



City of Mountain Lake
Police Department

2025

**Annual
Report**



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Message from Chief Norell



Welcome to the Mt. Lake Police Department's 2025 Annual Report. It is with great pride and humility that I present the Mountain Lake Police Department's 2025 Annual Report. As I reflect on my first full year serving as Chief of Police, I am reminded daily of the profound responsibility we carry and the deep commitment our team shares to protect and serve this community.

My very first act as Chief occurred just after midnight on my initial day, when I responded to assist the Windom Police Department with an active homicide investigation. Arriving on scene, I joined colleagues from across the region to support the critical work of bringing justice in a serious case. This experience reinforced a core truth: the Mountain Lake Police Department is always ready to serve others and provide assistance wherever it is needed—especially in major investigations that impact our broader area.

The year 2025 also brought significant accomplishments, which you'll find highlighted throughout this report. These included preparing for the possibility of nearly 50% of our officers being on family leave at the same time, equipment upgrades, Grant Collaboration with the Southwest Crisis Center, and training assignments.

Throughout this last year, the Mountain Lake Police Department remained exceptionally busy. Calls for service and incident reports increased compared to the previous two years, reflecting both the growth in our community and our officers' dedication to responsive, professional service.

Looking ahead, we are optimistic about the future. We will continue to expand positive interactions with residents through community policing initiatives and everyday engagement. Our department remains solid and committed, with officers who are invested in pursuing new opportunities to strengthen our community. This dedication reflects the long-term strength and stability of the Mountain Lake Police Department. We are deeply grateful for the continued support of the City Council and the residents of Mountain Lake, and we remain committed to earning your trust every single day.

Thank you for taking the time to review this annual report. It highlights not only our work but also the partnership we share in keeping Mountain Lake safe and vibrant. We welcome your feedback and ongoing collaboration as we move forward together.

Respectfully,

Louis Norell
Chief of Police
Mountain Lake Police Department



Department Overview



Mission Statement

The Mountain Lake Police Department is committed to protecting and serving our community

Principles:

- We provide professional, fair and compassionate police services which are sensitive to the needs of the community
- We protect the lives and property of our citizens while maintaining respect for individual constitutional rights
- We respect the dignity of all persons and conduct public contacts with courtesy and compassion

Staffing

The Department fully staffed is comprised of 4 full time officers with various part-time officers as available.

Chaplain:

Ryan Kestner

Chief of Police

Louis Norell

K9 Bruno

Officers:

Adam Watkins

Benjamin McHenry

Jordan Ellis

Part Time Officers:

Andrew Kinnetz

Brandon Thongvixon

Daniel Gardiner

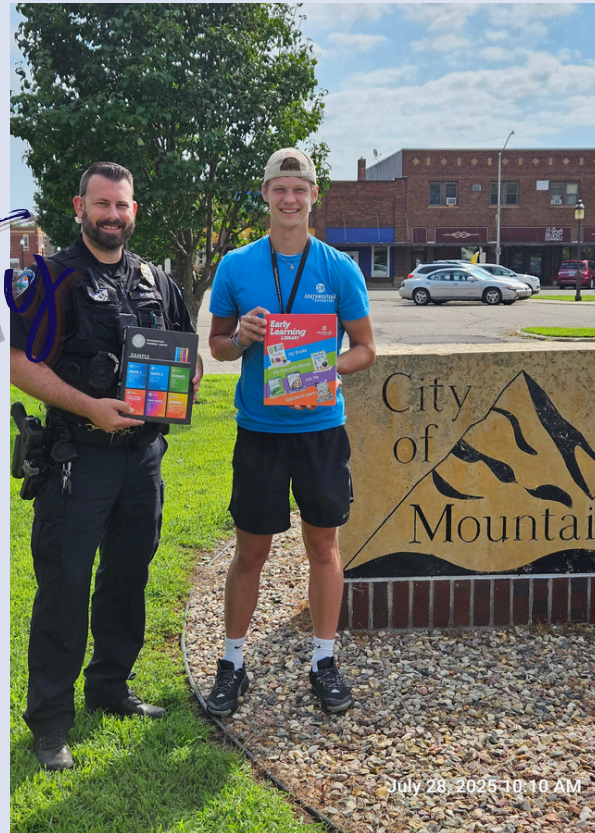
Jordan Allen

Jacob Samdal





Officers in the Community





2025 Accomplishments



Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) Grant Award



In the fall of 2025, the Mountain Lake Police Department, partnered with the Lakefield Police Department, the Southwest Crisis Center, and Standpoint, in seeking a grant with the Department of Justice, through their Office of Violence Against Women (OVW). This would be used for funding for services, training, and further collaboration. The Southwest Crisis Center is our local Domestic and Sexual Assault Advocacy support group that we've worked with for many years. Standpoint was brought on board to provide additional resources. Their experienced attorneys and advocates offer training, legal guidance, advocacy, and support services for victims.



The grant provides funding in many areas including Improving Access, Response, and Support Services for Victims of Domestic and Sexual Assault, Dating Violence, and Stalking programs.



We were ultimately awarded a grant in the total amount of \$750,000.00 that would be utilized between all four entities across three years from October 2025 to September 30, 2028. Our Department was allocated \$17,983.00. This will be used towards salaries, trainings, and mileage.

In the coming months to years, we'll be scheduling multidisciplinary trainings where we'll gather stakeholders, including Advocates, Prosecutors, and Law Enforcement, for training and case reviews, in how we can better serve survivors of domestic assault, sexual assault, and stalking.





Accomplishments–Equipment



Taser 10

One of our capital improvement projects for 2025, was to replace our aging Axon Taser X2 devices. These devices have been in service around 10 years, which Axon only warranty's these devices for 5 years. Axon recently released their latest device, the Taser 10, which drastically changed how their devices function. The updates made include improvement on the range, to a maximum range of 40 ft, compared to 7 feet to 25 feet. It also expands the amount of probe capacity to increase the ability for a successful deployment.



Patrol Rifles

Another equipment project we started in 2025, is updating our patrol rifles. For decades, the Mt. Lake Police Department has been a participant in the Department of Justice/Homeland Security LESO program (formerly the 1033 program). Through this program, the Federal Government provides various Military Surplus equipment at minimal cost to law enforcement agencies, who couldn't otherwise afford it. Through this program, we obtained several patrol rifles, which were Vietnam era M16A1 rifles. While this filled the gap, it was time to replace our patrol rifles that were originally manufactured from the 1960s.

We've taken a two phased approach in acquiring new rifles across '25 and '26. For the first phase in '25, we've purchased red dot optics, weapon mounted flashlights, and suppressors. For phase two, we'll complete the project in '26 after purchasing two complete rifles.



Personnel Development and Training



HEAT Team Assignment

This past year we assigned Officer Jordan Ellis to the regional H.E.A.T. team, or High-Risk Entry and Arrest Team (aka SWAT), bringing back specialized skills to our department. This partnership not only expands our enforcement capabilities but partners us with other agencies in the area in addressing high-risk circumstances, fostering safety across the region.

The HEAT Team provides assigned officers a variety of specialty training, on top of the standard required training to be on the team. Some of these options include Shield Operator, Drone Pilot, Sniper, Breacher, Negotiator, with many being cross trained in different areas. Having an officer trained in these specialty areas brings those skills directly back to our department while also allowing that knowledge to be shared with the rest of our officers.



Training



which they will now bring back to our department to lead in-house training.

Our department had great opportunities in officer training and specialization. Officer Ellis completed a five-day defensive tactics instructor course, earning certification through STORM. This training focused on critical use-of-force concepts and hands-on tactics,

As a continuation of being self sufficient for use of force training, Officer Ellis completed a two-day taser instructor course. This certification allows him to train fellow officers in the safe and effective deployment of the TASERt. The department also successfully implemented the new TASER 10 technology during the year. These less-lethal options allow us to safely navigate dangerous circumstances with the least amount of force possible.

Additionally, Officer McHenry attended a three-day Basic Narcotics Investigations course. This training provided them with in-depth skills in drug crime analysis, investigative techniques, and strategic approaches, strengthening our department's ability to address narcotics-related cases.



Part-Time Officer Program



The year 2025 also brought a significant internal challenge. At one point, we faced the real possibility of having nearly 50% of our officers on leave simultaneously. While this created operational demands, it was heartening to know these absences stemmed from officers caring for growing families and welcoming newborns.

Traditionally, "part-time" policing roles have carried a stigma—either seen as stepping stones for new officers seeking full-time work elsewhere, or as positions for those unable to secure full-time employment. This outdated perception stems from a time when agencies had the luxury of selecting from 50 to 100 applicants per opening. That is no longer the reality.

To maintain seamless service to our community, we implemented a thoughtful solution by hiring experienced officers from the region as temporary part-time officers. In order to attract experienced officers already working a full time position for another agency, we offered a competitive pay structure. This approach mitigated the costs and time associated with full hiring and training processes. Many of these officers had previously worked alongside or had been trained personally by Chief Norell, giving full confidence in their capabilities and their strong fit for our community.

As a result of this program, we were also able to retain two temporary officers into long term part-time positions. This helps reduce overtime demands on our full-time officers while giving us additional staffing flexibility, mitigating officer burn-out.





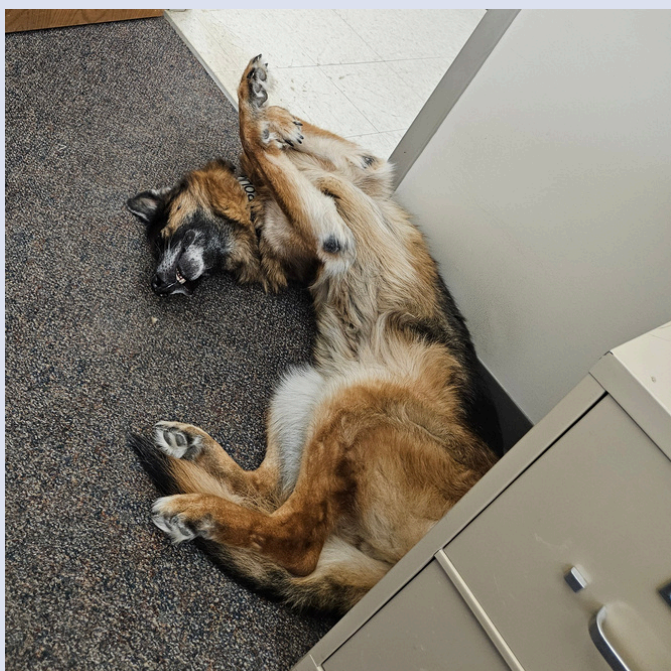
K9 Bruno- Retirement

After seven years of dedicated service to our community, it is time to recognize the retirement of one of our department's most valuable partners. At nine years old, and after accumulating the wear and tear that comes with a demanding law enforcement career, K9 Bruno has officially retired from active duty. He will remain in the care of his handler (dad), Chief Louis Norell.

Throughout a career marked by loyalty, courage, and unwavering dedication, our K9 served as a force multiplier for our officers and a trusted protector of our community. While statistics can never fully capture the impact of a police dog, they provide a glimpse into the remarkable service provided over the years.

During his career, our K9 was deployed 72 times and responded to 43 call-outs. Those deployments resulted in multiple arrests and countless successful outcomes that helped keep both officers and citizens safe. Beyond the measurable results, his mere presence often provided a powerful de-escalation tool. Many situations were resolved peacefully because suspects chose to surrender rather than face a highly trained police dog.

Like all working dogs, the physical demands of the job eventually take their toll. Years of deployments, training, searches, and patrol operations have resulted in various injuries that make retirement a well-earned next chapter. While his service to the department has come to an end, his legacy will remain.



For seven years, our K9 faithfully answered every call, stood beside his handler through countless challenges, and served our community with courage and determination. He helped bring people home safely, protected officers in dangerous situations, and played an important role in keeping our community secure.

We thank him for a career defined by service, sacrifice, and loyalty. His impact on this department and community will not be forgotten.

Enjoy your retirement, Bruno—you have more than earned it.



Cases of Interest



DWI Crash into Houses and Vehicles

In September, Mountain Lake Police Department responded to a report of a vehicle that had crashed into multiple vehicles and a house. Upon arrival, the suspect vehicle was located disabled with the driver nearby. Investigation revealed the suspect had crashed into three vehicles, a house, and a trailer. After further investigation including statements and Standardized Field Sobriety Tests the driver was placed under arrest for driving under the influence of alcohol. Thankfully, no bystanders had been hurt during the incident.

-Officer Ellis



Aggressive Individual Tased

In the early morning hours of April 19, the Mountain Lake Police Department responded to a disturbance involving an intoxicated and aggressive individual at a residence in the 1000 block of 6th Avenue.

Upon arrival, the individual became physically aggressive toward a family member and continued to advance toward the responding officer despite repeated commands and attempts to de-escalate the situation. Due to the individual's continued aggressive behavior, the officer deployed a department-issued Taser. The individual was safely taken into custody without further incident.

The suspect was transported to the Cottonwood County Jail and booked on charges of Domestic Assault. No additional injuries were reported, and there was no ongoing threat to the public.

This incident marked the first deployment of the Mountain Lake Police Department's newly issued Taser 10. The department would like to thank the City of Mountain Lake for approving this purchase, as the device proved necessary in safely resolving the situation and protecting the officer, victim, and suspect.

-Officer Watkins





Cases of Interest

Burglary Arrest and Confession Following Rapid Investigation

On the evening of December 14, 2025, an officer was dispatched to a reported trespassing incident involving a vacant residential property within the city. The reporting party was the property owner, who lives next door to the unoccupied house, which has been in disrepair and was not authorized for entry.



Earlier that evening, neighbors contacted the homeowner to report a man inside the vacant house. The homeowner responded and observed the individual exiting the residence carrying a box. The homeowner confronted the individual near the roadway, at which point the individual dropped the box, apologized, and then left the area in a gray hatchback vehicle.

Although the homeowner initially believed the situation had been resolved, he later contacted law enforcement after considering recent burglary activity in the area. He also advised that the incident had been captured on a residential security camera, and the footage was provided to officers.



Based on the video evidence and detailed information provided by the homeowner, the officer identified a likely suspect and location. The officer located the suspect later that same evening. A vehicle matching the description provided was observed, and an officer and deputy made contact with the suspect at a nearby apartment complex.

The suspect was detained without incident and advised of his rights. Prior to questioning, the suspect admitted to entering the vacant residence and removing property, stating he believed it was permissible because the house appeared unsecured and abandoned. The suspect provided a full confession to the offense.

The suspect was taken into custody and transported to the Cottonwood County Jail, where he was booked for third-degree burglary.

This case highlights the importance of community reporting, residential video surveillance, and prompt investigative follow-up. Through same-night identification and arrest, officers were able to quickly resolve the incident and prevent further property crimes.

-Officer McHenry



Cases of Interest



Stolen Firearm Recovered Following Citizen Tip

On March 30, 2025, an officer was dispatched to a local business after receiving information that a stolen handgun was believed to be inside a vehicle parked on the property. The information was provided by the owner of the firearm, who reported receiving a social media message earlier that day showing the handgun inside the suspect's vehicle. The firearm had previously been reported stolen in a neighboring county.

The officer located the vehicle and made contact with the driver, who was seated inside. During the initial interaction, the officer observed lethargic movements and detected the odor of cannabis coming from the vehicle. The driver denied possessing a handgun and stated that any firearm present would be a shotgun stored in the trunk.



When the officer instructed the driver to step out of the vehicle, the driver rolled up the window and began reaching around his lap area, which was partially covered by a blanket, preventing the officer from seeing what the driver was reaching for. The officer opened the driver's door and immediately observed an empty handgun holster on the driver-side floorboard. The officer grabbed the driver's left hand and ordered him not to move.

As the officer radioed for backup, the driver suddenly dove his right hand toward the floorboard. Fearing the driver was attempting to access a firearm, the officer grabbed the driver's right hand and pulled him out of the vehicle. During the removal, the driver slipped on ice near a picnic table, but the officer maintained control and secured the driver in handcuffs.

The driver admitted that a handgun was located under the driver's seat and stated that he had not stolen it and intended to return it. A search of the vehicle confirmed the presence of a loaded handgun concealed under the driver's seat, which matched the make and serial number of the firearm previously reported stolen.

This incident highlights the importance of responding to credible information and maintaining officer safety during vehicle contacts. Prompt action resulted in the recovery of a stolen firearm and the removal of an illegally possessed weapon from the community.

-Officer McHenry



Cases of Interest



Child Trafficking

On the Morning of June 23, 2025, events unfolded for what was a nightmare for any parent. A 13 year old girl was seen, voluntarily getting into a strangers vehicle, in an attempt to runaway from home. The parents watching this and discovering a note left behind detailing how she didn't plan on returning and provided minimal information on who she was with or where she was going. The investigation unfolded rapidly due to fear of possible kidnapping or human/sexual trafficking.



As the investigation progressed over the following days, it was revealed the child had been solicited online through Tiktok and other media sources from a complete stranger. The solicitor portrayed himself as a 20 year old, seeking a romantic relationship and also provide employment and thereby "independence".



It was discovered the child was picked up by another 3rd party, an adult female along with another child, unknown to our victim prior to meeting. She was then transported from Minnesota to Memphis, Tennessee area. Within a day or two, the child was already working for multiple employers

After several days of coordinated work involving multiple law enforcement agencies and members of the public, the child was located at one of the employers on June 27—just five days after leaving Minnesota. The child was eventually reunited with her family and provided multiple services. Thankfully, the child did not identify being assaulted or sex trafficked during the five days. The child has remained with her family since the incident.

-Chief Norell





Positive Stories

Positive Stories From 2025

Law enforcement officers regularly encounter individuals at moments where addiction, poor decision-making, and crisis intersect. These encounters often require firm and immediate accountability to protect the safety of the individual involved and the community as a whole. While officers rarely see what happens after an arrest or enforcement action, there are moments that offer a rare glimpse into what accountability can lead to when it is carried out with professionalism and respect.

Earlier in 2025, officers responded to a call involving a heavily intoxicated individual in crisis who was in possession of a handgun, creating immediate safety concerns for all involved. Officers took the individual into custody without serious injury, using controlled and measured force to safely resolve the incident. The individual was held accountable for his actions that night, as the circumstances required.

Several months later, during Pow Wow, one of the arresting officers was approached by the same individual. During that exchange, the officer was able to shake his hand, offer forgiveness, and express understanding. The individual apologized for his behavior and shared that being held accountable—while also being treated with dignity and respect—became a turning point that led him toward sobriety, which he continues to maintain.

In a separate instance, later that year, an individual stopped by City Hall to speak with the two officers who had arrested him for a DWI on New Year's Eve of 2023. He acknowledged that at the time he was angry, frustrated, and living an unhealthy lifestyle. He explained that the accountability he faced that night—combined with the professionalism and courtesy shown by officers throughout the DWI processing—prompted him to reassess his choices.

The individual shared that the experience led him to pursue sobriety and his faith. At the time he spoke with officers, he had been sober for over a year. He apologized for his conduct during the incident and expressed gratitude for being held accountable, stating that it changed his life for the better in ways he never would have expected. During that encounter, officers shook hands with and even received hugs from the appreciative individual.

These outcomes are not typical, nor are they the measure of effective enforcement. Accountability does not always lead to recovery, and officers do not expect recognition for simply doing their job. However, these experiences underscore the importance of how accountability is delivered.

On a personal level, I continue to check in routinely with members of our community whom I have had to hold accountable in the past. Nothing is more rewarding than seeing individuals improve their lives, knowing that their progress not only benefits them, but also strengthens our community.

These experiences reflect the department's guiding principle: integrity in action, service with compassion. Upholding the law and treating people with dignity are not opposing values.

Integrity in Action
Service with Compassion

Together, they represent the standard that officers in our community strive to meet every day.

—Officer McHenry



Positive Stories

Vocational Training Day at MLC

The Mountain Lake Police Department recently had the opportunity to participate in Vocational Training Week at Mountain Lake Christian School, providing students with a firsthand look into the profession of law enforcement and what it means to serve as a police officer in Minnesota.

The day began with students receiving tours of police squad cars and learning about the equipment officers carry and use each day while serving the community. Officers showcased many of the tools assigned to them, explaining how each piece of equipment contributes to officer safety, public safety, and effective policing.



Following the hands-on portion of the morning, students participated in a classroom session where several officers shared their personal journeys into law enforcement. Officers discussed their educational backgrounds, career paths, and the experiences that led them to become police officers in Minnesota.

Students also learned about the requirements and process necessary to

become a licensed peace officer, including educational expectations, skills training, and the licensing process. In addition, officers highlighted the many specialty assignments and advanced training opportunities available within modern policing, demonstrating the diverse career paths that exist within the profession.

Our participation in the Vocational Training Week was more than an educational event—it was a heartfelt investment in the next generation. By opening their world to local students, the officers not only demystified the profession but also strengthened the bond between the police department and the community it proudly serves. Mountain Lake Christian School and the department both hope this experience will encourage students to pursue careers that align with their values and passions, knowing that dedicated public servants are always needed to keep communities like theirs safe and thriving.

Integrity in Action
Service with Compassion



Toward Zero Deaths (TZD)



In 2025, the Mountain Lake Police Department continued its participation in the Toward Zero Deaths (TZD) program, funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and administered by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. The TZD program supports targeted traffic enforcement focused on reducing serious injuries and fatalities related to distracted driving, speeding, seat belt non-compliance, and other high-risk driving behaviors.



During the 2025 grant year, the Mountain Lake Police Department experienced a significant reduction in TZD funding allocated to our grant group due to federal program budget constraints. This reduction was not reflective of local enforcement needs or agency performance. As a result, fewer TZD-funded enforcement hours were available compared to prior years; however, officers continued to maximize enforcement effectiveness during the limited funded hours.

Traffic Enforcement Highlights

During 2025, Mountain Lake officers worked a total of 67 TZD-funded enforcement hours, conducting 76 traffic stops. Enforcement activity focused on high-risk violations consistent with TZD priorities.

Despite reduced funding levels, officers demonstrated increased efficiency, achieving a higher number of traffic stops per hour worked compared to previous grant years. This reflects a focused and effective use of limited TZD resources while maintaining a visible enforcement presence within the community.

Total TZD-funded activity included:

Total hours worked: 67.0

Total traffic stops: 76

Citations issued during TZD-funded enforcement primarily addressed speeding and occupant protection, with officers utilizing enforcement discretion and education to encourage voluntary compliance.



Overall Traffic Enforcement Activity

In addition to TZD-funded activity, the Mountain Lake Police Department conducted 304 total traffic stops during 2025, including both TZD-funded enforcement and routine patrol activity. This represents approximately a 20% increase in total traffic stops compared to the prior year. These enforcement efforts resulted in:

64 citations issued

5 arrests for Driving While Impaired (DWI)

2 vehicle pursuits



Toward Zero Deaths (TZD)



Traffic Safety Trends and Community Impact

Mountain Lake continues to face traffic safety challenges common to rural communities, including speeding, inconsistent seat belt use, and distracted driving. Despite a reduction in TZD funding, officers increased enforcement efficiency, achieving approximately a 43% increase in traffic stops per hour worked compared to the previous grant year.

Additionally, the number of DWI arrests remained consistent with the prior year, underscoring the continued presence of impaired driving and the need for sustained enforcement efforts. In line with the department's prior emphasis on occupant protection, seat belt-related enforcement activity increased in 2025, with officers conducting more than double the number of seat belt stops compared to the previous year.

Officers responded to 32 traffic crashes in 2025, compared to 25 crashes in 2024, representing an approximate 28% increase in crash response volume. As a general trend, the department has observed more crashes involving injuries, while fatal motor vehicle crashes in the region have declined, reinforcing the importance of continued enforcement, visibility, and education efforts aimed at reducing crash severity and saving lives.

Maintaining consistent enforcement visibility—both during TZD-funded operations and routine patrol—is critical to reinforcing safe driving behaviors and reducing the risk of serious injury and fatal crashes.

Traffic Safety Goals for 2026

Based on 2025 enforcement outcomes and observed traffic safety trends, the Mountain Lake Police Department has established the following goals for 2026:

- Continue to maximize the effectiveness of limited TZD funding by increasing enforcement efficiency and focusing targeted enforcement efforts on reducing crashes involving injuries.
- Launch a Youth Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Incentive Program: Develop and implement a youth-focused incentive program promoting safe bicycle and pedestrian behaviors, including helmet use, safe roadway crossings, and increased visibility.

These goals are intended to reduce crash severity, prevent fatalities, and improve overall traffic safety within the Mountain Lake community.

–The TZD Program Annual Report was prepared by Officer Ben McHenry, the Agency TZD Coordinator



MOUNTAIN LAKE POLICE DEPARTMENT

— 2025 ANNUAL REPORT —
ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE

1,250

Total Calls For Service (CFS)

19

Assaults

(Includes 1-5th Deg. Assault,
Sexual Assaults, Domestic,
Threats of Violence, etc.)

251

Incident Reports

(Cases requiring documentation
and investigation)

44

Disturbances

(Includes Disturbance,
Verbal Domestic,
Civil Disputes)

300

Traffic Stops

Warnings: **192**

Citations: **59**

38

Crashes



MOUNTAIN LAKE POLICE DEPARTMENT

2025 CALLS FOR SERVICE



1,250
CALLS FOR
SERVICE



300
TRAFFIC
STOPS



115
MEDICAL
CALLS



57
ANIMAL
CALLS



53
911
CALLS



298
INCIDENT
REPORTS



COMMUNITY CALLS

CALL TYPE	TOTAL
Medicals	115
Animal Calls	57
911 Calls	53
Disturbances (Verbal Domestic, Civil Disputes, etc.)	44
Mandated Child and Vulnerable Adults Reports	33
Alarms	32
Public Assist	32
Concern for Welfare	28
Assist Other Agencies	26



ENFORCEMENT & INVESTIGATIONS

ACTIVITY	TOTAL
Traffic Stops	300
Suspicious Activity	43
Accidents	38
Driving Complaint	27
Theft/Fraud	23
JV Related	21
Assaults (All Degrees, Sexual Assaults, Domestic, Threats of Violence)	19
Harassment	13
Burglary	3

SERVING MOUNTAIN LAKE EVERY DAY



PROACTIVE POLICING

Traffic enforcement remained one of our largest proactive activities, promoting safer streets throughout the community.



COMMUNITY SERVICE

More than 250 calls involved helping residents through medical emergencies, welfare checks, animal complaints, and public assistance.



PROFESSIONAL RESPONSE

Officers responded to 1,250 calls while completing 298 incident reports throughout 2025.

CALLS FOR SERVICE - 4 YEAR TREND



INCIDENT REPORTS - 4 YEAR TREND



INTEGRITY



SERVICE



PROFESSIONALISM

All statistics are generated directly from the Mountain Lake Police Department Records Management System (RMS) and are subject to change.