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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MT. TOM MULTIAGENCY SAR

INYO COUNTY, CA, MARCH 10, 2021 - On Sunday afternoon, March 7, Inyo County Sheriff's Dispatch received an inReach activation from a hiker requesting assistance for her hiking partner who had taken a 40' tumbling fall on the north ridge of Mt. Tom at approximately 12,000'. The subject was experiencing acute back pain and was unable to move. The reporting party was a Wilderness EMT and both women were experienced hikers who had been on the route before. With deteriorating conditions and darkness approaching, CHP H-82 out of Apple Valley attempted to extract the subjects or insert Inyo Search and Rescue (SAR) members nearby. High, gusty winds made this impossible. H-82 then attempted to drop overnight gear to the subjects. Unfortunately both gear drops were unsuccessful due to worsening wind conditions and the subject's location on a steep, narrow ridge. After the gear drops failed, an Inyo SAR ground team began up the north ridge around 2:00am on Monday, March 8 to attempt to reach the hikers, however conditions turned the field team around after several hours.

Around 9:00am the Sheriff's Office heard from the hikers that they had made it through the night, where temperatures were below zero with wind-chill, and both of their husbands had made it to them that morning having hiked through the night to bring supplies. At 11:00am, after several setbacks, an Army National Guard Chinook out of Stockton attempted to insert 12 Inyo SAR members near the party, but the more powerful Chinook was also turned around by the winds.

With a storm forecast arriving Tuesday morning making helicopter extraction even more unlikely, Inyo SAR deployed multiple ground teams up Elderberry Canyon to reach the party and prepare for potentially lowering the patient over 6000' down Elderberry Canyon. Given the scale of this potential evacuation, a mutual aid callout went to SAR teams across the state. While ground teams hiked, a Naval Air Station (NAS) helicopter from Fallon and another NAS ship from Lemoore made numerous attempts to reach the subject, but gusty winds turned them all back.

At approximately 10:30pm the first SAR team reached the party and was able to assess the situation better and begin to form an extraction plan for first light. Around 2:15am on Tuesday, March 9 VX-31 out of China

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INYO COUNTY, CA



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Lake was able to take advantage of a lull in the winds and insert a medic near the party. Both the patient and the reporting party, who had suffered significant frostbite to a foot, were successfully hoisted out by 3:00am and were flown to Antelope Valley for medical care. The SAR team and the husbands of the two hikers descended the headwall of Elderberry Canyon where they met up with dozens of SAR members who had traveled from near and far and hiked through the night to help with what could have been a truly epic extraction.

ICSO would like to extend their deepest gratitude to the SAR members involved in this mission from Inyo SAR, Mono SAR, El Dorado County SAR, Los Angeles County – Montrose SAR, Los Angeles County – Sierra Madre SAR, and Los Angeles County – Antelope Valley SAR. We would also like to thank the crews of all five helicopters from Army National Guard, CHP Inland Air Ops, China Lake NAWS, NAS Fallon, and NAS Lemoore for their incredible skill and persistence.

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