

# Volunteers search for 5-year-old boy in Androscoggin River

By Christopher Williams, Staff Writer -

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AUBURN — A volunteer search was launched Wednesday along the west bank of the Androscoggin River for a 5-year-old Auburn boy who was swept into the current more than a week ago.

At least 10 pairs of volunteers equipped with binoculars and life jackets were deployed by the Down East Emergency Medicine Institute, which organizes search, rescue and recovery operations in Maine and beyond.

The volunteers were cautioned to stay at least 20 feet from the water, stay hydrated and wear plenty of sunscreen. They were told to call 911 if they spotted what they believed was Valerio McFarland's body.

On Thursday morning, a plane is expected to fly over the river from Auburn to Brunswick, taking high-resolution digital snapshots that can be analyzed for signs of the boy, said Richard Bowie, who heads up the Orono-based organization.

A licensed drone operator plans to join the search, weather permitting, Bowie said.

"The phones are melting down up here," he said. "There are quite a lot of folks wanting to help out."

The boy's parents reached out to Bowie's group Tuesday, he said. He said he expected to have at least 30 people stationed along the river by the end of Wednesday.

The search crews have been told to look for the colors of the clothing worn by Valerio the night he fell into the river, Bowie said. The boy's yellow undershirt "will stand out," he said. The colors of the camouflage jacket he was wearing, light gray and white, also should help with the search, Bowie said.

The search parties were instructed to look on the river and along the west riverbank between Auburn and Durham because of prevailing currents. From Durham south, the boy could be found along either side of the river, Bowie said.

It's also possible that the boy's body was carried out to sea, given the high water volumes over the past week, he said. If that had happened, it likely followed the coastline southward from Brunswick, he said.

Anyone interested in volunteering for DEEMI is urged to contact Bowie at <https://tinyurl.com/yb8tk4z9>. Another search effort planned for Saturday is being organized by the Maine Veterans Initiative Project.