

The Pickle Barrel Review



THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTON MOUNTAIN DIGITAL RADIO ASSOCIATION

September 2026

Introduction

Greetings to one and all, and once again welcome to the Pickle Barrel Review! As in the previous issues, you'll find this issue filled with the latest happenings not only of the W7NEO system, and the NE-OREGON room, but System Fusion, Allstar, along with GMRS, from not only our system, but our partners here in the Pacific Northwest as well. All that said, as always, we invite others to contribute with articles, or if your club or organization is having an event such as a tailgate, swap meet, VE testing, or whatever, you can list it here as well. The only thing we ask is that your contribution be nonpolitical (unless it's a

government action that directly affects Ham, or GMRS Radio), respectful of others (no personal attacks), and relatively family friendly. We realize your pretty darn proud of it, but we really don't want to hear about your new tattoo, let alone just where exactly it's located on your body. And just to be clear, we apologize, but unfortunately your brother-in-law's bachelor party still doesn't qualify as an upcoming event. So, all that said, feel free to reach in the barrel, grab yourself a pickle, pull up a chair and have ah sit for a spell as we discuss the latest happenings in Fusion, Allstar, GMRS, and Personal Radio Communications in general. And for the record, you can rest assured that every line of the PBR is a 100% AI free zone, and will remain so (As proof just look at all the mistakes!).

A word from our sponsor

A&B Protection agency:

Today's world is not always the kindest, gentlest place to live in, and sometimes it helps to have a little something extra in your back pocket on your side. That's where the folks at A&B Protection agency can help. Having grown up in a tough world themselves, our staff has combined that with years of experience, and the most comprehensive training available anywhere in the world as part of their time serving in the US Marine Corp. All this combined to bring you the finest in personal protection available.

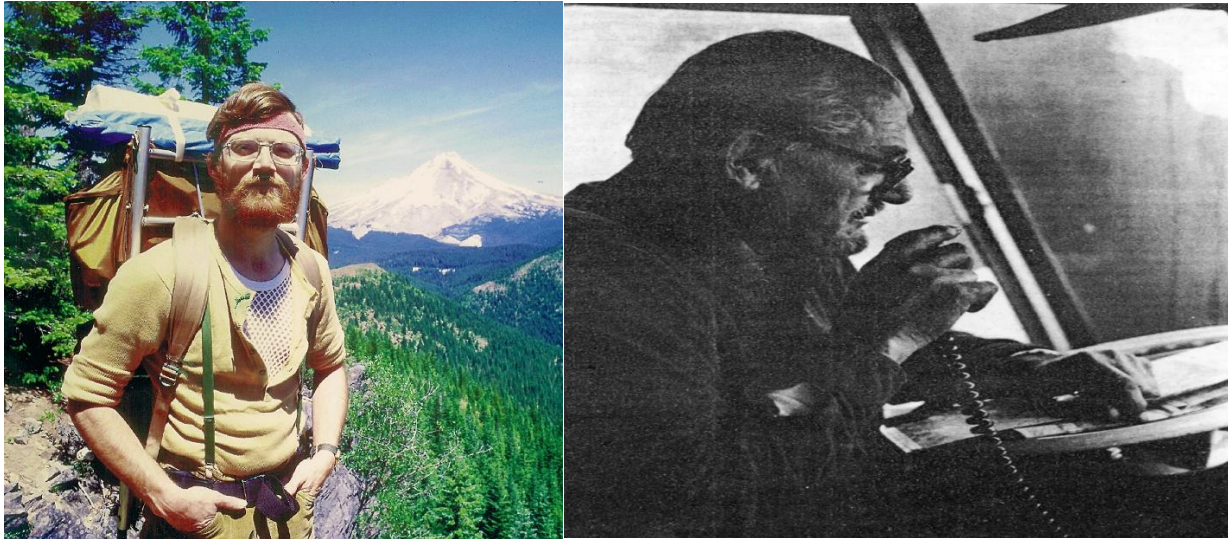
So, if you find yourself with an abusive ex-husband that keeps coming back, or some stranger you met in the local bar that just doesn't understand the word "NO," or maybe just a boyfriend that needs alittle sense knocked into him on just how to treat a Lady. Call on A&B and let Amy Lou, and Bobby Sue set things straight, or just plain take out the trash for you!

As a side note, A&B would like to dispel the rumors that Tank Johnson has been spreading lately in the local coffee shop that A&B's tactics are unfair, and that they fight dirty. So, if he doesn't apologize and set the record straight soon, Amy Lou will be look'n to give him another beat down, only this time it'll be Pro Bono!

So, remember A&B Protection Agency the next time you find yourself in need of a little extra whop ass on your side!



Amateur Radio has a long history of supporting our community during natural disasters. If you pay a visit to the Mount St. Helens Visitor Center located at Silver Lake Washington, among other things, you'll have the opportunity to listen to a recording of Ham Radio operators Gerry Martin (W6TQF), who was a 64-year-old retired Navy Chief Warrant Officer, and active RACES volunteer. Along with Reid Blackburn (KA7AMF), a 27-year-old professional photographer working for *The Columbian* and *National Geographic* at the time of the eruption. Both of whom were broadcasting status reports of the Mt St Helens eruption on May 18, 1980, right up until the very end, in which they both lost their lives as a result of their dedication. This scenario is nothing new, and is something that has been played out time and time again over the years during devastating hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, and even during the attack on the Twin Towers in New York City on September 9th, 2011 where Amateur Radio played a vital role in providing real time communications as most other forms of communication were jammed up with traffic to the point of being almost useless.



Reid Blackburn (KA7AMF) (L), and Gerry Martin (W6TQF) (R), Both died in the May 18, 1980, eruption of Mt St Helens.

Back in the early days of radio communications, unlike today, Hams were actually considered to be irritations, and nuisances to the "real" communicators, which included both the commercial sector, and the military. At one time, Hams were almost outlawed all together, and ultimately relegated to the then - what was considered at the time - "useless" frequencies of "200 meters and down."

Eventually having proved them wrong, various commercial interests over the years have been trying to regain many of the now "Ham Bands" ever since after seeing what we Hams were able to do with them. But in the early years that was the case up until it was demonstrated on numerous occasions that we could actually be of value as a legitimate public service. In 1913, a group of college students, who also happened to be hams in Michigan and Ohio passed disaster messages when other means of communications were down in the aftermath of severe storms, and flooding in that part of the country. A Department of Commerce bulletin soon followed suit, which proposed a dedicated communications network of radio amateurs to serve during disasters. Soon afterwards, five special licenses were reportedly issued. Also in 1913, an article in the ARRL publication QST, written by Gil McElroy (VE3PKD) titled; "*The Beginnings of Amateur Radio Emergency Communications,*" noted that amateurs were now considered to be essential auxiliary assets of the national public welfare. In 1914 the ARRL was formed, and was successful in proving the value of disaster response communications, as provided by radio amateurs being proven to be both organized and useful. In 1920,

there was even a recorded case of amateur radio having been used in order to help recover a stolen car. Soon, the use of Amateur Radio for providing vital communications during natural disasters emerged with hams actively responding to events ranging from deadly flooding in New Mexico, to ice storms in Minnesota.

The ARRL Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) traces its roots as far back as 1935, when it was originally formed as an all-volunteer group of Amateur Radio operators with the Amateur Radio Emergency Corps (AREC), prior to evolving into the modern ARES program which we in the Amateur Radio community know today. More organization followed, with a memorandum of understanding emerging with the American Railroad System for Amateur Radio support in the event the railroad's wire lines were down. This was made possible primarily through the formation of an ARRL Railroad Emergency Service Committee. There was even a Q-signal designated specifically for the possibility as "QRR," which could be equated as a sort of land version of "SOS." As the years continued, more reports of disaster response communications provided by Amateurs appeared in ARRL publications such as QST. In November of 1927 what came to be known as; "The Great New England Flood," served to place Amateur Radio in the spotlight as a credible disaster response organization. It was during this event that traditional telephone and telegraph infrastructures were entirely wiped out. Amateur Radio operators immediately stepped up to the task in order to provide the only efficient means of communication from the isolated, hard-hit areas of New England to the outside world. This prompted the chairman of the then Federal Radio Commission to release an official statement in order to say that; "The future of radio depended on the Amateur Radio operators."

When the U.S. entered World War II, regular Amateur Radio operations were completely silenced by the government for national security reasons. However, with the creation of the War Emergency Radio Service (WERS) in 1942, Amateur Radio was tasked with a vital role in the war effort as part of the local Civil Defense. After WW II, in 1952 WERS became RACES, which stands for; "Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service." The newly upgraded service became a specialized, government-run volunteer organization of licensed Amateur Radio operators who provided vital emergency communication support to state, county, and local government agencies during disasters, and civil emergencies. The idea of

RACES is that it functions as part of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), in order to integrate licensed Amateur Radio operators into state and local government disaster response plans. Now you might be asking yourself; “Isn’t that what ARES does?” While often confused, or even in some cases paired up with ARES, RACES is more of a formal governmental entity. RACES requires pre-registration with a civil defense agency, and grants specific legal/disaster-worker status during official deployments, whereas ARES has more flexible, non-governmental activation protocols. However, more recently many of these lines of responsibility have become somewhat blurred with ARES members being required to complete much of the same FEMA training as RACES members.

Regardless, in recent years there have been numerous discussions’ questioning the future of ARES/RACES, and the overall value as a responder in times of emergency by the Amateur Radio service in general. Case in point, during this past summer’s wildfire season ARES, RACES, along with the rest of the Amateur Radio community in general’s participation seemed almost nonexistent. It seemed that with regards to requesting Amateur Radio assistance, there really wasn’t much to speak of compared to years past. One of the few instances of Amateur Radio being contacted for assistance was when a US Air Force Air Refueling Wing based out of Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane Washington requested permission to use the SRG’s (Spokane Repeater Group) repeater system as a backup in the event their normal military channels became overloaded due to radio traffic related to the wildfires. Other than that, the only other participation of Amateur Radio operators during the wildfires was filling in as RADO’s (Radio Operators) on various state Forestry communications systems, and only then if they had a sponsor, and had completed the RADO course of instruction. For the sake of clarity, although our repeater system is not affiliated with ARES or RACES, or any of the various AUXCOMM organizations, in the past access to our system was requested by the Oregon Office of Emergency Management, which we provided. In addition, we do have formal agreements with some of the local ARES groups to provide limited access to our system in times of emergency should the need arise. However, during this wildfire season the W7NEO system wasn’t contacted either to provide a resource for emergency communications, or in order to provide radio operators in order to man RADO positions with state forestry department.

It's worth mentioning that the US government during times of an officially declared emergency under FCC section 47 U.S.C. § 606 of the Communications Act of 1934, does have the authority to commandeer private radio systems (repeaters) for emergency use. However, this is only under specific conditions, and the government is required to provide just compensation to the owners of the commandeered equipment for its use.

But as I alluded to earlier, recently there have been numerous conversations on the topic of Amateur Radio's role in emergency communications, and the changing environment of emergency communications in general. In each case there were some arguably valid points made on both sides both for and against the suggestion that perhaps ARES and RACES are inevitably destined to be sunset at some point over the next few years. Indeed, in some areas of the United States the process of sunseting various ARES and RACES groups has already been taking place. Of course there is always the rumor mill spreading misinformation, so it would be wise to take that into account. One such case took place when a CAL FIRE property manager sent a letter to a specific repeater owner stating that California would no longer financially support private radio tenancy at a specific site due to changing technology, and that the Ham's might have to remove and relocate their equipment from the site as a result. However, responsibility for communication sites in California did shift to a property management department tasked with evaluating all infrastructure and tenants. Operators were told they could maintain their equipment on state property by completing a formal collocation agreement, and paying standard site fees. Fees, which I can say from my own experience, for a small Amateur radio organization which relies upon membership dues, and donations, can quickly become cost prohibitive.

It was also suggested that ARES/RACES membership in general has been in decline in recent years. One reason for the decline in membership that was cited as a possibility was that as a requirement of membership there has been an increased requirement among Amateur Radio Emergency response organizations for additional mandatory training requirements. This resulted in pushing some members to the point of simply losing the desire to volunteer anymore, and resigning from the organizations all together. As a result, the number of volunteers in recent years has been in steady decline resulting in considerably lower levels of

participation. Another contributing factor as a part of the reason for the overall decline is that state and local communications systems have been advancing in capabilities in recent years. So, the need to augment state and local communications systems with Amateur Radio resources, such as has been the case in the past, is not nearly as much of a necessity as it once was, if at all.

It's worth mentioning that our friends in Benton and Franklin Counties in eastern Washington with the 3 Rivers AUXCOMM group have been somewhat of the exception in all of this, thanks in part to the leadership of Mark Hunn (KI7SI). With Mark's leadership, they have been very proactive in working with various state and local emergency response organizations since their inception. This as evidenced by their recent participation this past March with the simulated Hostal Action-Based nuclear drill, which took place at the Columbia Generating Plant located on the Hanford reservation just outside of Richland Washington. The exercise involved not only local first responders, law enforcement, along with Handford staff, but also the state Emergency Operating Center on Camp Murry in Tacoma Washington as well. I should mention that the 3 Rivers AUXCOMM group received a well-deserved award from the organizers, and evaluators of the drill for their outstanding performance.

I've noticed that in recent years there have been quite a few AUXCOMM groups appearing all over the country in counties that may have at one time had active ARES groups, but for whatever reason, now have active AUXCOMM groups instead. If I had to guess the reason why, based on what I've observed with the 3 Rivers group, that along with their proactiveness, would be their willingness to adapt to a changing emergency communications environment, which I'm sure played a key role. To ARES credit, they have been actively working with the AUXCOMM groups in support of a common goal, that being the safe wellbeing of all of our local communities.

So, with all this said, we as an Amateur Radio community have to ask ourselves, why is it that what once was touted as our primary role of having provided our local communities with real value as skilled communicators in times of natural disasters, now seems to have become more of a resource that rarely gets used. What's more, what can we as a community of dedicated volunteers do about it, if

anything? We've tried more training in order to keep up the pace with FEMA requirements. We've also tried to get more involved in community events such as marathons, parades, and such. Even that seems to have been falling off somewhat in recent years. For my part, I wouldn't give up entirely on the Amateur Radio communities ability to serve our community in times of need, but perhaps we just need to be a little more flexible, and at the same time allot more forward thinking.

Lynn Wilson, K7LW

Repeater Updates



Mike Gemelke (N7NKT), & Lynn Wilson (K7LW) paying a visit to the Weston Mt repeater site.

With summer almost in the rear-view mirror, and fall about to come into view, we here at the WMDRA are scrambling to get the last little bit of repeater work done before the snow begins to fly. Part of that is that we're still reviewing options for internet at our Cabbage Hill site in order to not only provide better connectivity to the repeaters already located there, but also to be able to link to other repeaters within the system, as well as future repeater sites more easily as well.

We've also been meeting with other local groups with packet nodes on our already growing system looking into ways with which to further improve upon the network as a whole. A couple of the things we're seriously considering is incorporating VARA FM into the W7NEO network in order to join the other groups already using VARA FM on the system, along with setting up an additional Winlink

gateway. It's become apparent that connecting with other gateways on the system with heavy smoke, or thick fog in the air isn't always a sure thing. So, with an additional gateway, and adding VARA capabilities to our system we can improve upon both connectivity, and speed.

Lastly, we're still working on a couple of additional repeater sites. But with these <Insert profanity here> tariffs, along with these <Insert more profanity here> trade wars, the price of antennas along with tower equipment has more than doubled, and in many cases tripled in price. This has forced us to scale back our plans for repeater installations considerably. But thanks to our stash of repeater equipment, and the generosity of others, we have managed to install both a Fusion, and analog repeaters, along with a packet node at a site overlooking Arlington Oregon. We're still working the bugs out, but hopefully by the time you read this it will be operational on the air.

Our goal, as always, is to provide a robust quality repeater system. So, we'll keep on working to achieve that goal...although it may take us just a little while longer.

Lynn Wilson, K7LW



In a previous article it was alluded to that during times of national emergency the government could simply commandeer local communications systems. I could just see the hair on the back of people's neck standing on end with that. To some extent that's true, but only when certain conditions are in effect. So, in order to set some of you more at ease, how about we take a dive into this subject, and in doing so try to get the facts straight.

To begin with, we need to first take a look at the FCC regulation which sets this all into motion in the first place. That would be FCC section 47, U.S.C. § 606 of the Communications Act of 1934. This is the ruling which grants the President broad emergency and war powers over telecommunications infrastructure and communications carriers in the United States. But as I said, first there has to be certain conditions taking place before this can come into play. To begin with, during a war, the President can order telecommunications carriers to give priority to messages essential for national defense and security. Carriers that comply are legally protected from civil or criminal penalties. But those that violate these rules can face both fines, and even possible imprisonment of up to one year, or up to 20 years if the violation was meant to injure the United States, or help a foreign power. During war, threats of war, public peril, or national emergencies, the President may suspend or change regulations, shut down stations, or take control of wire and radio facilities for government use. So much for our first amendment rights in times of war, right? But here's the catch, if the government takes control of private communication facilities, the owners must receive fair, and just compensation. In other words, if your repeater, radio station, or microwave link, etc. gets commandeered by the US government, by law they have to compensate you for that.

But here's where things begin to get real. It is illegal during wartime to use physical force, threats, block, or slow down wire, or radio communications. If he feels it's necessary, the President can use the armed forces to stop any such interference. So, you might want to think twice about that before you punch in the DTMF codes to shut down your repeater.

But the document that initially sets this all in motion is the War Powers Act. This is a federal law that first came about in 1973, and is designed to limit the U.S. president's ability to initiate, or escalate military actions abroad without congressional approval. The idea being to ensure the collective judgment of both Congress, and the President as it applies to the introduction of U.S. Armed Forces into hostilities. The President is required to submit a written report to Congress within 48 hours of deploying armed forces into active, or imminent hostilities. After that, the president must terminate the use of military forces within 60 days (with a potential 30-day safety extension) unless Congress explicitly declares war, authorizes the use of force, or extends the timeframe.

Fortunately, unlike older federal regulations, regulations that mandated an automatic closure of all amateur stations in the event of a declared war, or national emergency were removed prior to the Gulf War. However, the catch here is that Under Section 606 of the Communications Act of 1934, if the President proclaims a state of war, threat of war, or national emergency, he still maintains the legal authority to amend, suspend, or close radio stations altogether and direct spectrum use toward government priorities. So, we as Amateur Radio operators still must obey any specific orders or restrictions issued by the FCC or the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) intended to protect national security, or reallocate shared spectrum.

During a national crisis where war powers are specifically invoked, structured auxiliary frameworks, like the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES), may be activated by local, state, or federal emergency management in order to govern authorized transmissions.

Even with all that, there are still some amateurs that have been wondering if the FCC would shut down Amateur Radio in the event of yet another war breaking out in the Middle East. For them, the short answer is "no."

Just prior to the Gulf War, section 214.4(b)(4) of Title 47 of the Code of Federal Regulations was deleted. This section had mandated the closing of all Amateur Radio stations except Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) stations in the event that the president proclaimed a war, or national emergency. The last time Amateur Radio was completely shut down, was during World War II, although ironically, the FCC continued to give Amateur Radio examinations.

So, in summary, while the Amateur Radio Service, at least in the foreseeable future, will not automatically be shut down. However, if the president does decide to invoke the War Powers Act, Amateur Radio licensees "must continue" to observe any directives the FCC may issue in the interests of national security, and of making spectrum available for government use.

The FCC is directed to work in coordination with the; National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) in order to issue "appropriate rules, regulations, orders and instructions" for use of the spectrum "as may be necessary to ensure the effective use of those portions of the radio

spectrum shared by government and non-government users." As it stands at present, Amateurs share most UHF allocations with the US government.

So, what about GMRS you ask? Although RACES operates under FCC Part 97 for Amateur Radio operators during emergencies specifically when the President invokes the War Powers Act. GMRS is governed separately under FCC Part 95, and is not part of RACES, or any other amateur auxiliary structures. However, under statutory authorities like 47 U.S.C. § 606 (often tied to the war powers, or national emergencies), the President can close, take over, or restrict non-government radio stations, and communications devices. While historically applied to Amateur Radio services (such as during WWII), any severe national security crisis allows the federal government to restrict, or shut down entirely civilian transmissions on GMRS frequencies.

So, you see, if all hell breaks loose, Amateurs, and GMRS operators alike are basically all in the same boat. But as in both cases, there is a process that needs to be followed first.

Lynn Wilson, K7LW / WRYF803

VE Testing

There is no VE testing going on that we're aware of, but if you check the Links section of our website, there may be information on some of our friend's websites as to where you might find a test session going on near you. But in the meantime, if you do have a regular test session taking place, feel free to let us know, and we'll post it here in the next issue of the Pickle Barrel Review.

The End

Well, that's about it for this edition of the Pickle Barrel Review. We apologize for the relatively short length of this month's issue, it's just been a hectic month with a lot going on. We promise to get back to our usual content very soon as things start to calm down more.

As always, in the meantime, feel free to reach in the barrel and grab another pickle. There's plenty to go around, along with plenty more great conversation, and maybe even a touch of rhetoric here and there!

73!

Weston Mountain Digital Radio Association,
W7NEO



"LOOK AT THIS HONEY... THE ANTENNA NEVER
EVEN MOVED IN ALL THAT WIND"

"Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy... The statesman who yields to war fever must realize that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events."- Winston Churchill

