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# **Keweenaw County receives \$50,000 Rural Readiness grant from the State of Michigan**

*Grant will fund initial visioning and planning for a Keweenaw County Emergency Operations Center*

KEWEENAW COUNTY, Mich. — **Keweenaw County Sheriff Curt Pennala** today announced that Keweenaw County will receive a \$50,000 Rural Readiness Grant from the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity's (LEO) Office of Rural Prosperity. The **Keweenaw Community Foundation** and **The Nature Conservancy in Michigan** are co-applicants on the grant, which MDARD designed to support rural communities in planning and capacity building. In Keweenaw County, the grant award will support initial visioning and planning for a Keweenaw County Emergency Operations Center.

"I want to thank the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity for this grant and the Keweenaw Community Foundation and The Nature Conservancy for partnering with us on this project," Pennala said. "This grant is a key first step in supporting our emergency personnel and volunteers to scope and plan for an Emergency Operations Center. This center will improve training and coordination across the County's emergency response force, enhance search and rescue capabilities, and ensure Keweenaw County has the capacity to respond to large-scale emergencies."

Through the Emergency Operations Center, the County aims to improve and enhance their emergency response capabilities by:

- Supporting in-person and virtual training and multi-agency exercises for law enforcement personnel and emergency response volunteers.
- Ensuring search and rescue and law enforcement training equipment is properly stored and easily accessible.
- Providing a space for the County and its partners to coordinate large-scale emergency or public health responses.

"The demands on our county's emergency response capabilities have been a concern for the County Board of Commissioners for two years," said **Keweenaw County Board** Chairman **Don Piche**. "This planning project is the first step in meeting critical needs that will benefit Keweenaw County, its residents, and visitors for years to come, and I am happy to see it moving forward."

“Keweenaw County is no longer the best kept secret in the Upper Peninsula, and the steady uptick in tourism over the last several years is stretching our emergency response resources,” said **Robin Meneguzzo**, executive director of the **Keweenaw Community Foundation**. “Once complete, this Emergency Operations Center will provide a path to grow our volunteer first responder ranks and better coordinate search and rescue and emergency responses with the five townships within Keweenaw County.”

Currently, the Keweenaw County Sheriff’s office employs six full-time law enforcement officers and four part-time officers. The remainder of the county’s emergency response services are managed by approximately 100 trained volunteers who respond to everything from wilderness search and rescue incidents to car crashes and house fires.

“The Keweenaw Peninsula offers some of the most remote and difficult terrain in Michigan, which makes search and rescue operations here all the more challenging,” said **Julia Petersen**, Keweenaw Peninsula project manager for **The Nature Conservancy in Michigan**. “This grant is a big first step towards bolstering the emergency response capabilities of the dedicated law enforcement officers and volunteer first responders in Keweenaw County, which benefits residents and visitors alike.”

The planning process for the new Keweenaw County Emergency Operations Center will begin in the spring and continue into early 2025. Community meetings are planned throughout the year to get feedback from the public.

“I’m eager to start this process and am looking forward to working with residents and stakeholders throughout Keweenaw County to build something so meaningful to our community,” Pennala said.

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