



# NEWS RELEASE

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Release No. FS-0526

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## **FOREST SERVICE COMPLETES INVESTIGATION INTO LAST FALL'S AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT IN MONTANA; ANNOUNCES ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES**

KALISPELL, MONT., Mar. 9, 2005—The Forest Service today released its report into the Sept. 20 crash of a Forest Service-chartered aircraft in which three people died and two survived. The agency will implement several administrative changes recommended by the accident investigation team to prevent a similar tragedy from occurring.

"The Forest Service's accident investigation team's charter was to review the agency's administrative procedures leading up to the crash and during the search and rescue operation. In addition, our goal was to learn from what happened and to improve our safety procedures for the future," said Team Leader Randy Moore. "The team was not tasked to identify the cause of the accident, which is the role of the National Transportation Safety Board."

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is the government's chief investigative unit for accidents involving aircraft. The Forest Service is cooperating with NTSB in its investigation, which is expected to be completed within the year.

Moore's team found that the Forest Service's contract with Edwards Jet Center did not specify the requirements for a pilot's flight experience in wilderness or to properly define what was meant by "typical terrain" flight experience. The Forest Service often travels by aircraft to conduct its day-to-day operations. For example, the workers on the Montana plane were traveling to conduct an annual vegetation inventory and to repair telecommunications facilities. The agency will now review and modify its current requirements for backcountry pilot experience as well as issue a standard definition for what constitutes typical terrain.

Investigators also found that clothing worn by most of the passengers sustained significant damage from the post-accident fire. However, a fire-resistant jacket worn by one of the passengers provided adequate burn protection for areas covered by the jacket. In light of these findings, the Forest Service will reevaluate appropriate personal protective equipment requirements for its fixed-wing backcountry flight operations.

Finally, the team found that while the radio check-in procedures for flight following were used, they provided limited and eventually, misleading information in the search and rescue operation. All personal gear and emergency locators were burned in the fire. These findings led to the third action item to step up the already-planned implementation of an automated flight following program, a real-time tracking system using satellite communication and internet systems. Until this program is fully implemented, latitude,

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longitude and heading reports will be required for radio check-in on Global Positioning Systems-equipped aircraft.

"My condolences are with the family, friends and coworkers of Davita Bryant, Ken Good and Jim Long. We will never forget them for their hard work and their dedication to natural resource management," said Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth. "My thanks to Randy Moore and his team for doing such a detailed investigation and for recommending action items that will improve the way we conduct aviation operations in the future."

On Sept. 20, a pilot and four Forest Service employees were en route in a Cessna 206 from Kalispell, Mont., to the Shafer Meadows backcountry airstrip when their plane crashed and caught on fire. Pilot Jim Long, 60, and passenger Davita Bryant, 32, died in the crash. Ken Good, Jodee Hogg, and Mathew Ramige escaped the fiery aircraft with burns and injuries, huddling together the first night to ward off the effects of cold and moisture. Good, 58, died the following morning, prompting Hogg and Ramige to hike down the mountain before rescue personnel located the wreckage. Forest Service ground personnel located the wreckage the next day. Nearly two days after the crash, Hogg and Ramige, after a courageous and rigorous hike out of backcountry terrain, emerged on a local highway and flagged down a passenger car for help. Hogg is recovering from her injuries; Ramige is still undergoing treatment for his injuries.

The report and action plan can be found on the Forest Service website at: [http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/av\\_safety/mishaps/lessons\\_learned/index.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/av_safety/mishaps/lessons_learned/index.html).

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Note to Editors: The following Forest Service leaders are available to discuss the findings and action report: Randy Moore, Accident Investigation Team Leader; Marcia Patton-Mallory; Rocky Mountain Research Station Director; and Cathy Barbouletos, Flathead National Forest Supervisor. Contact Ed Nesselroad at (406) 758-5208 to schedule interviews.