

# MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office  
Division of Emergency Management

## COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

January 2026

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, all cities in the county and other EMCOMM groups (CERT, HEC, ARES, MBA) with voice, image & data communications locally, statewide and across the United States.

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

### Next Bimonthly Meeting

Saturday, January 17th,  
10:00 am at the EOC

**Annual Meeting Event.**

**All are Welcomed!**

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

### Moving Forward - Starting our 22<sup>nd</sup> Year of Service



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)  
MERT Coordinator

As we step into a new year, I begin by expressing my deepest gratitude to each of you. 2025 was a year of growth, a few "curve balls", and several remarkable achievements for MERT. Together, we trained with purpose, stayed ready for any possible activation, added Field Exercises to our regular events schedule, upgraded our reliability by replacing three repeaters, enhanced UPS backup capabilities powering two repeaters, added a hurricane rated antenna support lift tower to our EOC inventory and significantly expanded our knowledge about our primary mission – supporting the Shelters – with a new Shelter Resource manual.

I offer for your consideration we are better organized, our SHREK kits better equipped and other resources enhanced in small and big ways that will meaningfully serve our team for years to come. All of this was only possible by the unwavering support of Director Preston Bowlins and his entire team within the Division of Emergency Management, MCSO.

One of our proudest milestones was the activation of the Ocala National Forest repeater — a technical leap forward opening direct EOC communications with Atlantic coast county's which reflects your dedication, expertise, and teamwork. It's more than a piece of infrastructure; it's a symbol of what we can accomplish when we combine vision with action (along with some patience). [Note: I personally look forward to doing the same type of project in the western portion of Marion County opening direct EOC communications with Gulf county's one day!]

*"When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too." - Paulo Coelho*

Looking ahead, we're focused on bringing our fulltime SHARES station online — a major step toward fully integrating MERT into the national emergency communications framework. Hopefully, with new HF antennas on the horizon, this goal is within reach, and it will significantly enhance our ability to support one major objective of keeping the Marion County EOC and its leaders connected 24x7 with federal and state agencies during all critical events. With your support this year, we will make it a reality!

Our mission remains clear: to strengthen all our emergency communications capabilities, empower all volunteers towards more skills and knowledge, support the shelter leaders with unwavering emergency communications while supporting the Division of Emergency Management with excellence. Whether it's refining our systems, mentoring new members, or preparing for the next storm season, every effort you make matters. Let me also add the members who have stepped up to fill executive positions will be leading us to new skills, new levels of organization and new levels of readiness for whatever challenges we are assigned.

The result? Delivering on our mission... **"Call MERT if all else Fails!"**

2026 will also bring new opportunities to innovate, collaborate, and lead. I encourage each of you to stay engaged, share improvement ideas, offer constructive feedback and support one another to achieve new milestones in your life. MERT is more than a team — it's a wonderful community of serious AUXCOMM trained and certified amateur radio volunteers built on service, shared purpose, and excellence.

I thank you for being the heart of this organization. Your support and meaningful commitment to our mission is inspiring, and I'm honored to walk this path with you. Let's make 2026 our most impactful year yet.

With sincere appreciation,



Harlan Cook  
MERT Coordinator

**A Special PS:**

**All members and friends** are invited to let MERT know when your community or organization schedules any event that we can participate in. MERT can share our mission by inviting new amateur radio operators to join us supporting the growing list of Marion County Shelters. New Member Manager Nick Kiddey welcomes your update!

Please share your event or activity by emailing : [KG4NXO@marionso.com](mailto:KG4NXO@marionso.com)

## **MERT at HAMFEST 2025**

Each year, the Silver Springs Radio Club (SSRC) hosts an excellent event where amateur radio operators from multiple counties in the area can come together to see and purchase equipment, antennas, specialty hardware and surplus radio systems equipment for sale by the multiple “tailgaters” attending. That event was on Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup> which included an invitation to MERT to promote who we are and what we do.

Kudos to New Member Manager Nick Kiddey (W4NFK) for organizing our excellent booth presentation. Joining Nick was Phil Lewis (W4EVV) and Royce Hagerman (KD7SNN).

We encourage all amateur radio operators to attend and thank the SSRC for their invitation.



(L-R) Phil Lewis and Nick Kiddey. Not shown Royce Hagerman.

MERT was assigned a great location!

**SSRC Note:** Congratulations to the newly elected SSRC officers and board members for 2026

President - Ed Long  
Vice President - Terry Strey  
Treasurer - Andy Allen  
Secretary - Wayne Peterson

Board Members:  
Wayne Millican  
John Norman  
Mike Terracina  
Adam Parker

A special note: SSRC recognized their outgoing board member and former President, Bill Gillespie (KW5BG) with their Lifetime Member award.  
(Bill was also recognized for his decade of service to MERT recently.)

## **FCC Affirms...and Allocates new Spectrum in 60-Meter Band**

ARRL | Published on 12/11/2025

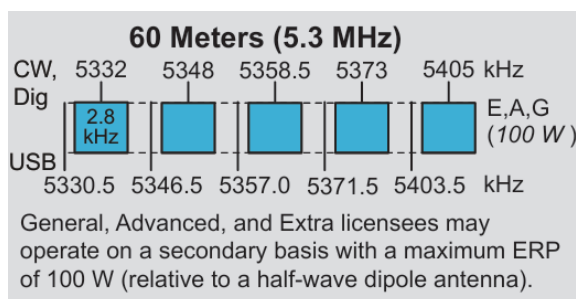
The FCC on December 9, 2025, released a long-awaited Report and Order adopting a new amateur radio spectrum allocation in the 60-meter band.

### **QRP'ers Alert!**

Specifically, the Commission allocated 5351.5 - 5366.5 kHz (60 meters) to the amateur service on a secondary basis with a permitted power of **9.15 watts ERP**. There are no antenna restrictions, but antenna gain must be used to calculate ERP.

*“Volunteers are the only human beings on the face of the earth who reflect this nation’s compassion, unselfish caring, patience, and just plain loving one another.” - Erma Bombeck*

## Existing 60-Meter Allocations Codified



The Commission also agreed with the ARRL petition to continue to allow amateur operations on four existing 60-meter channels outside the international allocation with a full 100 watts. The new rules will go into effect 30 days after publication in the Federal Register, when amateurs may then begin using the allocation.

The 60-meter allocation is available to amateurs holding a General Class or above license.

For more details on the FCC allocation, visit: <https://www.arrl.org/>

For more details on the 60-Meter band, visit: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/60-meter\\_band](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/60-meter_band)

## QRP – What is it?

QRP is the amateur-radio term for operating at low to very-low transmitter power levels, typically 5 watts or less for CW & digital modes; and, 10 watts or less for SSB voice. The term comes from the Q-signal “QRP?”, originally meaning “Shall I reduce power?”, but it evolved into a whole new operating style and, an entirely new hobby “subculture” in ham radio.

Amateur radio operators choose QRP operations for several reasons:

- The challenge — making long-distance contacts with very little power is a skillful pursuit.
- Portability — QRP rigs are small, light, and ideal for field work, SOTA, POTA, or emergency deployments.
- Efficiency — low power reduces interference and is easier on batteries in the field.
- The thrill — making DX contacts with “less power than a nightlight” is a badge of honor in the QRP world.

The “keys” to making QRP operations successful, especially since low power transmissions are **much harder to hear**, usually relies on:

- ✓ Highly efficient antennas
- ✓ Good propagation awareness
- ✓ Modes that work well with weak signals (CW, FT8, etc.)
- ✓ Skilled operating techniques, and...
- ✓ Patience!

More about **QRP** at:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/QRP\\_operation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/QRP_operation)



(Above) Member Kraig Pritts (KA2LHO) shares details on his custom QRP radio & antenna system he built at the August, 2024 MERT meeting.



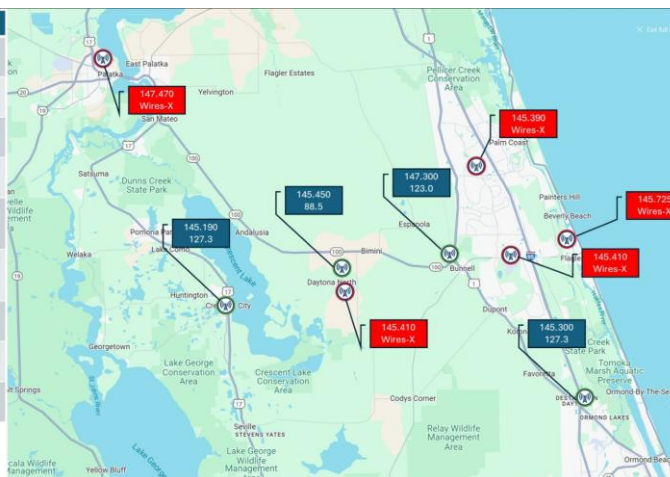
## North Florida AUXCOMM Work Group Meeting #3

The third meeting of this Work Group was hosted by Jonathan Lord, Flagler County Emergency Management Director on Wednesday, December 10<sup>th</sup> at the Flagler County EOC in Bunnell, FL.

**Vitor Mira, Flagler Emergency Management Planner** shared his report the meeting provided a thorough overview of the county's resources including:

FREQ	INFORMATION
145.450 PL 88.5 Analog	KB4DE BUNNELL/ DAYTONA NORTH Echolink, Wires-X, and AISStar Hub
145.190 PL 127.3 Analog	KJ4UOP CRESCENT CITY 6 M Link Echolink to 145.450
145.300 127.3 Analog	KAROL LOVES TRK STOP, ORMOND BCH, Echolink to 145.450
145.410 Wires-X Node	ND1C DAYTONAN Wires-X Room 80751 Linked to FCS Room 310-38
145.390 Wires-X RPT	KO4AHD Advent Health Hosp North (Palm Coast Pkwy) Wires-X 80751 and FCS Room 310-38
147.715 Wires-X RPT	W3QCV Advent Health Hosp South (100 & I-95) Wires-X 80751 and FCS Room 310-38
147.300 123.0 Analog	WB4EOC Bunnell FCSO Analog NCS Channel to EOC During Activations
145.725 Wires-X Node	WA3QCV FLAGLER BEACH Wires-X 80751 and FCS Room 310-38
147.470 Wires-X Node	KN4GZY PALATKA Wires-X 80751 and FCS Room 310-38

During Nets & Emergencies  
Analog repeaters and linked to  
Wires-X Digital Repeaters &  
Nodes



Above – Flagler County map of key repeaters and Wires-X nodes available for emergency operations when needed.

+AuxComm contacts; +Amateur Repeaters; +GMRS Repeaters; and, +Radio Antenna Coverage

Participants also discussed what capabilities the attending counties had in working together should conditions require. Participants were also given a tour of the EOC and other Emergency Management facilities.

**Member Mark Weible (N4GPA)** represented MERT and shares:

Discussed using GMRS & Meshtastic technologies:

Flagler is using GMRS, Sumter is getting started with Meshtastic.

Discussed Flagler's capabilities:

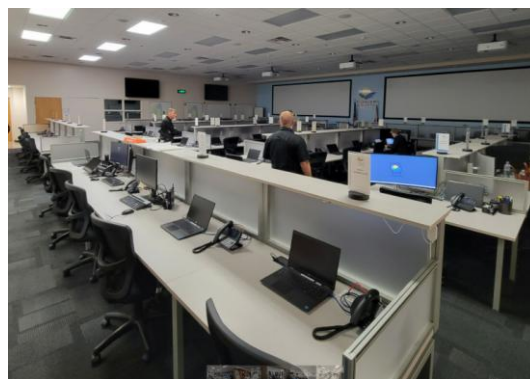
- Flagler EM owns 3 - 4 repeaters
- ARES & Palm Coast radio clubs very involved
- All towers are 100 ft except 1 @ 50 ft
- 145. 150 MHz is primary EMCOMM repeater
- Tow-hitched generators used for back-up power
- Monthly testing at towers

Discussed:

- FLDigi and ALE capabilities among participating counties, including monthly tests
- Should we focus in using VHF for voice and using HF for digital?
- Discussed SHARES - if you don't check-in in 6 months, your license gets In deleted
- Discussed Alachua-Winter Field Day Jan. 24-25 and received a tour of Flagler EOC

Victor will send out his PPT slide

Received tour of Flagler EOC and local facilities



**“Volunteer service is the rent each of us pays for living - the very purpose of life and not something you do in your spare time or after you have reached your personal goals.” - Marian Wright Edelman**

Everyone participating sincerely thanked Vitor Mira and the entire Flagler County Division of Emergency Management staff for hosting this meeting and sharing more about Flagler County operations.

### **More information on the North Florida AUXCOMM Work Group**

The Work Group includes 11 counties (Alachua; Bradford; Citrus; Flagler; Hernando; Lake; Levy; Marion; Putnam; Sumter and Volusia) and is being created to build awareness, assist in development of procedures and/or processes, share best practices, create cooperative training resources, develop a EOC to EOC voice and digital network, and identify and conduct regular communications tests implementing activities supporting the Emergency Management agencies in this region.

Participants included Directors and Managers of Emergency Management; County Communications Leaders responsible for AUXCOMM (or EMCOMM) programs; and the AUXCOMM (amateur radio) leaders responsible for supporting each EOC during declared emergency events.

**Mission:** This Work Group was established to provide the Emergency Management leaders from the 11 counties across North Florida (Gulf to Atlantic coasts) a telecommunications independent and uninterruptable resource providing direct EOC to EOC voice, image and digital communications during emergencies.

**Why is this Work Group necessary?:** The political environment around FEMA in 2025 is unusually turbulent, including some recommending it being abolished. Current reports are primarily focused on major overhauls of its objectives, goals, responsibilities, budget and staffing levels.

While a bipartisan bill, the Fixing Emergency Management for Americans (FEMA) Act of 2025, aims to dramatically reform FEMA and the federal disaster program, it is unpredictable to forecast what the changes will be and where the reforms will end. However, at this date almost 10% of its workforce has been terminated along with all SHARES applications, transfers and operations currently on hold.

In summary, there is strong evidence that FEMA will undergo significant restructuring, driven by both Congress and the administration with the impacts to the emergency management organizations within cities, counties and states undetermined.

The North Florida AUXCOMM Work Group will be a new resource supporting EOC to EOC communications during emergencies.

*“What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal.” - Albert Pike*

## New Terms Explained:

**What is Meshtastic?** It is an open-source mesh networking platform designed for decentralized, long-range, and ad-hoc communications. It allows devices to connect directly with each other, forming a network where each node can act as a relay for others. The project enables low-power, long-range communication over unlicensed radio bands.

More about Meshtastic operations at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meshtastic> or, <https://meshtastic.org/>

**What is WIRES-X?** WIRES-X (Wide-coverage Internet Repeater Enhancement System) is an internet linking system developed by Yaesu for amateur radio operators. It allows analog and digital radios to connect across long distances using the internet as a bridge, enabling users to communicate with other amateur stations worldwide through a node connected to the internet. WIRES-X serves as the network backbone for System Fusion radios, extending the reach of amateur radio by linking radio systems via the internet.

More about WIRES-X at: <https://www.yaesu.com/jp/en/wires-x/index.php>

Here's an interesting MS Excel deck providing more information on WIRES-X and Fusion: [https://xarc.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Having\\_fun\\_with\\_wiresx\\_May\\_2018.pdf](https://xarc.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Having_fun_with_wiresx_May_2018.pdf)

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

**[KG4NXO.com](http://KG4NXO.com)**

All amateur radio operators and the general public are welcomed to attend all MERT meetings every Wednesday from 9:00 am till Noon  
at the  
Emergency Operations Center (EOC)  
located at 692 NW 30<sup>th</sup> Ave., Ocala, FL.

Communications Update 2026 01

*"No one can do everything, but everyone can do something!" - Max Lucado*

*"Paul Revere earned his living as a silversmith. But what do we remember him for? His volunteer work. All activism is volunteering in that it's done above and beyond earning a living and deals with what people really care passionately about. Remember, no one gets paid to rebel. All revolutions start with volunteers. - Susan J. Ellis*