

Gastonia Police Department

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Contact: Donna Lahser

lahser_donna@cityofgastonia.com

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Search for 6-year-old Maddox update

Law enforcement and emergency officials talked about today's efforts in the continuing search at Rankin Lake Park in Gastonia for 6-year-old Maddox Ritch. Maddox went missing on Saturday while at the park with family, and has blond hair, blue eyes, weighs 45 pounds, is 4 feet tall and was wearing an orange T-shirt with lettering "I am the Man," black shorts, and closed toe sandals. Maddox is autistic and does not talk.

"Today, the search continued at Rankin Lake Park on the ground and in the air," Gastonia Police Chief Robert Helton said. "Trained crews on foot and ATVs expanded the search area by two miles. Specially trained dogs from the SBI and National Center for Missing and Exploited Children also covered parts of the terrain. Gaston County Emergency Management Services had its drone up as well.

"We went to businesses around the park that were not open yesterday to see if they had surveillance video that could be helpful to us and also to check the areas outside, including dumpsters," Helton said. "The SWAT team checked dozens of dumpsters by hand. We want to make sure we are checking every possible spot to find this child."

Agents and detectives from more than a dozen local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies continue to conduct interviews and follow leads. There have been more than 80 leads to pursue in the search for Maddox, Helton said. "I want to continue to ask the community for help."

Police ask anyone visiting Rankin Lake Park on Saturday is asked to call the tip line at 704-869-1075.

"We have spoken to many people who were there, but we want to make sure we talk to them all," Helton said. "No piece of information is too small. Something you may think is insignificant could be helpful to our case."

FBI Supervisor Jason Kaplan showed a picture of the design of T-shirt and type of closed toe sandals Maddox was wearing. "Every second counts when a child is missing," Kaplan said. "Our focus is to find Maddox as quickly as possible and to bring him home safe and sound."

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