

Body of missing boater recovered from Bay Lake

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Cadaver dogs helped locate the missing Bay Lake boater and the Crow Wing County Sheriff's Dive Team recovered the body in 50 feet of water about 10 a.m. Tuesday.

The 59-year-old Minneapolis man was identified as Thomas Robert Fife, who owns a seasonal home on Wakeman Road on Bay Lake. When the pontoon washed ashore the swimming ladder was down and the gate was open on the railing, the Crow Wing County Sheriff's office reported.

Sheriff Todd Dahl said a large effort and community support were part of recovering the missing boater and providing relief for his loved ones.

"Our hearts go out to the family," Dahl said.

Fife was first reported missing at 3:35 p.m. Friday after his pontoon washed up on the west side of Woodland Beach Road in Bay Lake Township on Bay Lake's south side. The body was found west of Woodland Beach Road.

The body was transported to the Ramsey County Medical Examiner's Office for an autopsy.

Dahl said **Central Lakes Research and Rescue** dogs out on a boat in Bay Lake first alerted searchers who were then able to target the area with side-scan sonar to find Fife's body.

The sheriff's office was assisted by the DNR and the State Patrol.

Tim Smalley, DNR water safety specialist, said the nature of the Fife's death would be classified as a fresh water drowning instead of a boating fatality.

"It's a terrible tragic for his family," Smalley said. "It sounds like (swimming from his pontoon) something he did all time."

Fife's drowning is the second this year in Crow Wing County. The first drowning happened on May 26 on South Long Lake. The victim, Raymond Levno, was found by his wife face down in the lake not far from shore.

In general, Smalley recommends people not swim from boats unless they are wearing a life jacket and the boat is anchored.

"Boats can be fairly large, especially a pontoon, and drift fairly quickly," Phelps said. "You may think you're Michael Phelps but it can be tough to catch a drifting boat. Every year we have tragedies like this."

While not swimming alone also is advised, Smalley said it's impractical to recommend people do so.

