



Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report

Location:	Cove Fort, UT	Accident Number:	ANC26FA079
Date & Time:	August 7, 2026, 10:44 Local	Registration:	N793HT
Aircraft:	Helicopter Transport Services (Sikorsky) CH-54A	Injuries:	2 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 133: Rotorcraft ext. load		

On August 7, 2026, about 1044 mountain daylight time, a Helicopter Transport Services (Sikorsky) CH-54A Skycrane Helitanker, N793HT, was destroyed when it was involved in an accident near Cove Fort, Utah. The pilot and copilot were fatally injured. The helicopter was operated as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 133 aerial firefighting flight.

The helicopter, owned and operated by Helicopter Transport Services, was conducting aerial fire suppression operations under an exclusive-use contract with the United States Forest Service (USFS) in support of the Wide Mouth 2 Fire in central Utah. It was equipped with a 2,650-gallon water tank and a retractable hover-snorkel system.

According to the USFS, the helicopter departed Richfield Municipal Airport (RIF) about 1021 and proceeded toward the Wide Mouth 2 Fire to begin firefighting operations.

After departure, the flight crew established radio communications with the aerial supervisor and received authorization to enter the temporary flight restriction (TFR) area surrounding the fire. The aerial supervisor briefed the crew on the initial firefighting objectives, which included coordinated aerial water-drop operations. The helicopter proceeded to a predetermined water source, filled its tank, and then continued to the designated drop area as directed.

As the helicopter approached the drop site, the aerial supervisor transferred communications to the ground supervisor, who provided specific instructions regarding the target area. According to the ground supervisor, the helicopter arrived from the northwest, and he directed the crew to the location where water was needed. The helicopter then flew over the area to verify the target, and the flight crew confirmed they had identified the correct location.

The crew subsequently reported that they would make another pass before releasing the water load. While maneuvering in a right turn, the helicopter disappeared behind a knoll. The ground supervisor then heard a radio transmission stating, "Oh (expletive), we have a problem," followed about one second later by, "Mayday, mayday, mayday." No further communications were received from the helicopter.

The helicopter impacted rising terrain, and a post-crash fire consumed much of the airframe (see figure 1).



Figure 1. Aerial overview of accident site. (U.S. Forest Service Drone Photo)

The investigator-in-charge from the NTSB's Alaska Regional Office, accompanied by an NTSB aerospace engineer and helicopter specialist, responded to the accident site and examined the wreckage on August 9, 2026. During the on-scene investigation, components were retained for further examination and testing. The results of those examinations are pending.

Recovery of the wreckage will take place when fire conditions and logistical considerations allow. A detailed examination of the airframe and engines is pending.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Helicopter Transport Services (Sikorsky)	Registration:	N793HT
Model/Series:	CH-54A	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Amateur Built:			
Operator:	Helicopter Transport Services	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	Rotorcraft external load (133), Agricultural aircraft (137)
Operator Designator Code:			

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	VMC	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KMLF, 5033 ft msl	Observation Time:	11:00 Local
Distance from Accident Site:	30 Nautical Miles	Temperature/Dew Point:	30°C / 9°C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	13 knots / 22 knots, 220°
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility:	10 miles
Altimeter Setting:	30.24 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	CVFR
Departure Point:	Richfield, UT (KRIF)	Destination:	Richfield, UT (KRIF)

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	2 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:		Aircraft Fire:	On-ground
Ground Injuries:		Aircraft Explosion:	Unknown
Total Injuries:	2 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	38.629745,-112.47663

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Ward, Mark
Additional Participating Persons:	David Knowles; Helicopter Transport Services Dennis Pilon; Helicopter Transport Services Dylan Tiffany; Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) John Waddell; Department of Interior (DOI) James (Jesse) Ballard; Department of Interior (DOI)
Investigation Class:	Class 3
Note:	