

SUMMARY REPORT
FIRE LINE FATALITY
OF
ONE CDF FIREFIGHTER

*snag
accident*

"RECER FIRE"

MNF-0264

MENDOCINO NATIONAL FOREST, U.S.F.S. REGION 5, U.S.D.A
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION

REGION II

AUGUST 13, 1990

SUMMARY

This accident occurred during initial attack of a spotfire. At approximately 1335 hours on August 13, 1990, a snag fell on a CDF firefighter working on a hoselay attempting to contain the spotfire. The fire was burning on moderate to steep slopes in a moderate to heavy understory of timber. The firefighter received a blow to the head that broke his helmet into multiple pieces, but the helmet remained somewhat intact. The victim was treated by EMTs within seconds of the accident occurring. A Paramedic was on scene within 10-15 minutes, and the victim was being transported by CDF helicopter to Willows and by Enloe Flight Care helicopter (with advanced life support) to the hospital in less than 60 minutes of the accident. The firefighter succumbed to his injuries on August 14, 1990 at 1005 hours.

FIRE LINE CONDITIONS

FUEL:

TYPE: Using a sample site, the fuel was determined to be similar to NFFL fuel model 10 with a predominance of Ponderosa Pine and Douglas Fir with some scattered Oaks. The understory was scattered brush up to four feet in height. The black oak trees were poisoned about 30 years ago to reduce competition to conifers. As a result there were numerous snags in the area.

The understory on the site was approximately 90 percent consumed with remnants of brush 1.5 to 4.0 feet in height. The overstory (timber canopy) was less than 10 percent consumed. Vegetative cover on site is estimated at 90 to 100 percent.

LOADING: Ground fuel loading of the representative sample plot was approximately 12 tons per acre.

RATIO: The percentage of live fuel in the total fuel load was estimated to be 17 percent.

TOPOGRAPHY:

TERRAIN: The accident site is located in a heavy canopy on steep slopes. There is an access road above the accident site (22N17) and a lower road (cul de sac 22N17A) below the site. The slope where the hoselay leaves the lower road is about 70 percent and decreases to about 40 percent at the accident site. Footing is difficult, with assistance needed to begin the ascent. Thereafter, travel is slow while supporting the hoselay or constructing handline.

ASPECT: The accident site is on a northwest exposure.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

At approximately 1000 hours, Division C assigned two engines to support a hoselay from the upper road to the lower road to contain a slopover. The remaining three engines of the strike team are assigned: two to the lower road and one to the upper road to patrol and keep the fire from jumping the roads.

At approximately 1250 hours, the 1500 foot hoselay is about 100 feet from completion. Personnel heard individual trees burning rapidly (torching) and were aware of the general increase in fire intensity.

At approximately 1300 hours, the spotfire occurred above the lower road. The original hoselay was continued to attack the left flank of the spotfire. The left flank attack was abandoned in favor of a right flank direct action to allow the spotfire to burn into the main fire slopover. At this time, the original hoselay became a supply line for this third hoselay.

At 1335 hours a single snag 20 to 30 feet tall fell and struck the CDF firefighter. The first EMT was on the scene in five seconds. Air drops are made attempting to support the ground units and allow a CDF Helicopter (BLS) to land and transport the patient. Engines were moved and a landing zone was wet down on the road just west of the hoselay.

The patient was stabilized and brought down to the landing zone within approximately twenty minutes. The CDF helicopter departed to Willows Airport at approximately 1401 hours. The CDF helicopter arrived at Willows simultaneously with Flight Care helicopter (ALS) at approximately 1419 hours. The Flight Care helicopter landed at Enloe Hospital on the roof at approximately 1455 hours.

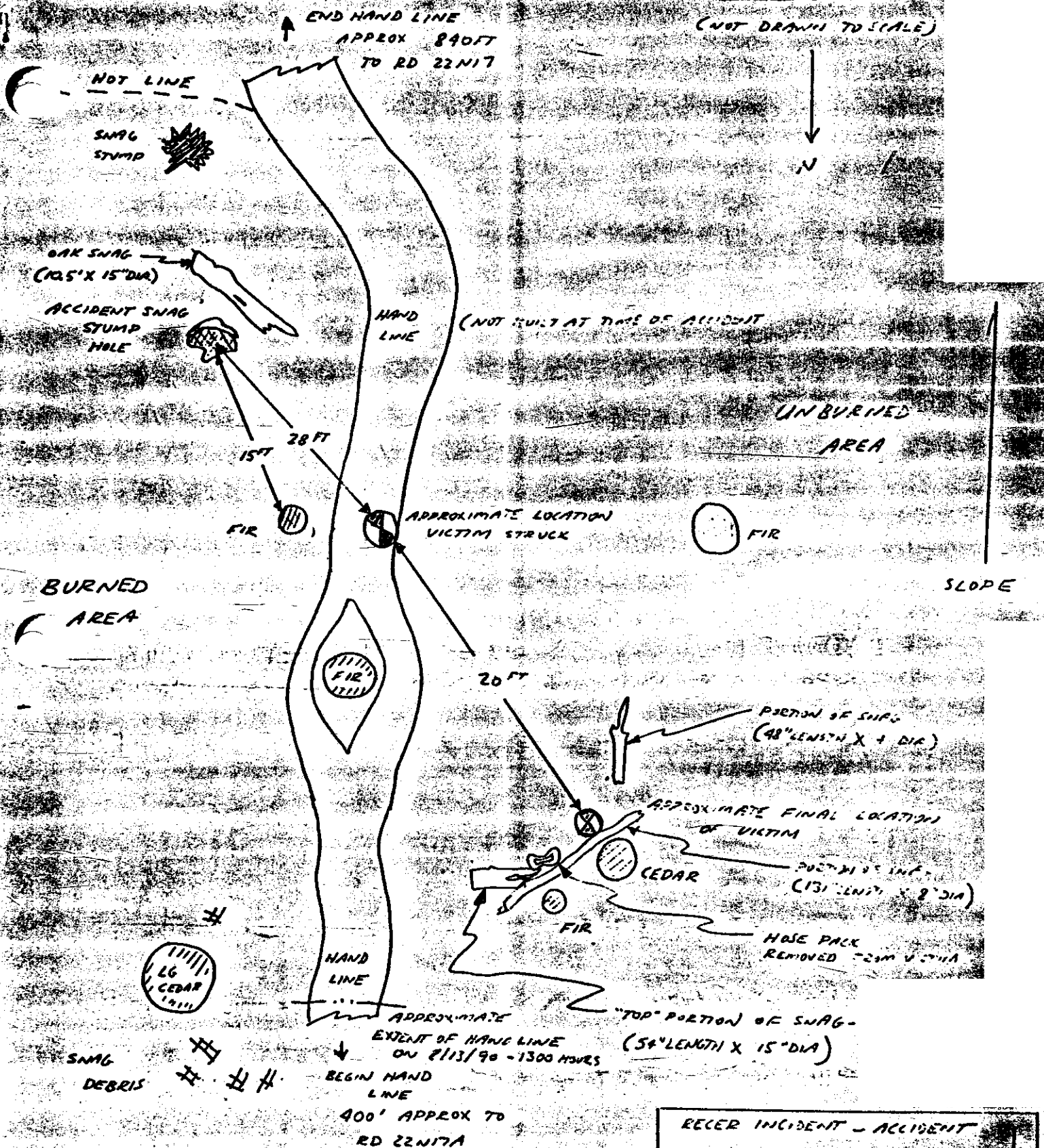
CAUSE OF ACCIDENT

The accident occurred during an aggressive wildland initial attack on a spot fire. The hazard (a snag burning at its base) was identified by the work supervisor, pointed out to the employee, and acknowledged by the employee. There was insufficient time to fell the snag and felling it would also have been hazardous. Coworkers nearby saw the snag starting to fall and cried out "SNAG!" "SNAG!", these warnings apparently came too late as the victim did not move. The snag struck the victim on his hard hat.



EXHIBIT C
SCHEMATIC ONLY

(NOT DRAWN TO SCALE)



RECER INCIDENT - ACCIDENT

M. DENNIS

2/15/90