

NEWSRelease

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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For release: Immediate

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Wildfire Fatality Investigation Report Released

(Boise, Idaho) – An investigative report released today identifies multiple factors leading to a crash that killed a 19-year-old water tender driver on last year's Big Windy Fire near Grants Pass. The report stems from an investigation conducted by a Serious Accident Investigation Team comprised of specialists from the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Oregon Department of Forestry.

The report details the factual findings surrounding the accident that took the life of Jesse Trader. The accident happened the morning of August 6, 2013 on a steep, narrow and winding paved road when the 1966 International Harvester truck with a water tank left the road and rolled. Trader was completing his first fire assignment as a contract tender driver. He suffered blunt force trauma and was pronounced deceased at the scene.

"This was a tragic accident and we continue to mourn the loss of Mr. Trader," said Jerry Perez, BLM State Director, Oregon/Washington. "Just as we do with any fire fatality we hope to learn new lessons that will help us move forward and focus even more closely on safety."

The investigation found that the water tender was fully loaded and exceeded the maximum gross vehicle weight by more than 5,000 pounds. It also found that the braking capabilities of the vehicle were consistent with 1966 technology, which included only rear brakes.

The excessive weight of the vehicle, the braking system, the narrow and steep road, and the limited experience of the driver were all found to be contributing factors. Mr. Trader had received his Oregon Class B Commercial Driver's License with the Tanker Endorsement six days prior to the accident.

Separate from the report are proposals based on what was learned from this accident and what will help prevent similar accidents in the future. Proposals include enhanced communication and cooperation among fire managers and contractors hired to provide a support service, as well as improvements in the inspection process and standards. For example, water tender vehicles on all fires should have brakes on all axles and a requirement for compression engine brakes on water tenders should be phased in. "We will thoughtfully review these findings to enhance safety and minimize the chances of such a tragic loss of life recurring in the future," said Doug Decker, Oregon State Forester.

The Big Windy Fire accident was also investigated by the Josephine County Sheriff's Office, the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Oregon State Police accident reconstruction staff. The full report can be found at:

<http://www.wildfirelessons.net/communities/resources/viewincident/?DocumentKey=9d43ee0f-2ec4-4c97-987d-68dad2fc628f>.

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