lake.

The department has a pumper tanker and a tender and an engine with an 1,100-gallon tank. But Holm and his officers were working as of this writing to convince the fire board to authorize a loan to purchase a used pumper-tanker to augment the fleet and ideally help the area’s ISO rating. Holm said the department also is looking at replacing the tank on its 1,800-gallon 2002 tanker.

Winter F.D. is also always ready to assist its neighbors and vice versa. Four departments in Sawyer County are members of MABAS Division 160, but inter-county mutual aid requests are the standard dispatch modus operandi.

“We have a very strong county fire association so it’s just a matter of

a call to get whatever we want,” Holm said. “We very rarely call from outside the county.”

The department is run on an annual budget of about \$100,000. Members are not paid per call, but do get a year-end bonus based on a point system that accounts for calls and trainings and participation in department activities.

The department holds one fundraiser a year, a smelt feed traditionally held on the opening day of fishing season. The department usually brings in about \$13,000 in about five hours.

This year, unfortunately, the smelt feed had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. But the fire hall still played a role in helping the community, serving as a National Guard COVID-19 testing site on May 14.

Other community outreach efforts by the department include the annual fire prevention visit to the local school and open houses at the fire hall. The department is also working on plans for a safety fair.

Winter’s fire hall opened in 2003, replacing a 1980s era station that still stands next door and is used by the village water utility. Winter F.D.,

for about four decades was a base for one of the county's ambulances, but EMS last year moved to its own facility in Ojibwa.

The fire hall does, however, serve as the office for Sawyer County Emergency Management and is also equipped to be a backup county dispatch center should something happen at the main dispatch center in Hayward.

Holm, a member of the department for 20 years, has been chief for two years. His regular gig is working as an EMT for Rusk County EMS.

Winter F.D. top officers are elected from the ranks every two years. Assisting Holm are Asst. Chief Larry Falk, Deputy Chief 1 Chad Lynch, Deputy Chief 2 Kayla Coggins, Maintenance Capt. Floyd Kahl and Health and Safety Officer Bryan Coss. The veteran member of the department is Brian Blair, who has served since October 1981.



Winter F.D. responds to calls in the Flambeau River State Forest and Tuscobia State trail.



Winter's many lakes offer great locations for drafting training



Deputy Chief Chad Lynch leads a training class



Assistant Chief Larry Falk and Chief John Holm

### Winter F.D. apparatus:

- 1993 Chevrolet brush truck, with skid unit for brush and car fires; 200 gallons of water and eight gallons of foam. Truck also carries Hurst extrication equipment.
- 2000 GMC engine with 1,100

- gallons of water, a 1,250 GPM pump and on-board foam.
- 2001 E-One pumper tanker on a Freightliner chassis with 2,100 gallons of water and a PTO Hale pump.
- 2002 Sterling tanker with

- 1,800 gallons of water.
- 1991 International heavy rescue/command post.
- 1997 Suburban water site unit; carries portable pump and ice auger.
- Kubota UTV with tracks.
- Portable light tower with generator.

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Main Street in Winter, Wisconsin

## About the Winter community:

**W**inter, located 35 miles southeast of Hayward, lies in an area attractive to vacationers, hunters, and other sportsmen. Numerous resorts on lakes and rivers cater to visitors from all over the Midwest. Fishing and deer hunting are the most attractive sports of the area. A most interesting sight is to see the deer hunters move in during November. They make Winter their headquarters during their visit.

The Flambeau River State Forest comprises a portion of the Town of Winter.

The Tuscobia State Trail is a refurbished 74-mile railroad grade once owned by the Chicago, Minneapolis, St. Paul and Omaha Railway (The Omaha Road). Bought out by the Chicago & Northwestern Railway, this portion, called the Park Falls Line, once served as the lifeblood for the area through early logging, farming and settling. The state trail

crosses through the heart of the Village of Winter.

East of the village is Lake Winter, an outflow of the Brunet River.

— *Information from the Winter Area Chamber of Commerce*

