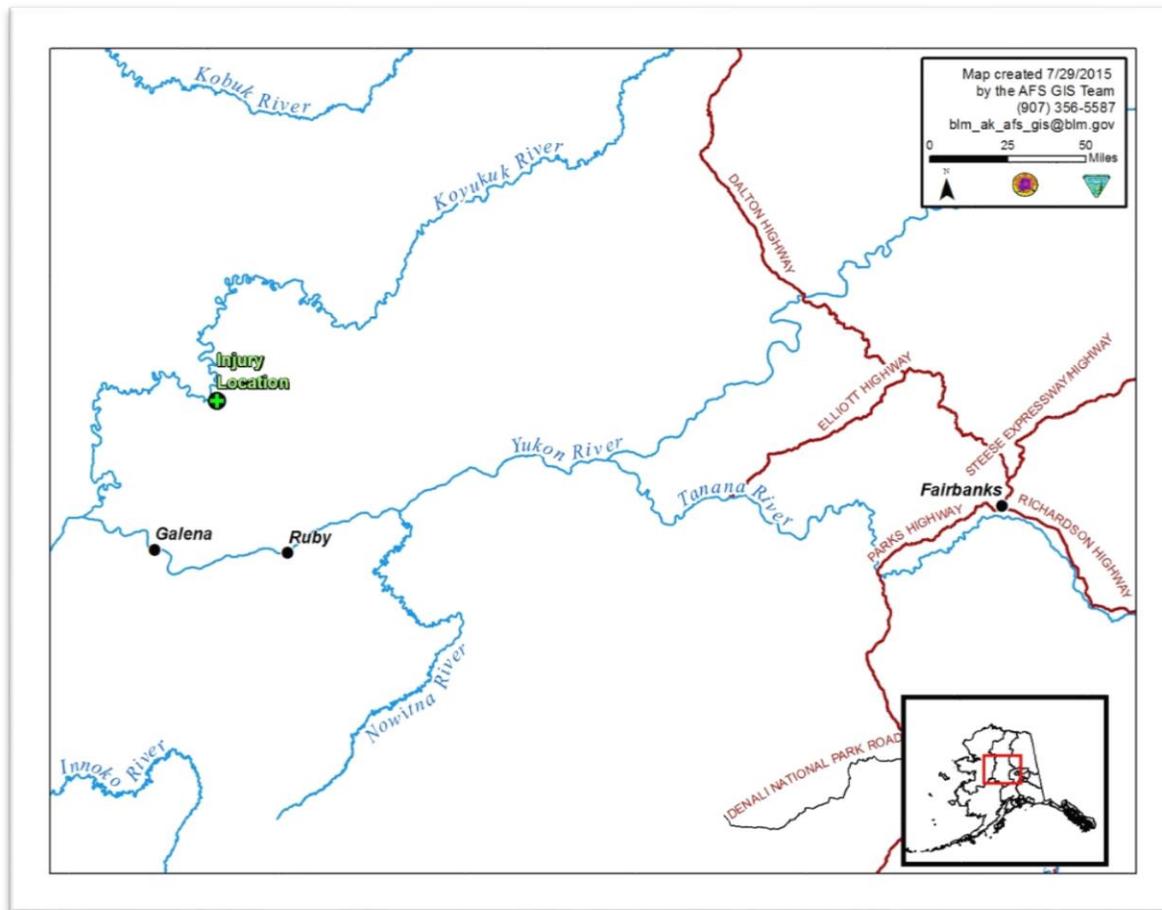


# Rapid Lesson Sharing

**Event Type:** Tree Strike Injury;  
Medevac Problems

**Date:** July 22, 2015

**Location:** Holnakatna Fire #539;  
Galena Zone; Alaska



## NARRATIVE

At approximately 1450 hours, while a firefighter on the Holnakatna Fire #539 is mopping up the edge of the fireline, a 60-foot tall white spruce tree falls and strikes the firefighter directly across his upper back. The other firefighters in the vicinity immediately respond and inform the Incident Commander, who is EMT qualified, as well as a Medic assigned to the fire.

The mechanism of injury and symptoms that the firefighter is reporting indicate that his injuries call for advanced medical care. Galena Fire Management Zone Dispatch is contacted and a medevac helicopter and backboard are requested by the personnel on scene.

A plan unfolds that includes calling for a fixed-wing air ambulance to be ordered to the nearest airport, located in Galena (see map above). A Type 2 Zone Helicopter, located in Galena, will fill the initial retrieval request and fly to the fire to begin the medevac process.

### **No Trauma Kit or Backboard**

While the Galena Zone Helicopter is mobilizing, it is determined that there is no trauma kit or backboard at the Galena Fire Management Zone Field Station. A backup plan to utilize a Type 2 Helicopter assigned to a nearby fire—and is the designated medevac ship for this fire—is implemented.

This helicopter responds—under the assumption that this is a request for a medical transport, not medevac—and arrives on the fire without a backboard.

A third helicopter, this time a B-3 Light, also in the vicinity on a different mission, is asked to retrieve the backboard located at their ICP in Ruby (see map on previous page) and carry out the medevac. However, a call into Dispatch from the Medic on scene raises concern over whether their 6’3” patient—when fully packaged—can fit into this light helicopter. To mitigate this potential issue, the original Zone Helicopter is re-dispatched from the Galena Station to carry out the initial transport back to Galena.

### **Backboard is Delivered; Patient is Packaged**

At 1623 hours—approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes from the initial injury—the light helicopter lands on the fire and drops off the backboard. The on-scene Medic packages the patient while the Zone Helicopter is enroute.



*Photo shows the shallow root base on a white spruce that was easily consumed when the ground fire passed through this stand. (This is not the tree that was involved in this tree-strike injury incident.)*

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***This helicopter responds—under the assumption that this is a request for a medical transport, not medevac—and arrives on the fire without a backboard.***

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The Zone Helicopter retrieves the injured patient and arrives back in Galena at 1715 hours along with the on-scene Medic and a liaison (a member of the patient’s home crew from Boise, Idaho). The air ambulance is there waiting for them.

### **Patient Arrives in Fairbanks ER**

The remainder of this medevac operation goes as planned.

The patient is transferred to the waiting air ambulance and arrives at the Emergency Room in Fairbanks at 1900 hours. X-rays and a MRI indicate that the firefighter did not sustain any major injuries. At 2230 hours, he is released from the hospital.

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## LESSONS

Due to their shallow root base, it is not uncommon for the root systems to be completely consumed after ground fire passes through a white spruce stand. Many of these trees will fall without warning—or with the slightest wind. Identifying and felling these trees is a good practice to ensure these areas are safe for mop-up.

### ***Several findings were identified that are relevant to the success and problems with this medevac:***

- ✓ Medical gear is typically ordered and delivered to the station on an annual basis, then returned to Fairbanks after the season for refurb. This year it was never ordered. An individual or position should be designated to ensure medical supplies are available in the Zone.
- ✓ Communications between Zone personnel and the air operations personnel on the second responding helicopter failed to solidify the type of response, or equipment necessary to assist. Some accounts mention short-haul, some mention medical emergency, and some mention medical transport.
- ✓ It was unclear by all parties involved whether a light helicopter has the capability to carry a 6'3" patient on a backboard.
- ✓ It is unclear which Zone personnel assumed control of the medevac, as the Unit Aviation Manager, AFMO and Dispatch all became involved.
- ✓ Although a fireline Medic was assigned to the fire, it is unclear whether this fire had a medical response plan.
- ✓ Using another fire's medevac resources compromised that fire's ability to respond to an emergency of its own.
- ✓ Consider utilizing smokejumpers and their trauma kit if it may possibly decrease the overall response time.
- ✓ Dutch Creek Protocols were designed as a tool for IMTs, but they can be adapted for utilization in many other logistical situations.

**This RLS was submitted by:  
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