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'Nothing substantial' found during river search for Ayla Reynolds

When asked what he meant by “substantial,” the Department of Public Safety spokesman skirted the question.

BY BEN MCCANNA MORNING SENTINEL

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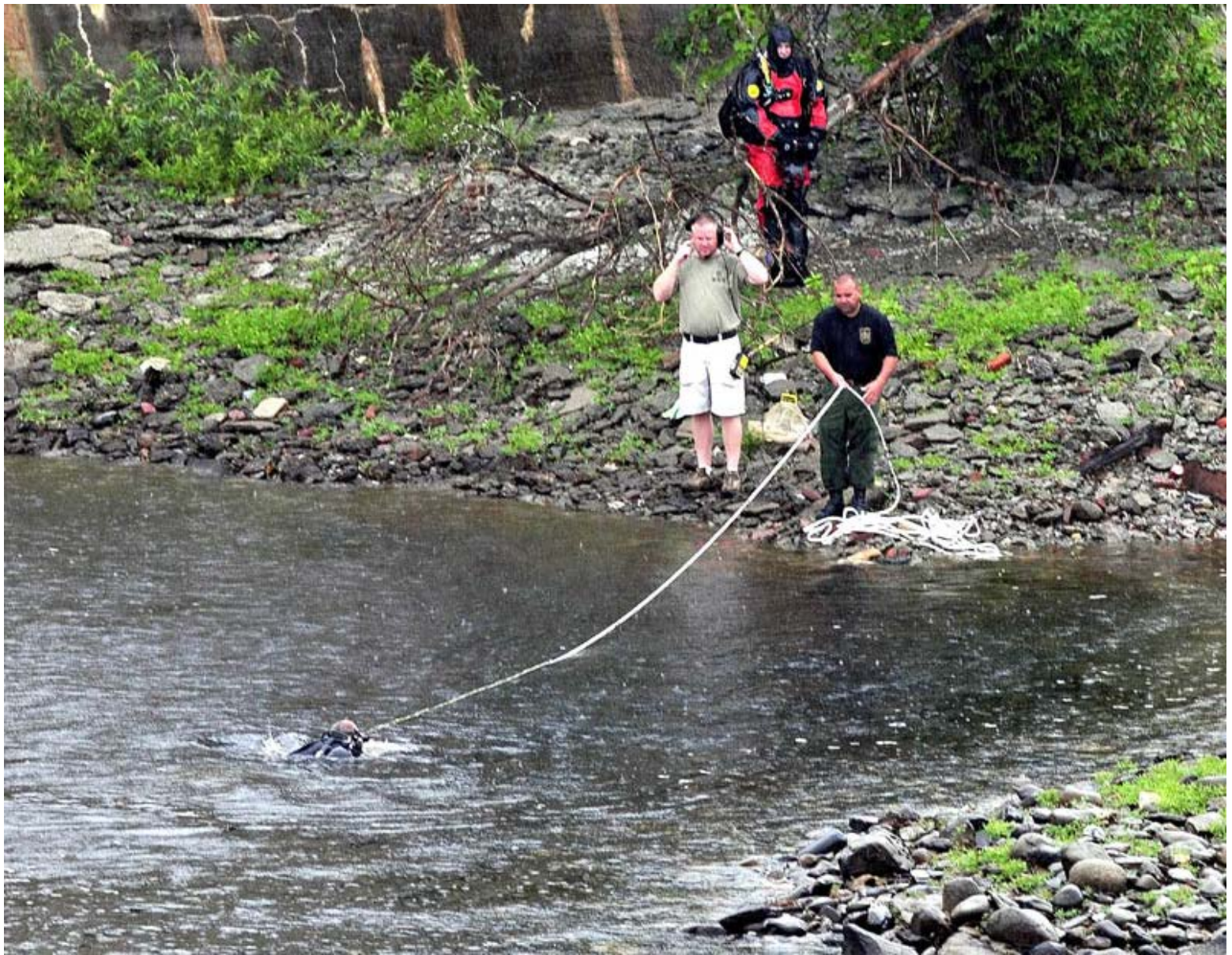


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WATERVILLE — Investigators didn't find anything substantial in the Kennebec River or along its banks during a renewed search for missing toddler Ayla Reynolds on Tuesday.

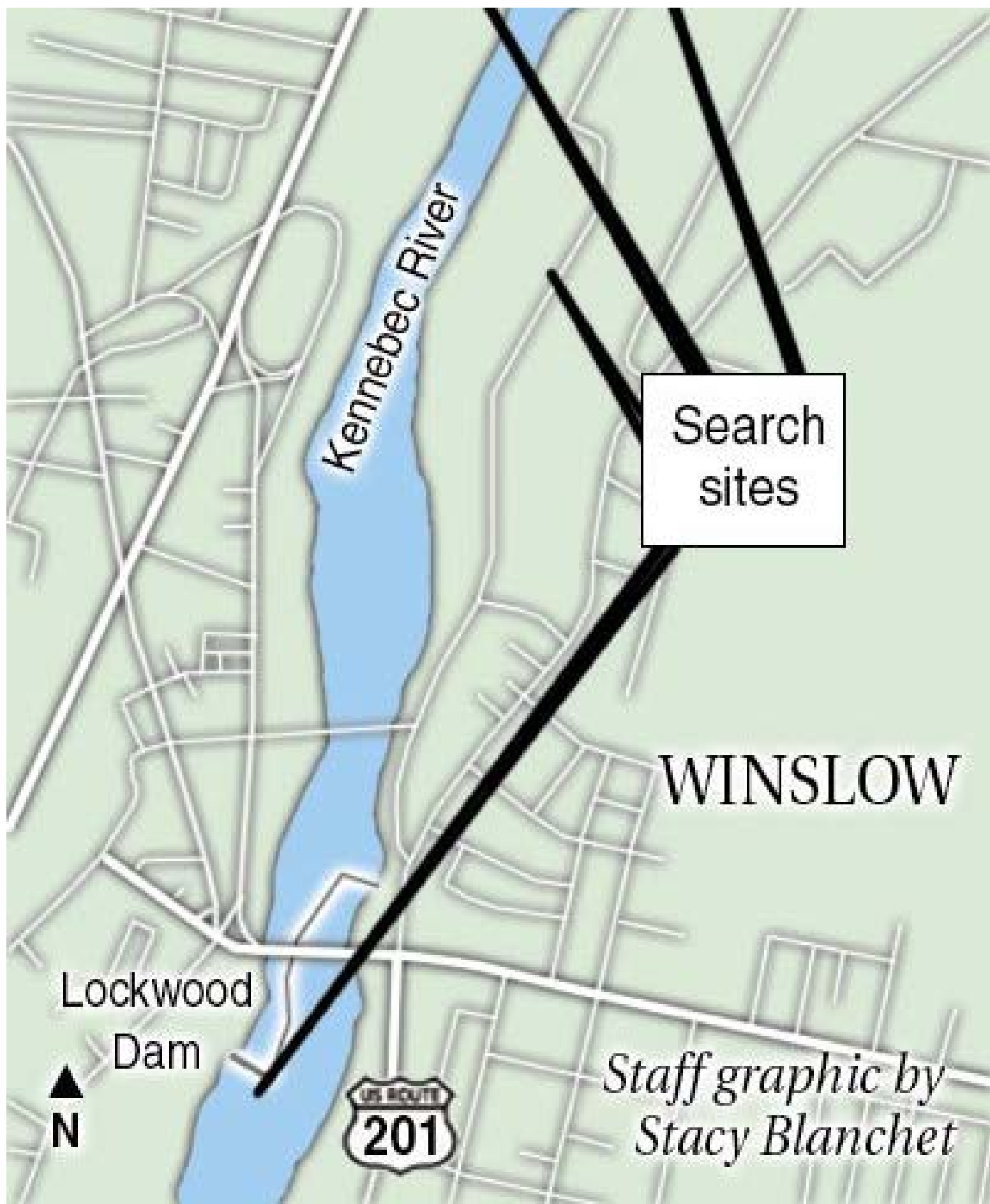
Beginning about 8:30 a.m., 13 divers from Maine State Police and the Maine Warden Service entered the water above the Brookfield Power dam and below the Lockwood Dam at the Hathaway Creative Center. On land and on boats, nine cadaver dogs from both agencies and the Maine Search and Rescue Dogs joined the search, Department of Public Safety Spokesman Steve McCausland said during an afternoon press conference.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



Divers with the Maine State Police and Warden Service enter the Kennebec River below the Lockwood Dam in Waterville on Tuesday to search for missing toddler Ayla Reynolds.





Search sites

WINSLOW

Lockwood Dam



Staff graphic by Stacy Blanchet





UPDATE: Department of Public Safety Spokesman Steve McCausland, right, gives an update on the extensive search for Ayla Reynolds along the Kennebec River, background, done on Tuesday by several agencies. At left is Lt. Kevin Adam of the Maine Warden Service.



Debbie Palman, a volunteer with Maine Search and Rescue Dogs, helps with a search for Ayla Reynolds on Tuesday morning at the site of the former Scott Paper Mill in Winslow. Ayla was reported missing seven months ago today from her Waterville home. *Staff photo by Ben McCanna*





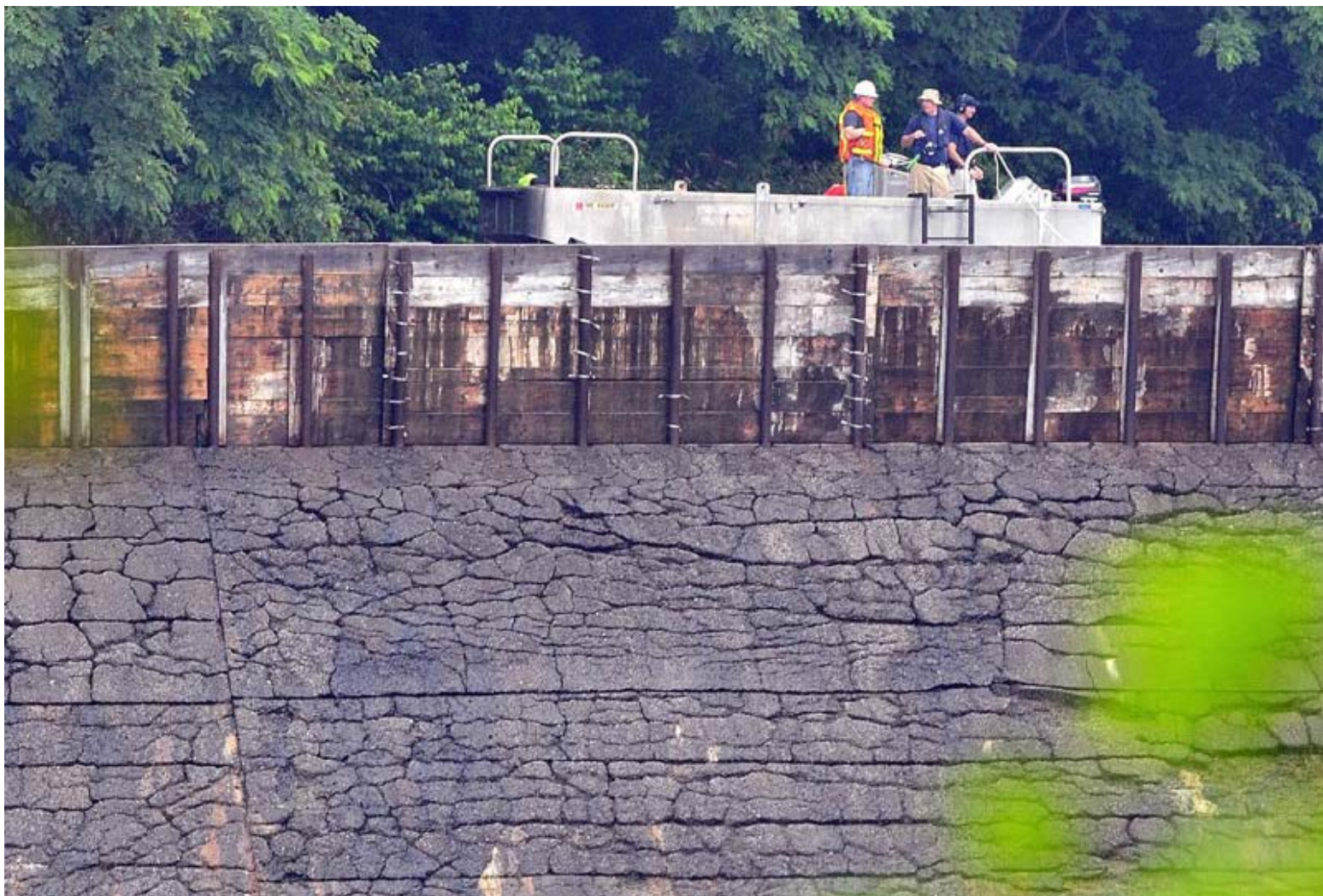
A Maine State Police Major Crimes Unit evidence collection van at Simpson Avenue in Winslow Tuesday morning near the Brookfield Power Dam. Searchers are looking for Ayla Reynolds, reported missing seven months ago today from her Waterville home. *Photo by Ben McCanna*



Members of Maine Search and Rescue Dogs assemble at the Pan Am railroad yard in Waterville after searching the area and riverbank for evidence of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds on Tuesday.



Maine State Police officers prepare to search near the Brookfield dam in Winslow on Tuesday for evidence of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds.



Searchers in a boat search above the Brookfield dam in Winslow for evidence of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds on Tuesday.



Search photos available for purchase: [Photo Store](#) →

“Nothing substantial was located,” McCausland said. “This is not the end. We will continue to look, we will continue to search, we will continue to dive.”

When asked what he meant by “substantial,” McCausland skirted the question.

“I don’t want to get into specifics,” he said.

The search was the result of weeks of planning and coordinating between state police and dam owners to lower the river level for a more thorough search. Tuesday marked seven months since Ayla was reported missing on Dec. 17 by her father, Justin DiPietro. McCausland said the date of the search was purely coincidental.

McCausland wouldn’t say whether the search was related to undisclosed items found by investigators in a

diversion channel at the Lockwood Dam on April 21 and later on May 8.

“We have not specified what those items are, and we’re not going to do that today,” he said.

Searches of local waterways began on Dec. 20 and continued periodically throughout the winter and spring. McCausland said wardens have eliminated between two and three miles of the Kennebec River and Messalonskee Stream. In March, Waterville Police Chief said the cost of the investigation could be as high as \$500,000.

“This is the most extensive missing persons case in the state’s history,” McCausland said Tuesday. “There has been no case in our history that so much time, effort has been devoted, and the efforts will continue. The efforts will continue until we find her.”

Earlier Tuesday, teams of dogs were searching areas at the site of the former Scott Paper Mill in Winslow, and by a rail yard east of College Avenue in Waterville. An evidence collection vehicle from the state police Major Crimes Unit was parked east of the dam on the Winslow side. A similar vehicle was parked on the Waterville side, where wardens and state police troopers were also performing a ground search.

Also on the Waterville side, a vehicle from the State Office of Chief Medical Examiner was parked near the rail yard east of College Avenue. McCausland said the vehicle was driven by Dr. Ed David, an assistant state medical examiner and also a K-9 handler.

“It was primarily in that role, of handling the dogs, that he was here,” McCausland said.

About 2 p.m., a boat from Maine Search and Rescue Dogs motored slowly downstream between the two dams with a dog on the bow. Adam said the dog was a water-certified cadaver dog, meaning it could detect the presence of a submerged body.

McCausland said Ayla’s parents, Justin DiPietro of Waterville and Trista Reynolds of Portland, were notified of the search early Tuesday morning. He said that the level of communication between investigators and DiPietro hasn’t changed since the last press conference on May 30 when McCausland announced that investigators believe Ayla is dead.

McCausland has said that DiPietro, his sister Elisha DiPietro and friend Courtney Roberts aren’t forthcoming with information in the case.

Neither parent could be reached for comment Tuesday.

McCausland said searches for Ayla will continue, but police will no longer “pre-announce” the times and locations of searches, as they had done during the winter and spring.

DiPietro contends that Ayla was abducted. Investigators, however, say a kidnapping did not happen. In January, McCausland announced that investigators had found Ayla's blood in the basement of her Violette Avenue home, but wouldn't specify how much. No suspects have been named and one has been charged.

McCausland said he doesn't believe the investigation is at a dead end, but acknowledged frustration in the case.

"It's hard to believe it's been seven months," he said.

Ben McCanna — 861-9239

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