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## **Search for San Diego County girl ends in grief**

**A body found in a shallow grave is believed to be that of Chelsea King, 17.**

By Richard Marosi

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Reporting from Poway, Calif.

The intense search for Chelsea King ended Tuesday when authorities unearthed a body in a shallow grave near the lakeside park where the teenager had gone running last week.

There is a "strong likelihood" that the body is that of the 17-year-old Poway High School senior, though a positive identification had yet to be made, said San Diego County Sheriff Bill Gore.

The teenager's family was devastated, he said at a news conference, adding: "They were holding out hope, as we all were, that we would find Chelsea alive."

A dive team found the body on a tributary of Lake Hodges, in a wooded area that had been the focus of an extensive search since Saturday, after a shoe was found there. A diver working his way up the tributary saw debris about 10 feet from the water, which led to the grave, Gore said.

The site is about half a mile from the parking lot at Rancho Bernardo Community Park, where King had left her car before heading out on the trail.

News of the discovery quickly spread in the upscale San Diego suburb, where thousands of volunteers -- students, senior citizens, friends and family -- had joined hundreds of law enforcement officials hiking for miles in rough terrain to help find the missing girl.

"Everybody is asking the same question: Why?" said Paula Bunn, a bereavement counselor at the Chelsea King Search Center, who consoled several of King's distraught friends. They were still wearing "Bring Chelsea Home" sweatshirts.

The suspect in the case, John Albert Gardner III, a 30-year-old registered sex offender, is expected to be charged at a hearing scheduled for Wednesday, according to the San Diego County district attorney's office.

Authorities have expanded the investigation in recent days after linking Gardner to an attack in December on another young, female jogger in the same park.

They are also looking into whether he had anything to do with the disappearance of a 14-year-old girl last year in Escondido.

In the December incident, a 22-year-old woman was approached by a man who tackled her and demanded money. She escaped after hitting him in the face, bloodying her elbow. San Diego police did not disclose how they linked Gardner to the attack.

Some residents and people posting comments on the Chelsea King Facebook Page have criticized law enforcement authorities for not posting warning signs in the park after the December attack. Gore declined to comment at the news conference.

The search began Thursday night after the teenager, a straight-A student and member of the San Diego Youth Symphony, failed to return home after going for a run.

Brent King, Chelsea's father, found his daughter's locked car in the parking lot.

"Fear gripped me and I took off running, searching for my daughter, calling her name at the top of my lungs," he said in an interview with KUSI-TV Channel 9 in San Diego.

Gardner was arrested Sunday afternoon outside a restaurant near the lake after unspecified evidence linked him to the crime, authorities said. The 230-pound Gardner, who is registered as living in Lake Elsinore, had been visiting his mother in Rancho Bernardo last week.

In 2000, Gardner pleaded guilty to molestation charges involving a 13-year-old girl.

He served five years of a six-year prison term and wore a global-positioning system tracking device until 2008, when his parole term ended.