



**Event Type:** UTV Accident

**Date:** June 4, 2025

**Location:** Woodworth Station Pasture E,  
Woodworth Station Waterfowl Production Area, a unit  
of the Chase Lake Wetlands Management District  
North Dakota

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## **The Story and Lessons from the FWS Chase Lake Wetlands Management District Prescribed Fire UTV Accident**

On June 4, 2025, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conducted the Woodworth Station Pasture E Prescribed Fire (Rx or burn) at Woodworth Station Waterfowl Production Area (WPA), a unit in the Chase Lake Wetland Management District, North Dakota, Mountain-Prairie Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Chase Lake Wetland Management District with the Rx unit is located in the Missouri Coteau Geological Land Formation in east central North Dakota.

Waterfowl production areas are small natural wetlands and grasslands that provide breeding, resting and nesting habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, grassland birds and other wildlife. A wetland management district (WMD) is a landscape-scale conservation area managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect wetlands, grasslands, and the wildlife in one or more counties. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages more than 289,000 acres of WPAs in 14 Wetland Management Districts in North Dakota.

Primary fuels present at Chase Lake Wetland Management District are upland warm season native grasses (Fuel Model GR2/GR7) with a snowberry/silverberry brush component both inside the prescribed fire unit and in the adjacent units. During the Rx operations, the fuels were considered in "green up". Green up is the stage in plant development when new, green vegetation begins to emerge, increasing live fuel moisture and reducing fire behavior potential. This transition marks a shift from more flammable live fuels to less flammable live fuels.

The prescribed fire unit is 359 acres. The unit's control lines are identified as south and east gravel roads. The north control line is an old railroad grade. The west control line is a mowed fire break. Topography within the burn unit is wetlands and rolling hills with large rocks, typical of the Missouri Coteau.

### **Prescribed Fire Plan and Implementation**

The prescribed fire plan included the establishment of blacklines along the perimeter of the unit, then ignition of interior strips with a Utility Terrain Vehicle (UTV) to allow for faster fuel consumption and more heat to lift the smoke up and out of the area. Adding interior ignition strips in the late spring is a normal Rx operation in North Dakota. The ignition team is comprised of two UTVs, UTV A and UTV B. These UTVs have water tanks strapped into the beds and are assigned two firefighters.

The test fire was started at 1130 hours. Once the test fire showed that the Rx fire was going to reach the objectives of the prescribed fire plan, UTV A began heading north along the east road. UTV B began moving west along the south road.

At approximately 1200, UTV A arrived at the railroad grade which was the north holding line. At this point, both UTV A and B went interior to secure and burn out around the wooden posts of a fox study enclosure. At approximately 1245, the fox study enclosure ignition operation was completed. UTV B continued with ignition along the north line and UTV A began the interior ignition strips of the unit between the north and south control lines while moving from east toward the west each time they turned.

## Timeline

**1330** – The interior ignition UTV A comes to the north line to meet the Firing Boss and exchange empty drip torches for full drip torches.

**1334** – While returning to ignite the interior strip fire, UTV A strikes a large rock obscured by tall grass, causing the UTV to roll over on its driver's side. The Firing Boss immediately runs from the north control line to the overturned UTV to assess the situation and administer first aid as needed. The UTV A driver operator is a qualified EMT with a first aid kit included in their line gear. As soon as both occupants are safely out of the UTV, the UTV A driver immediately begins first aid on the UTV A passenger. Once the Firing Boss assesses the situation, the Firing Boss calls over the radio: *"UTV overturned—multiple lacerations and possible broken arm."*

**1336** – The Line Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) who is on-site, immediately radios: *"Enroute to the incident."*

**1340** – The EMT retrieves the first aid bag and is enroute to this Incident Within an Incident (IWI). 911 is called for an ambulance.

**1345** – RXB2 (Burn Boss) requests the Refuge Manager—who is also a qualified Hospital Liaison—to call the acting Agency Administrator and advise the Agency Administer of the IWI.

**1355** – A local EMT who hears the 911 page and lives within three miles of the IWI arrives at the Rx unit and meets up with UTV B.

**1402** – UTV B delivers the local EMT to the RXB2 for transportation to the IWI site.

**1403** – The IWI site is secured from any approaching fire.

**1407** – The Woodworth ambulance arrives, is able to administer first aid, but, due to the configuration of this ambulance, is not able to transport patients. The Medina ambulance is enroute for patient transfer.

**1410** – The two patients are transported by the RXB2 from the IWI site to Highway 36, which is 0.5 miles north, to meet the Medina ambulance.

**1411** – The Woodworth ambulance relocates to patient transfer site on Highway 36.

**1416** – The Medina ambulance arrives and is ready to receive patient transfer.

**1427** – The patients are out of the Rx unit and are headed to nearest hospital emergency room.



Red circle indicates the location of the rock—hidden by the tall grass—that caused the UTV to tip over onto its side.

**1436** – The Woodworth Burn Boss calls and speaks with a Burn Boss on another nearby U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service prescribed fire to ask for assistance securing the Woodworth Rx unit. This other Burn Boss sends assistance quickly due to their ignitions being complete and now being in mop-up and patrol.

**1600** – Ignitions complete.

**After UTV A Struck the Rock**

Neither driver nor passenger of UTV A were wearing seatbelts when this rock strike occurred. Both passengers were wearing helmets—but were not using chin straps. Both passengers remained within the Rollover Protection System (ROPS) during the incident.

After UTV A struck the rock, the passenger’s head struck the ROPS of the UTV while still wearing his helmet. After the initial impact, the passenger’s helmet was knocked from his head, causing him to hit his head on the roof of the UTV as it fell to its side.

The UTV driver’s helmet remained on his head during this incident. It was still secured to his head when responders first arrived on scene. However, the driver’s arm was injured, leading to bruising where it impacted the passenger protection bar.

The Refuge Manager/Hospital Liaison followed the ambulance to the hospital and was there for support. At the Emergency Room (ER), the passenger received nine staples to the head. The driver had a bruised left arm. The injured firefighters were released from the ER at approximately 1630.



The helmet of the UTV’s passenger.

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Off-Road Utility Vehicles (ORUVs) Policy 243 FW 6**

Link to FWS ORUVs Policy: <https://www.fws.gov/policy-library/243fw6>

**Table 6-1: PPE Required for Operating ORUVs**

<b>B. ORUVs with ROPS and seat belts</b>	A securely fastened hard hat with an integral fastened chinstrap.	The hard hat must meet the ANSI standard for Industrial Head Protection (Type 1, Class B) with chinstrap unless the risk assessment for the operation dictates wearing a securely fastened motorcycle helmet.
	The same eye protection and clothing as required for an ORUV without ROPS	N/A.
	Wildland firefighters must meet the requirements in the <a href="#">Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations (Redbook)</a> <a href="#">↗</a> .	N/A.

## Lessons

- ❖ While participating in interior ignition in uneven, rocky terrain, always wear your seatbelt. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service policy is to wear a seat belt whenever operating a UTV.
- ❖ While it was not evident that travel speed played a factor in the striking of the rock, it is important to be constantly scanning the direction of travel for unexpected obstacles, regardless of speed of travel.
- ❖ Securing helmet chin straps while operating or riding in a UTV may have limited or prevented the extent of the head injuries to the passenger. It is agency policy that while operating UTVs a helmet must be secured by chin strap.
- ❖ Ensure emergency point of contacts are known for all firefighting personnel. It is not uncommon to have firefighting personnel from other agencies or other locations assisting with prescribed fire. Ensuring emergency contacts are known in advance can make IWIs less stressful for all involved.

## Successes

- ❖ The UTV was equipped with a Rollover Protection System (ROPS), which protected the driver and passenger from ejecting outside of the UTV.
- ❖ The UTV driver was a qualified EMT, had medical supplies in his line gear, and immediately started rendering first aid to the passenger.
- ❖ The second qualified EMT was operating a Yanmar, a soft-tracked UTV type vehicle, as part of holding/ignitions and responded to this incident within minutes.
- ❖ The third local EMT was only miles away and responded within minutes to render aid.
- ❖ This IWI, with all its experienced personnel on scene, made the process flow very well with communication—placing the right calls to the right people in a timely manner.
- ❖ The Refuge Manager followed the ambulance to the ER and was the Hospital Liaison for both patients.

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**This RLS was submitted by:**  
**Incident Overhead**

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**Chase Lake WMD  
Stutsman Co.**

### Woodworth Station (Pastures E,F)

## Project Map

## 359 Acres

