

Salem woman presumed dead after canoe capsizes

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RAYMOND — Police believe a Salem woman drowned Friday when her canoe capsized in the chilly, swollen waters of the Exeter River.

Cassandra Ray, 21, of 5 Chase St., was canoeing with two friends in the area of Blueberry Hill Road and Darren Drive when their canoe tipped over around 3:45 p.m. Friday. The river was over flood stage due to the heavy rains that had fallen in the region.

The two others in the canoe, Michael Putnam, 22, of 150 Zion Hill Road, Salem, and Ryan Goff, 20, of 296 Lane Road, Chester, were able to swim to shore.

A dozen officers and fire personnel were at the scene within minutes, searching for Ray, who disappeared into deep waters. An intensive search of the river on Friday night and again yesterday failed to turn up her body.

Police said none of the three were wearing life jackets when they were tossed in waters over their heads.

The search party yesterday found the canoe, submerged under ice in the river, but were unable to recover it because of dangerous conditions caused by swift moving currents and ice flow in the river.

"Until the high water levels subside, it's too dangerous to recover the canoe or the body," Raymond police Cpl. Joseph Keating said last night. "The rescue dogs indicated the body may be submerged in that area (where the canoe was located). Based on the currents and the trajectory of the river, we believe that's where it is."

Keating estimated the current carried the canoe about 125 yards from where it capsized and 20 to 30 yards from the shore.

The Raymond police and fire departments, along with the New Hampshire Fish and Game and New Hampshire Marine Patrol, searched the shore and waters until 8 p.m. Friday.

The search party returned to the river at 8 a.m. yesterday, along with the Derry and Chester fire departments, the New England Canine Search and Rescue team, police in boats, and divers in wet suits.

"There were about 30 to 50 local law enforcement, fire and rescue personnel and some civilians involved in the search," Keating said. "The search, which is being coordinated by the Fish and Game people, will continue until a body is recovered."

"Until the flood waters subside, we definitely recommend that everyone stay away from the river," he added. "The conditions are too treacherous to be out there right now."

Police believe that the canoe party had only been out on the river about 30 minutes when the accident happened.

"I think the intention was for them to only be out there for an hour, because they had a pickup vehicle waiting for them downstream," Keating said.