

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Spike Camp Tree Strike

Date: July 25, 2025

Location: Aggie Creek Fire
Division Alpha Spike Camp
Alaska

The Story and Lessons from this Spike Camp Tree Strike

The Division Alpha Spike Camp had been in operation on the Aggie Creek Fire since July 6th. It is located on the Chatanika River, 44 miles downstream from Olnes Boat Ramp—an approximate two-hour boat ride. The camp is situated on private property, with the landowner being a very gracious host.

At Division Alpha, the camping area is mowed. The cooking area is located next to a shelter that the landowner has provided access for food storage. To the east of the main residence, Helispot 145 is just off the river's edge.

At the height of suppression operations, the Division Alpha Spike Camp hosted 33 operational personnel.

Approximately 47 personnel resided at this spike during its life span, July 6th–28th.

Snag Noticed Adjacent to Camping Area

The original crews who were in the camping area demobed and the area was vacant roughly from July 16th–19th. A new Wildland Fire Module (WFM) consisting of 11 individuals arrived on July 20. While the camping area was vacant the DIVS and field Safety Officer (SOFF) noticed a snag adjacent to the camping area.

A discussion took place regarding this hazard. However, they did not have the means to eliminate it. Compounding the issue, a sawmill needed to be moved before the tree could be cut. A conversation also occurred with the landowner concerning the hazard.

The snag, a white spruce, was leaning into a green tree. This green tree also had a dead top. The landowner mentioned that the tree had been in that condition for two to three years.



The white spruce snag and tree it had been leaning against that fell into the sleeping area at 0406 hours when crew members were asleep in their tents, injuring one of the firefighters.

A Series of Popping Sounds . . .

In the early morning of July 25, at 0406, the crew was awakened by a loud series of popping sounds, followed by a large crash as the snag and the green tree's dead top fell and came to rest in the camping area. One individual was struck in the foot by a 2-inch by 4-foot piece from the top of the green tree when it clipped the corner of a tent.

In total, 12 individuals were camping in the area, with five tents positioned immediately adjacent to the downed tree. The injured individual was attended to by on-scene medical personnel, who communicated with the incident Medical Unit Leader. No lost time was recorded. The individual was examined by a paramedic at spike camp and refused any further treatment. They had no more than a slight bump and bruise.

Lessons

- ❖ The DIVS and WFM experienced a false sense of security camping in the area, as the spike camp had been in operation for nearly 20 days prior to this tree strike incident.
- ❖ Take the time to be responsible for your own safety—visually inspect the surrounding area before setting up camp.
- ❖ Ensure briefings include hazards that exist both on and off the fireline. When the WFM arrived at the spike they didn't receive a briefing on the snag in the sleeping area—nor was the area flagged off.
- ❖ Green or dead trees can fall at any time. These two trees fell without any warning in the absence of wind.
- ❖ Take the time to clear all hazards from sleeping areas, regardless of the effort required to complete the task.
- ❖ When crews are working and spiking in the backcountry, ensure that extraction methods are available and valid 24 hours a day.



The 2-inch by 4-foot piece from the top of the tree that clipped the corner of this tent, striking the crewmember's foot.

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