

Emergency Plane Landing at El Malpais NCA

In late December, a private plane traveling from Arizona made an emergency landing on Highway 117 in El Malpais National Conservation Area. Maintenance workers Dennis Zamora, Sergio Abila, Paul Waldo, and Park Ranger Tim Crafton were nearby when the plane landed and provided critical help. Tim gives his account below:

Dennis, Sergio, Paul, and I were on the roof of the ranger station shoveling snow when we saw this plane flying pretty low. It was making strange noises and then we saw the propellers stop. I immediately thought this was going to be a disaster, that this plane would crash. But it glided down and landed right on the highway. We jumped in the truck and rushed over. The plane was covered in oil, but luckily everyone was alright. There were two adults, a ten-year-old boy, and a little puppy. The boy was pretty shaken up.

The State Police and Park Service law enforcement arrived. We helped to direct traffic and get the plane off the road, and ended up towing the plane to the ranger station.

Unfortunately, it wouldn't fit through the gate at the ranger station, so we just parked it at the entrance. It stayed there for about two days. Eventually, someone had to come out and take plane apart since they had no other way to take the plane.

The situation could have been a lot worse. I'm just glad they were able to land safely and everyone was ok.

Rio Puerco Field Manager Tom Gow commented, "It turned out the grandfather and the boy in the plane had flown to Arizona to pick up the puppy – an English bulldog – for the boy's Christmas present. Our employees provided critical help during the initial emergency situation and later provided aid and comfort to the individuals, which they greatly appreciated. Given the events, not to mention the fact that there was about two feet of snow on the ground that day, I'm really proud of how our employees handled the situation and the assistance they gave."

Click here to read the article in the Cibola Beacon newspaper about the emergency landing.

www.cibolabeacon.com/news/plane-makes-emergency-landing/article_e045d136-3807-11e1-aa9b-001871e3ce6c.html



The plane after its emergency landing on Highway 117 in El Malpais NCA.



The plane after it was towed to the El Malpais ranger station.