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Val Verde County Sheriff Joe Frank Martinez confirmed Wednesday evening that the body of missing angler Richard Babb had been recovered earlier in the day. Babb had been missing since Feb. 3 when the boat he and two other people were in had capsized. The other two persons were able to be rescued but Babb was not, leading to a search by multiple law enforcement agencies and volunteers from the US and Mexico. (Facebook photo)

NEWS — MISSING FISHERMAN'S BODY RECOVERED FROM RIO GRANDE

By Karen Gleason

The 830 Times

The body of a fisherman missing since Feb. 3 was recovered from the Rio Grande Wednesday morning, Val Verde Sheriff Joe Frank Martinez has confirmed.

Martinez told the 830 Times the body of Richard Babb, 42, a resident of Lufkin, Texas, was recovered about 9:30 a.m. Wednesday following days of intensive searching in and along the river by county, state, federal and Mexico authorities.

"The initial search for Mr. Babb began Feb. 3, and on the day we were notified, efforts were made to rescue him, but within a day or two, our efforts turned toward recovery," Martinez said in an interview Wednesday evening.

Martinez said earlier the sheriff's office received a 9-1-1 call on Feb. 3 that a man and his seven-year-old daughter needed rescue along the Rio Grande. When law enforcement officers arrived at the scene, the man said he and his daughter and Babb had been fishing in a boat just upstream of a weir dam on the Rio Grande about two miles downstream from Amistad Dam.

The boat capsized, and the rescued man told authorities he and his daughter were able to swim to the riverbank and that they had last seen Babb trying to climb onto the capsized boat, Martinez said.

The sheriff said agencies and organizations that assisted in the search efforts included the Texas Department of Public Safety's Marine and Air units, the Border Patrol's BORSTAR search and rescue unit, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department game wardens, volunteers with Texas EquuSearch Search and Recovery, a non-profit organization from east Texas; and Fundación 911, the fire department from Ciudad Acuña, Coah., Mexico.

"Every effort was made in an attempt to either rescue or recover this individual," Martinez said.

Martinez said members of Babb's family, including his wife, were in Del Rio while the search was underway, and he said he stayed in close contact with them.

"We had morning briefings with them. It didn't start out that way, but then we began letting them know what the search events of the day were going to be, and sadly, today I had to notify the family that a recovery had been made," Martinez said.

The sheriff said he showed the family members photos of Babb's shoes, phone and an article of clothing, which they identified as belonging to the missing fisherman.

Martinez said Babb's body was found in the river about a mile-and-a-half downstream of the Del Rio International Bridge.

Martinez said the International Boundary and Water Commission had slowed the release of water from Amistad Dam for 48 hours.

He noted agencies conducting the search for Babb had resumed normal operations today after searching for the missing man for the past 10 days.

"The game wardens were going to have a boat on the river, and so was the Border Patrol. They were going back to the standard patrol routines, while still keeping a lookout for the individual. The game wardens had a canine on their boat, and the canine alerted, and they went to the location in the river where Mr. Babb's body was found," Martinez said.

He said the body was transferred to Sunset Memorial Funeral Home after Justice of the Peace Pct. 3 Pat Cole pronounced Babb dead at the scene.

"Everyone did a tremendous job, our federal partners in the Border Patrol, our state partners in the DPS and with the game wardens, our own office, our criminal investigations division and patrol, and the county supported our efforts as well, providing portable toilets for the searchers," Martinez said.

He said members of the local community assisted as well, providing meals and moral support to searchers and members of Babb's family.

Martinez gave a public thank-you to everyone who assisted in the search for Babb and those who supported the search efforts. He made his comments during Wednesday evening's county commissioners court meeting.

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