



# United States Department of the Interior

U. S. WILDLAND FIRE SERVICE  
3833 S Development Drive  
Boise, Idaho 83705

31 March 2026

## Memorandum

**To:** Jason Fallon, Fire Director, U. S. Wildland Fire Service for the National Park Service  
**From:** Chris Arne, Wildland Fire Serious Accident Review Team Leader  
**Subject:** 72 Hour Report

### THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS PRELIMINARY AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE

**Location:** Big South Fork National Recreation Area (NRRRA), Stearns, KY  
**Date of Occurrence:** 25 March 2026  
**Time of Occurrence:** 1845 EDT  
**Activity:** Prescribed Fire (RX)  
**Number of Injuries:** 1 agency employee  
**Number of Fatalities:** None  
**Property Damage:** Agency vehicle, trailer, and UTV

**Incident Summary:** While returning from prescribed fire activities on the Bald Knob South RX in the Big South Fork NRA, a vehicle accident occurred on the Beech Grove Road, a county road. The driver was the sole occupant of the pickup, pulling a utility trailer with UTV, equipped with a 75-gallon slip-in pump, when the vehicle left the edge of the road and rolled onto its side. The driver was injured when their hand was pinned between the door frame and a tree that the vehicle rolled onto. Following extrication by other fire personnel, the individual was transferred via ambulance and life-flight to the University of Tennessee Medical Center, Knoxville, TN. The individual underwent surgery on 26 March and was discharged on 28 March at 1430.

The Serious Accident Investigation Team was mobilized on Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup> 2026 and met at the Kentucky Ranger Station on Sunday March 29<sup>th</sup> 2026.

#### Preliminary Key Facts:

- The road is windy, narrow (13 ft across), tight, and has steep drop-offs.
- The hitch ball broke free from the hitch and trailer landed on its side but was still attached to the truck by chains. The breakaway system was not activated.

#### Preliminary Investigation Findings:

- Weather/environmental conditions (including smoke) were not factors in the accident.
- Burn crew was familiar with the road and travel route having been over it multiple time Burn crew was prepared for medical issues by identifying EMT qualified personnel and equipment.
- The hitch ball was rated for only 3,500 pounds; the load is estimated to be at least 5,000 pounds. We do not consider this to be a factor of the accident.

cc: Wildland Fire Operations Chief, Fire and Aviation Management