Alachua ARES/NFARC/NF4AC Clubs

MINUTES

July 9 2025

Attendance: **18.** The meeting was at the Alachua County Emergency Operations Center and via ZOOM. Meeting attendees are not specifically noted as attending live and in person or via ZOOM.

Gordon Gibby
Leland Gallup
Jeff Capehart
Susan Halbert
Dean Covey
Cooper Campen
John Campen
David Huckstep
Craig White
Rosemary Judith Jones
Earl Sloane
Brian Joy
Manish Sahni
Mark McDow
Earl McDow
Reid Tillery
Mike Hasselbeck
John Green

Introductions. From 1830 until 1900 when the meeting commenced.

1. **MINUTES APPROVED FOR JUNE 2025/PREVIOUS MONTH ARES HOURS REPORT**. Jeff Capehart described the three levels of taskbook that ARRL has put out. These provide a standardized "pathway" to emergency radio service competence. Level Two allows one to assist at the EOC and be deployed. Level three allows one to actually run the EOC radio room. 94 people on our NF4RC forum. Our group has two supporting clubs and callsigns: NF4RC and NF4AC (the latter for the EOC). June minutes approved. Previous months hours report: June we had Field Day, so many hours were related to Field Day and so categorized. 436 hours in June. 294 of that was FD itself. Another 30 or so for setup and testing.

2. **PROGRAM TOPIC #1.** Fall Technician Class. Discussion of the Fall technician class license. Will run from September through 2 Dec at the EOC. Zoom participation discussed. Decision: the classes will be held at the EOC only, and not by Zoom. That the classes are scheduled for the "meat" of the hurricane season means we will have to be flexible in rescheduling or varying training methods should activations occur. If real world requirements mean the EOC is not available, all instructors and students will have to be ready to deal with that. The few remaining days on the class schedule that needed instructors were taken care of – there is now a complete

roster of instructors. KX4Z recorded the names; e.g., AA3YB agreed to teach 11 September on the FCC rules.

3. **PROGRAM TOPIC #2.** General Class license pathway. KX4Z listed a number of ideas for pathway to a General Class license. These included a POTA outing, a registry for loaner HF station for loaner antennas. Antenna advice teams? Monthly meeting with a LIVE DEMO of some antennas? Demos with antennas to include POTA vertical spike, a random length wire, EFHW? So what do we do to help folks get to a General Class license? Reid Tillery said "people will get their General Class on their own," so Reid is of the view that we don't need to actually run General Class license courses, but rather an Elmer program to assist people who had recently got their General Class licenses. Tillery believes that the abundance of General Class license course materials online obviate the need for live/in person instruction. Earl Sloan recommends that we do some of the suggestions to Tech-level licensees that Gordon proposed as a conversation starter. The interested will see what advancing to the General Class will get them in terms of the all important HF privileges. Much lively discussion ensued. KX4Z suggests asking the Technicians what they want, as well as doing some demonstrations. Cooper Campen recommended that folks be allowed during hurricane season to shadow an actual badged volunteer to a shelter, for example. KX4Z suggests that we will come up short when it comes to providing support given the thinness of our bench and the aging of our most experienced cadre. Younger people will have to shoulder the load as the basic volunteer group ages out of an ability to assist. KX4Z has prepared a resource for how this pathway to General and for increased volunteer ARES support can be generated. The document for how we do the pathway can be found on the NF4RC website in the same location as the ARES application. Gordon recommended the new ARRL basic EMCOMM course, which consists largely of PDFs and which he is now taking – important to see what the League thinks is important. The process for getting an Alachua County communications/ham volunteer badge was set out on a screen. Gordon showed a slide for possible improvements; he recommended a sample Google document, the "Alachua County Communications Pathway." This is a fillable Google document. Reid Tillery suggested that "we" actually use live human beings to do the ICS series. FEMA's ICS series includes the great majority of all formal training required to "credential" our ARES volunteers to be badged and to assume increasing responsibility at the EOC. Susan Halbert opined that online is good for the basic 100/700 ICS series, with live as much better for the 300/400 series. KX4Z says, "we could offer" this live basic instruction – but only in the event that online content is not available. Teaching an "official" ARRL course requires actual ARRL certification. KX4Z said he had to take 40 hours of work to get credentialed by ARRL. The proposed document on the Club website would allow a person to keep track of their level along the pathway.

4. **PROGRAM TOPIC #3.** Community Service pathway for our emergency services personnel, both deployed and not deployed. KX4Z said that folks can "talk but not actually walk." The County needs people to actually appear to be useful – at shelters. Mark McDow recommended that we have some kind of outreach at the 12 July course that local EM preparedness groups are running.

5. **PROGRAM TOPIC #4. FIELD DAY PRELIMINARY RESULTS: SUCCESS!!** Overall reasons for success this FD...KX4D began the discussion this evening by going over the century long history of the ARRL Field Day.. FD was always intended to be a difficult and stressful exercise, since the concept is operation in the field, under emergency like circumstances. Because of this, our ARES FD group has devoted much pre-FD effort to preparation. A laundry

list of acquisitions and equipment assemblies includes KX4Z's obtaining a diesel generator, a mobile trailer, and a tower that goes on the trailer. Moreover, he "scrounged" a free HF beam antenna that can be assembled on the fly and then reaised on the trailer tower on-site. The group has donated and purchased hundreds of feet of high quality and expensive coaxial cable. Years devoted to developing the hard and software backbone for a MESH network resulted in a network that was almost flawless for FD 2025; The MESH supported a real-time database that all stations on the network could use to log contacts, see where other stations were operating, and to send text messages. The database operated virtually without failure, and was key to effectively keeping track of operations not only for the three in-EOC stations, but also the fourth remote station. The latter was housed in an RV that KX4Z brought to FD and which was sited within the thousand-foot circle prescribed by the FD rules, but far enough from the EOC stations/beam/wire antennas so as not to interfere with them. All of this equipment was thrown up rapidly. Moreover, the KX4Z-built quintplexor and bandpass filters permitted stations in the EOC to share single antennas and coax connections. This ability has been refined over a number of years and was dictated by the limitations imposed by our antenna/feedline constraints. We are now a very experienced team when it comes to towing, tower assembly, antenna wires being placed into trees, and the siting of coaxial cable feedlines. We had new successes this FD as to digital operations. We had a "fantastic GOTA" station. We had our own time server. We had a very successful PIO outreach which is why we had such good turnout visiting the GOTA station and witnessing our overall FD effort. We had more visitors than we had last year. Two of the visitors are with us this evening for our meeting (Cooper and John Campen). Many of our group have now stepped up to operate to a much greater degree, and with demonstrable success! Moreover, people apart from "the usual suspects" lent a great and most welcome hand in the pre-FD preparatoins. Craig White helped on tower, as did Mike Hasselbeck. Hugh Minnich towed our trailer. As to actual FD operations, Manish Sahni himself prepared and dispatched the bonus-point rich SM message and the ten "random folk" generated messages. Manish, KX4KC, flawlessly dispatched these by 2m VARA FM. This got us 200 points. AA3YB did the GOTA station. Mark McDow did phone for the first time – these were only some who had done things outside of their comfort zone. KX4Z summarized what we did WELL: more total contacts; great GOTA station activity; GREAT media coverage (not just GOOD, but GREAT); amazing outreach to the community; many technical triumphs. Through a lot of hard work, despite our efforts to reduce – these included "no cabin" for our 4th station; no standing tower, so decent signal means a beam that was assembled and mounted on a towed trailer. BONUS POINT BONANZA; 100 emergency power points; media publicity 100 points; public location, 100 points; public information table 100 points; formal message to SM 100 points; FD Field Day bulletin copy 100 points, natural power (meaning from an off-grid power source that is "naturally derived" – typically solar) QSOs 100 points; elected official (G'ville City Councilman Ed Book)100 points; served agency (David Peaton, Deputy Alachua EM) talk 100 points; GOTA station, 1200 points (Sec'y note – not sure I copied this figure accurately). We had 34 total participants, with probably more than that actually appearing – they just weren't adequately recorded. Total basic point scores: total CW points: 834; total Phone: 132 points; total Digital points: 2218; Power multiplier (100 watts or less operations) 2x; claimed score 6386; bonus points: 2725; total claimed points: 9093!! AA3YB asked where would 9093 points put us? Last year the top 4F station had about 8000 points: so, we might be THE TOP 4F station in the United States if the pattern holds. KX4Z showed how we have done by category and operator year by year since about 2020. SO many who never had made contacts before were making contacts this year. Many folks were recognized. We did 100 hours building equipment; KX4Z listed how many hours the crew put together. The draft AAR listed how we put this together. Only one other team in Ocala may beat us. They are very strong.

6. **FIELD DAY HOTWASH – GOOD/BAD/IMPROVEMENTS?** Jeff Capehart suggested something affixed to the bandpass filters that might help eliminate the issue of their "blowing." As it turns out, the lack of IC oversight of frequency usage/coax cabling meant that a transmitter was inadvertantly connected to the incorrect filter. Result? Smoke and a damaged filter. Learning point for future FD – insist on frequency discipline! Mark McDow recommended closing "digital apps" such as FLDIGI if you are not using them. Close non used program if you are changing modes. Use the KX4Z cheat sheet. Reason? An open digital app such as FLDIGI is still communicating with the logging software – this can cause problems! Food this year was beyond great – it was absolutely remarkable. But keeping flies off food was a problem. Discussion of how the nutrition worked and how things might be changed for a future FD at the EOC. Telling the CCC that we are operating at the EOC, and extending an invitation to them to join us for food, was an excellent suggestion by W4JIR. Timing issues for feeding the CCC staff -- since their shift changes didn't jibe with our schedules. Earl Sloan was given 220$ by Susan from Club funds. Earl is short $80- we gave him the remaining funds, so we are now square on FD food costs with Earl. Manish Sahni suggested we use the whiteboard to a much greater extent; in hindsight lack of use for the whiteboard was a glaring operational shortcoming. Incident Commanders are important to make sure we have frequency discipline, which helps us prevent blowing filters; they can use the whiteboard for operational notes Mike Hasselbeck recommended the N3FJP texting is important for keeping people at the remote trailer advised as to what is happening. Mike hadn't seen any texting activity for hours and was quite alone in the trailer – remote from the EOC. Cooper Campen recommended a sign/sheet that marked out what folks would be seeing on FT8, how things would work. (Good idea). Mike Hasselbeck also said that a few people had asked at the GOTA station why we were using a computer as opposed to voice. Good points by Mike Hasselbeck and Cooper Campen. Cooper offered that when he was looking as a new "wannabe ham" for clubs, he only saw GARS and the Ocala group. Our group did not show up near the top in a Google search of "ham radio Gainesville." Cooper said that the way our web site is captioned isn't "intuitive" to a non-ham person. Dean said that photos on Facebook would be great, and Mark McDow will take on that responsibility. Earl Sloane said that he'd set up a Facebook page, and will allow Mark McDow to be the co-"owner". Cooper suggested modifying our key words for search. Mark McDow suggested that a weather map on the screens is a good thing to have throughout the FD period. Dave Huckstep talked about how we had used live weather to see what was going on with lightning. Mark McDow is volunteered to be our "public presence improvement," (i.e., search term optimizing). Cooper said that our website is a good one in comparison with GARS, but many people won't see our site. As they might be somewhat less "enthused" by the GARS web content – they'd be less likely to join the GARS FD operation. In Cooper's case, after he found the NF4RC website, he was prompted to go to our FD operation. Pictures – we need more of them to put on our site. Earl Sloan was asked about FD feeding – he doesn't know a different way to simplify the operation. He doesn't know how people could ask him. Earl said he enjoyed doing the feeding. Earl even got a "serve safe" card, which means he is certified to do feeding for other groups.

10. **ADDITIONAL TOPICS/DISCUSSION.** None.

11. **ADJOURNMENT.** At 2044 hours EDT.