Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report

Location:	Yosemite Valley, CA	**Accident Number:**	WPR26FA346
Date & Time:	September 20, 2026, 13:56 Local	**Registration:**	N332N
Aircraft:	Airbus AS332	**Injuries:**	2 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Public aircraft		

On September 20, 2026, at 1356 Pacific daylight time, an Airbus AS332 L1 Super Puma, N332N, was destroyed when it was involved in an accident near Yosemite Valley, California. The two pilots were fatally injured. The helicopter was operated as a public use firefighting flight.

Earlier in the day, the pilots conducted a 2.9 hour firefighting flight where they dropped water from an 800-gallon Nomad bucket that was attached to a 200 ft longline. After finishing the helicopter's fuel cycle and completing over 25 drops, they returned back to their helibase. During that flight, they had problems with the water bucket and upon landing, the mechanics tightened the bucket's air pressure regulator and pressure checked the system. Shortly thereafter, they received a request to perform water drops on fires near helispot H-5, using Ostrander Lake as the dip site.

A review of FAA ADS-B data, Spidertracks data, and firefighter's cell phone videos revealed that the helicopter made three dips at the lake and the accident occurred during the helicopter's third drop (see figure 1).

This information is preliminary and subject to change.

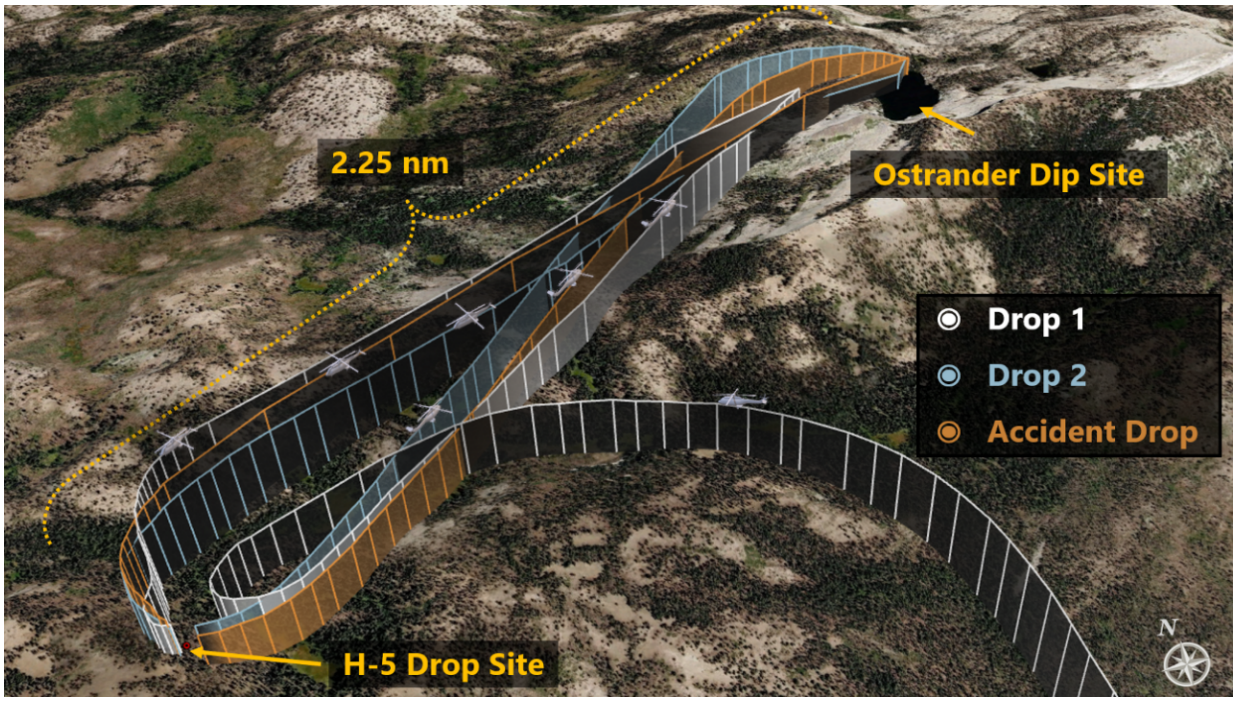


Figure 1: ADS-B data showing the helicopter's dip and drop site

The helicopter departed the helibase about 1328 and continued toward the requested drop area, consistent with the flight crew assessing the drop site before loading water in the bucket. The pilots then flew to the dip site and coordinated with two other helicopters that were operating out of the site. After filling the bucket with a load of water that was less than full, the pilots flew about 2.25 nautical miles (nm) to drop area and then made a trailing drop at about 1345 before returning to the dip site (see figure 2).

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Figure 2: ADS-B data showing the flight path before the first drop as well as photos from the drop showing the bucket

The pilots again filled the bucket and flew to the drop site. The helicopter approached the area about 8,690 ft mean sea level (msl) and gradually descended for a concentrated, or spot, drop on a dead tree (snag). The ground crew provided a strobe light to help aid the pilots in identifying the desired drop location. The drop occurred about 1350:50, with the bucket remaining just above the approximately 80- to 125-ft tree canopy (see figure 2).

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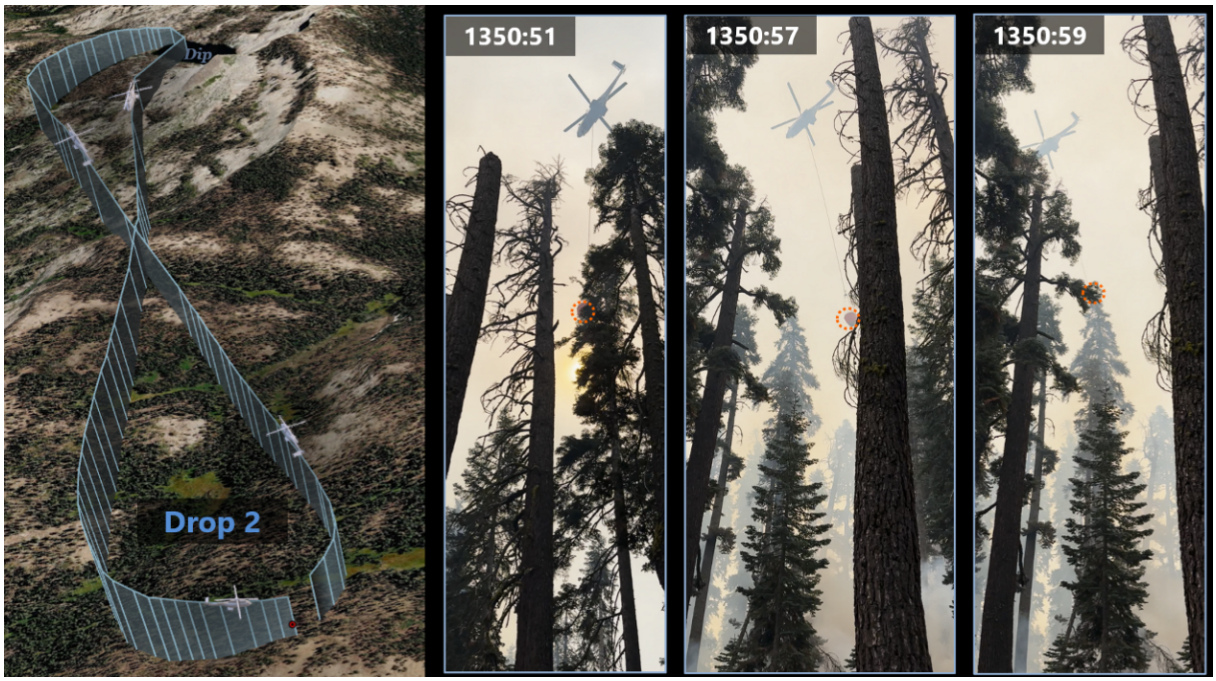


Figure 3: ADS-B data showing the flight path before the second drop as well as photos from the drop showing the bucket

The helicopter returned to the dip site, the pilots filled the bucket and continued back to the drop area. The helicopter's groundspeed generally decreased as the descent rate increased. The firefighting ground crew reported that the water was dropped in the same location as drop 2, which according to the ground crew, was the desired location. The water drop began about 1356:28 and the bucket was empty about 3 seconds later, which was followed by the helicopter yawing to the left about 1 second later (see figure 4 and 5). At 1356:37, the helicopter's ground speed was 4 kts and the descent rate was about 1,344 feet per minute (fpm).

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Figure 4: ADS-B data showing the flight path before the third drop as well as photos from the drop showing the bucket

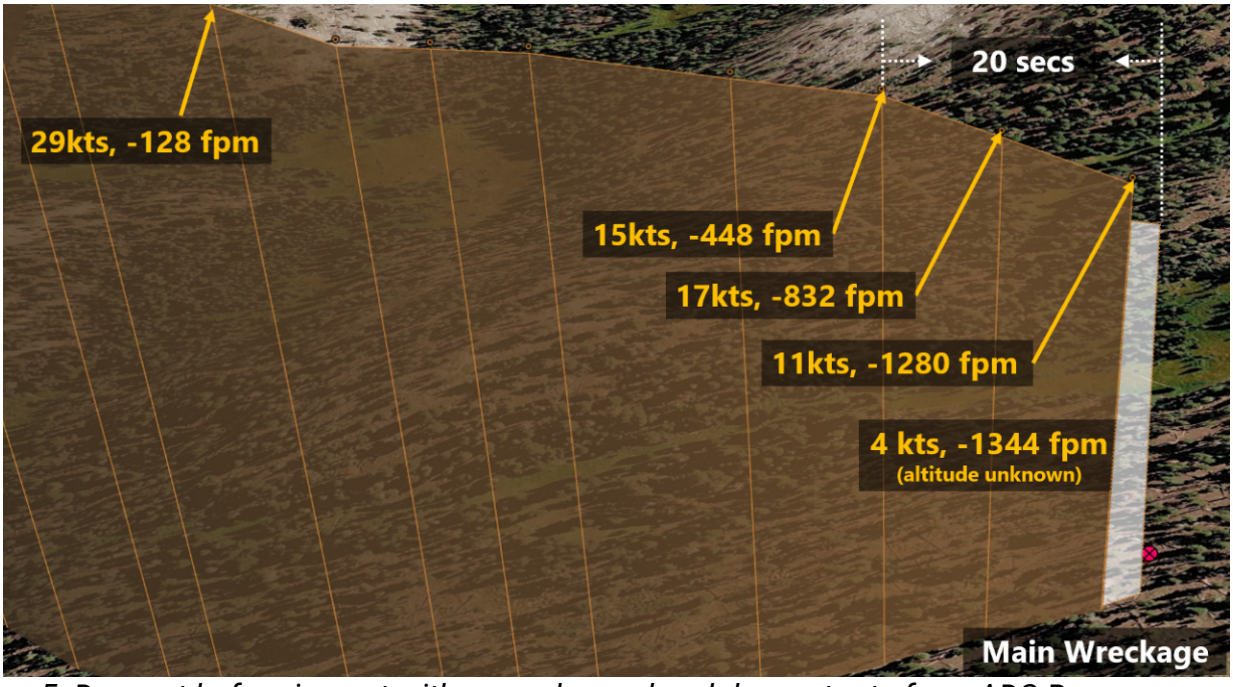


Figure 5: Descent before impact with ground speed and descent rate from ADS-B

The bucket appeared to drop almost vertically and then contacted the ground about 1356:38. The cargo hook was released about one second later which allowed the longline to fall and the helicopter appeared to move forward about 1356:40 (see figures 6 and 7). The helicopter contacted trees about 1356:43, followed by the sound of impact about one second later.

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Figure 6: Video compilation showing bucket vertically descending



Figure 7: Excerpt of video showing the hook release for the bucket and bucket position in wreckage

A preliminary review was conducted on the audio from some of the videos taken. The video soundtrack was used to estimate main rotor speed (NR) and engine gas-generator speed (Ng)

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during the accident sequence. A comparison of the frequencies recorded and those known of the helicopter's operation indicated that NR was about 102% at 13:56:13 and about 101% near the time of the water drop. Ng was estimated at about 90% before the water drop, increased to 96.9% shortly afterward, and subsequently increased to about 101.2%. Near the end of the sequence, NR was estimated at about 96%. The soundtrack analysis also identified the acoustic event associated with blade impact at about 13:56:42.

The accident site was located in the Yosemite National Park at an elevation of about 8,150 ft mean sea level (msl). The main wreckage was positioned on sloping terrain about 500 ft downslope from the relatively flat area that comprised helispot H-5. The surrounding terrain was densely forested with tall fir trees. The tree canopy was about 100 to 150 ft above ground level (agl), depending on the slope of the terrain. There were several trees in the immediate area of the wreckage that were severed consistent with the helicopter's impact into the canopy. The main wreckage came to rest on its left side with the nose oriented upslope. A majority of the helicopter was consumed by postimpact fire. The cockpit and instrument panel were extensively fire damaged, and no meaningful data could be obtained from most of the cockpit gauges.

The bucket was located about 90 ft west-northwest from the main wreckage adjacent to an area of dirt that had the appearance of being disrupted from a water drop (see figure 8). The cargo hook was found in the locked position, consistent with a normal electronic release, rather than use of the manual release.

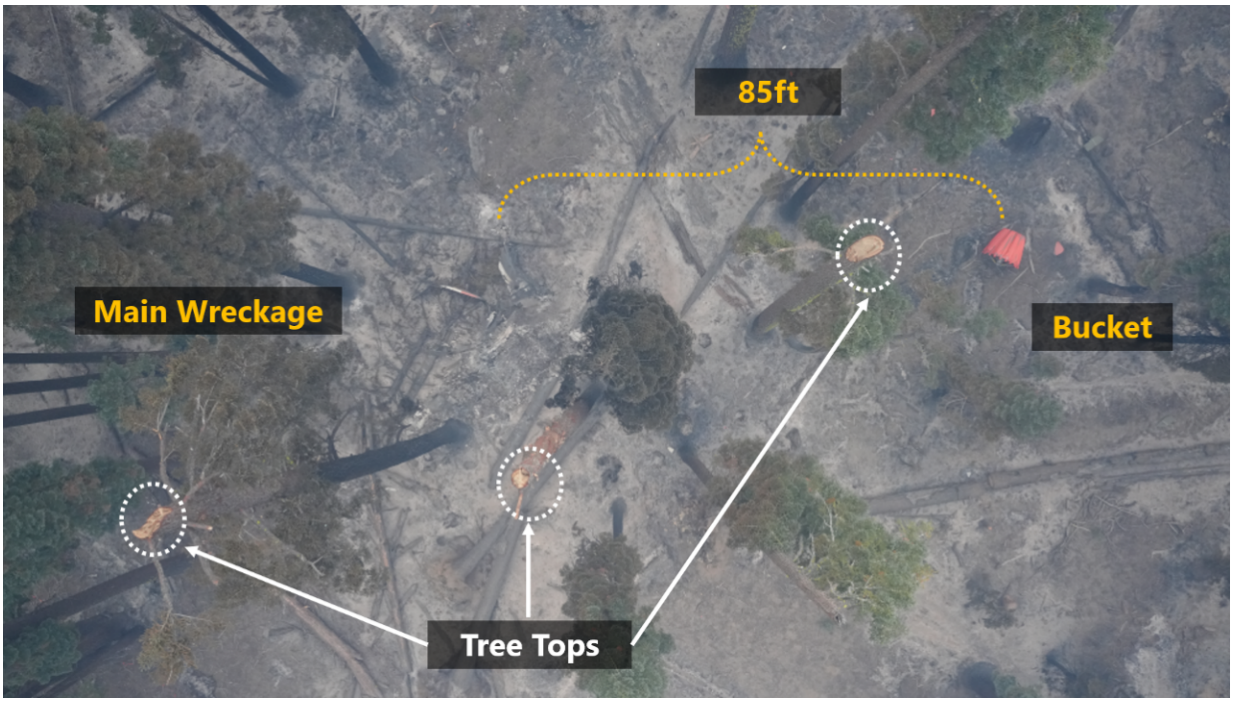


Figure 8: Main wreckage in reference to bucket

The cockpit voice recorder was retained and downloaded. The wreckage is being recovered pending the fire danger in the area and is planned to be examined at a future date.

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Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Airbus	**Registration:**	N332N
Model/Series:	AS332 L1	**Aircraft Category:**	Helicopter
Amateur Built:			
Operator:	Precision Helicopter	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	Rotorcraft external load (133)
Operator Designator Code:			

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	VMC	**Condition of Light:**	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KMMH,7128 ft msl	**Observation Time:**	14:35 Local
Distance from Accident Site:	35 Nautical Miles	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	21°C /-5°C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	**Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:**	9 knots / 16 knots, 110°
Lowest Ceiling:	None	**Visibility:**	10 miles
Altimeter Setting:	30.2 inches Hg	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	NONE
Departure Point:	Oakhurst, CA	**Destination:**	Yosemite Valley, CA

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:**	37.608092,-119.59123 (est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Keliher, Zoe
Additional Participating Persons:	Jason Alves; FAA Fresno FSDO; Fresno, CA Ty Burlingham; Precision, LLC; McMinnville, OR Mark Paulson; Precision, LLC; McMinnville, OR Seth Buttner; Airbus Helicopters; Grand Prarie, TX Bryan Larimore; Safran HE USA; Grand Prarie, TX Eric Shambora; U.S. Forest Service; Boise, ID
Investigation Class:	Class 3
Note:	

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