

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

September 2025

MERT's primary role is to support all open Evacuation Shelters throughout Marion County (FL) during declared Emergency events. We also support the Emergency Operations Center Incident Commander, staff and other EMCOMM groups (CERT, HEC, ARES) with voice, image & data communications locally, statewide and across the United States.

"Call MERT... When all else fails!"

Next Bimonthly Meeting

Sept. 20th, 10:00 am at
the EOC

All Amateur Radio Operators
are Welcomed!

Meetings conducted in Jan,
March, May, July, Sept. and Nov.

Why Volunteer for MERT?



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

In times of disaster, information is more than power—it's survival. Hurricanes and severe storms can knock out traditional communication channels, leaving communities disconnected just when they need help the most... like we've seen multiple times across our state and the U.S.

That's when MERT steps in. MERT isn't just about radios. It's about readiness, resourcefulness, and reaching people when others can't. As a volunteer with the Marion County Emergency Radio Team, you become an essential part of Marion County's emergency response system,

working alongside Division of Emergency Management staff and other public safety partners.

Your role could be sending important communications from a shelter, relaying updates from another EOC in an adjoining county, helping a hospital team member (HEC) get important resources to a hospital or receiving an emergency message from a community CERT member requesting support from Fire Rescue personnel. No matter what the radio report, **you** make it possible for someone needing help - to receive help when it matters most!

Volunteering with MERT means gaining hands-on experience in real-world emergency communications. From coaxial cables and antenna systems to repeater networks and EOC operations, you'll develop skills that are technical, practical, and deeply impactful. And whether you're new to amateur radio or a seasoned pro, there's room for you to grow and

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." – Margaret Mead

help others when they need it. There's also room for you to Elmer others!

But volunteering at MERT is more than technical - it's transformational. You'll be part of a mission-driven team that is focused on service, teamwork, and innovation. You'll experience firsthand what it means to help make the Division of Emergency Management stronger, more resilient, and better prepared for the future support of all Marion County residents.

As we have now expanded our EMCOMM coverage with the new repeater launched in the Ocala National Forest, we've significantly raised the capabilities of the Division of Emergency Management in helping other counties in need, or in asking for help for Marion County.

MERT is a powerful resource during emergencies. When the winds rise, power fades and normal communications resources fail, MERT volunteers keep the information flowing at the Shelters, our EOC... and now other EOC's across Florida. Our motto is our guide....

"When all else fails. Call MERT!"

HR Cook

New Forest Tower Repeater Update



New "Forest" repeater on 147.210 MHz.

Bill Gillespie, Deputy Coordinator, and I are very pleased sharing that the new Division of Emergency Management "Ocala Forest" repeater went active on Monday, August 18, 2025. The repeater now provides critical Emergency Communications (EMCOMM) radio services to the far NE areas of Marion County (including the entire Ocala National Forest). Previously, all these areas were unserved by MERT during prior declared emergencies.

Preliminary radio coverage tests are very positive using mobile and handy-talkie radio units. Recent tests were also successful with Alachua and Sumter County EOC's. Tests have been conducted near the Volusia EOC, with other tests scheduled with Lake, Flagler, Putnam, Levy and Citrus County EOC's.



MERT radio coverage now includes all northeastern and East portions of Marion County.



(L-R) The activation crew included - Harlan Cook KN4VRM; Phil Lewis W4EVV; Royce Hagerman KD7SNN; Ray Woody WB6FKJ; Nick Kiddey W4NFK; and Bill Gillespie KW5BG. Not shown Mark Weible N4GPA and behind the camera

"As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands — one for helping yourself, the other for helping others."
- Audrey Hepburn

Coordinator Harlan Cook sent this message to Director Preston Bowlin...

“To: Preston Bowlin, Director of the Division of Emergency Management, MCSO

We extend our thanks to you and the Sheriff’s Office for your continued support in making this significant enhancement in MERT emergency radio coverage in the northeast areas, along with the Ocala National Forest, a reality. Activation of the new repeater also now provides EMCOMM capability and direct EOC to EOC radio access across Florida should any emergency arise in the future.”

MERT EMCOMM Network diagram on KG4NXO.com’s website at:

<https://kg4nxo.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/MERT-EMCOMM-Network-2025-08-22.pdf>

A BIG Thank You to Kraig Pritts!



Donated Yaesu FT-891

I am very pleased sharing long-time member Kraig Pritts (KA2LHO) has donated his all-band Yaesu FT-891 radio to MERT. This is a richly featured radio capable of supporting EMCOMM operations on all amateur radio bands (HF, 2 M & 70 cm). The radio will also be upgraded to SHARES HF band operations as a backup to the new SHARES radio unit at Station 1.

His donation is especially noteworthy in now supporting continuous emergency operations monitoring of the Forest tower repeater (NA4DA, 147.210 MHz) dedicated to providing EOC to EOC direct communications between 11 northern counties from the Atlantic to the Gulf. This new initiative is part of an expanded effort by the North Florida AUXCOMM Work Group in supporting each county’s Emergency Management organization.



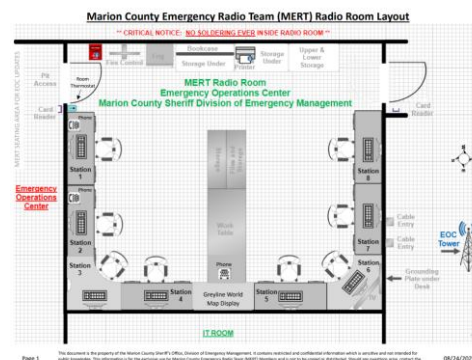
Kraig Pritts KA2LHO

Thank you, Kraig for your long-time service... and very meaningful donation to MERT!

EOC Radio Room Changes

With the donation mentioned above, the EOC radio room has undergone another operational change. The new layout has been documented in the revised “Radio Room Layout” version 08/24/2025”.

The revision captures the move of our SHARES radio to **Station 1** and the addition of a new radio at **Station 2** monitoring the new repeater dedicated to **EOC to EOC** emergency communications across northern Florida.



Please update your Radio Room Layout document in keeping your records current

“Volunteering is at the very core of being a human. No one has made it through life without someone else’s help.” – Heather French Henry

North Florida AUXCOMM Work Group



To address a growing concern... with positive action... Marion County Director Preston Bowlin, Division of Emergency Management invited 11 northern Florida counties to a concept meeting on August 13th. He wanted to explore development of an inter-county AUXCOMM Work Group providing Emergency

Management Leaders a new option for regional voice and digital message communications directly between County EOC's.

The invitees included Directors and Managers of Emergency Management; County Comm. Leaders responsible for AUXCOMM (or EMCOMM) programs; and, the AUXCOMM Leader (amateur radio) personnel responsible for supporting each EOC.



AUXCOMM Work Group attendees at the Marion County EOC

Invited participants were from Alachua, Bradford, Citrus, Flagler, Hernando, Lake, Levy, Putnam, Sumter and Volusia. 36 personnel attended.

Director Bowlin introduced the topic in having the potential to provide him, and his peers, another important communication resource when existing systems and telecom utilities fail - as has been experienced in other Florida counties with recent and past hurricanes.

Sgt. Jason Matthews of the Lake County Sheriff's Office, Communications Unit Leader, then shared his support for the Work Group with a recent example on the need to have inter-EOC communications. It focused on the failure of a telecom utility fiber optic network when it was damaged by underground contractors resulting in a total **911** blackout for several counties in north central Florida. He offered this was a perfect example on the benefits of having this capability available 24 x 7 as a "County fast-reaction communications resource".



Harlan Cook, MERT Coordinator then presented a PowerPoint deck proposing the AUXCOMM Work Group focus on several topics, including:

- ✓ Creating contact lists and establishing Leadership communications channels between County AUXCOMM teams;
- ✓ Identify, catalog and share regional resources and networks (voice and Winlink digital) available & used by each AUXCOMM team;
- ✓ Be a resource sharing information and best practices;

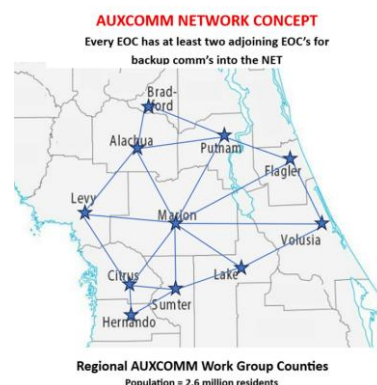


"The purpose of life is not to be happy, but to matter – to be productive, to be useful, to have it make some difference that you have lived at all." – Leo Rosten

- ✓ Develop/share cooperative training resources with each AUXCOMM team in helping achieve each county's Mission;
- ✓ Provide speakers sharing the benefits of volunteer service by amateur radio operators in support of County EOC's;
- ✓ Develop common EMCOMM procedures used during emergencies;
- ✓ Conduct regular EOC network tests verifying operational readiness of inter-EOC communications by all AUXCOMM teams;

His presentation concluded with three (3) long-term goals the Work Group could focus on:

1. Be a regional resource for Emergency Management Leaders in providing information and expertise on AUXCOMM matters.
2. Provide Emergency Management Leaders a new communications link which is separate and independent of all traditional telecom networks now in existence.
3. **Foster the creation of a coast-to-coast voice and digital message radio network between EOC's.**

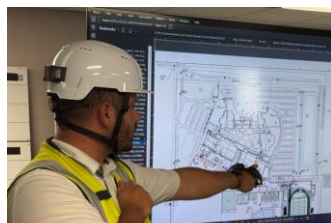


Attending Leaders of the County Emergency Management organizations decided to support the project and determined the next meeting will be at the Lake County EOC. Meeting details are pending.

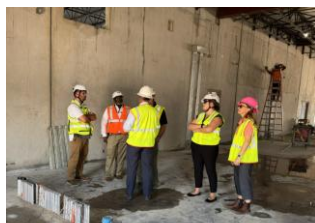
Proposed Inter-County EOC to EOC voice and digital AUXCOMM network from the Atlantic to the Gulf.

A copy of the **AUXCOMM Work Group Concept Meeting** presentation can be found at:
<https://kg4nxx.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/EM-Slideshow-AUXCOMM-Workgroup-FINAL-2025-08-13.pdf>

New SHELTER Announced – South Marion High School



(L-R) David Romero, Senior Project Mgr.; Warton-Smith Construction Group



Preston Bowlin & Logan Stamp MCSCO Div. of EM with other MCPS officials



MERT Shelter Mgr. Ray Woody WB6FKJ and Santos Pagan KR4FEP participate



Designer rendition of new South Marion High School

Director, Preston Bowlin and Logan Stamp, Emergency Management Coordinator, invited MERT to participate in the first site inspection of the first new high school under construction in the county since 2003. It's scheduled to open in August 2026 at 1350 SW 165th Street, in Marion Oaks. MERT values the opportunity providing input on the best location for operators.

ARES Updates



Marion County Coordinator Hayden Kauffman (N2HAY) shares these updates:

- ✓ ARES will conduct an extensive operational Exercise on Sept. 6th simulating an EOC environment for “Operation Iron Spill” on Saturday, Sept. 6th at Green Clover Hall, located in the MacPherson Governmental Complex. **Sign up at:** <https://aresmcfl.org/operation-iron-spill/>
- ✓ The ARES BEACON newsletter is now monthly. See: <https://aresmcfl.org/>

NEW Weekly Radio NET is on the air

Member Mark Weible (N4GPA) announces a new weekly NET has been started by the Marion Baptist Association and is scheduled to operate every Tuesday at 8:00 PM on repeater KA4WJA repeater on 146.970 MHz. Offset: -600 kHz offset (146.370 MHz). No PL tone. (Anthony, FL)



This repeater will also support a “Disaster Relief Ham Radio Net” throughout Marion County when emergencies arise. For more information, visit: <https://www.reach.mba/blog/disaster-relief-ham-net>

A Special Thanks



Andy Allen NA4DA

MERT shares a special thanks to Andy Allen, NA4DA, for use of his license and duplexer. Andy also serves as a Director for the Silver Springs Radio Club.

Thank you, Andy for your support to MERT!

For more information about the Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT), visit:

KG4NXO.com

“The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members.” – Coretta Scott King