CRYSTAL FALLS—The Iron County Board of Commissioners has delayed a decision regarding funding for an Upper Peninsula drug task force.

"I just hope this is something I hope we can support," Board Chairman Wayne Wales said at the Oct. 23 regular meeting. __PUBLIC__

The Upper Peninsula Substance Abuse Enforcement Team (UPSET) investigates illegal drug activities in 12 counties in the western U.P. According to Michigan State Police Detective Lt. Tim Sholander, the unit's $188,000 budget comes from grants supplemented by contributions from counties and municipalities.

The Iron River City Council voted to donate $1,000 to the program at its Oct. 17 meeting. "We think it's a service that we need at this time, and it's worth contributing to," City Manager Perry Franzoi said.

The Crystal Falls City Council will contribute $1,469, according to City Manager Dorothea Olson. "Budgets are tight, but we think it's something we want to get behind," Olson added.

Besides running undercover drug operations, UPSET also raids methamphetamine labs. Sholander said the meth problem in UPSET's jurisdiction has grown more than 400 % in the past four years. In 2009, the team raided seven labs. During 2010, that count jumped to 21 labs, and in 2011 police busted 26 labs. So far this year, UPSET officers have raided and dismantled 30 drug labs—nine of them this month alone.

"It costs about $6,800 to clean up a meth lab," Sholander said. "That's what makes it so difficult for communities."

UPSET is comprised of officers from state, county and local law enforcement agencies. Its members have been federalized so they can operate on tribal lands and cross over into other states. "This is a problem that doesn't stop at county lines," Sholander said.

Sholander is slated to address the County Board at its next regular meeting, which is scheduled for Nov. 13 at 6 p.m. at the Courthouse.