

To whom it may concern,

I witnessed the accident of the Cessna Golden Eagle, N51RX on Wednesday, 8/27. My self and a companion were driving west bound on interstate 10 when the accident occurred. Prior to the accident I recall witnessing the Cessna taking off from Las Cruces Airport. I am an aspiring pilot with an aviation background, so aircraft routinely catch my eye. I do not recall anything unusual about the aircrafts takeoff and initial climb, everything appeared routine. After the initial climb, I did not have the aircraft in sight for several minutes. The aircraft caught my eye again as it was beginning to make a turn to the south. I estimate the aircraft was flying at approximately 800 feet AGL, and a heading of 240-270 degrees. As the pilot was expediting the turn to a heading of approx. 200 degrees, I noticed a significant amount of dark brown smoke trailing behind the aircraft. We were driving into the setting sun, making it difficult to make out the origin of the smoke, but it appeared to be the right side engine. As the pilot continued the turn to the south, the aircraft began a decent. I estimate the aircraft was at approx. 500 ft. AGL when it crossed over the interstate on a SSE heading. As the pilot continued the left hand turn, through heading 180, the visible smoke trail was no longer apparent. It was clear that the aircraft was in distress and descending rapidly. The pilot continued the turn to a heading of approx. 90-120 degrees, and at this time I estimate the altitude was approx. 200 ft. AGL. The pilot maintained this heading, in a wings level descent until the aircraft neared the ground. I momentarily lost sight of it bellow the horizon, then witnessed a significant amount of fire and black smoke rise from the point of impact. At this time our vehicle was about halfway between the fairgrounds to the south and exit 127 on the freeway. I dialed 911 and reported the accident. My estimates of the aircrafts altitudes are based on my familiarity with the sight of aircraft flying at a standard traffic pattern altitude of 1000 feet AGL. When the aircraft crossed interstate 10, I knew it was significantly lower than pattern altitude, estimating it was at approx. 500 ft. AGL. I work for the U.S. Forest Service, Silver City Hotshots as a wildland firefighter. I work around aircraft frequently and am familiar with their operations. I will also be pursuing my private pilots license this winter, already having some flight time(not logged) with my roommate who works as a CFI in Oregon. I hope this account can be of some benefit to the investigation. I also attached a map of the aircrafts estimated flight path.

Best regards,

Preston Carlisle

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Bend, OR. 97701

Dark Smoke visible trailing
behind aircraft, pilot begins
descent

Est. Heading
 200°
Est. Alt. 500 AGL

Exit 127

Est. Heading $240-270^\circ$
Est. Alt. 800 AGL.

has crues
Airport

our estimated location during this time.

Fair ground

Smoke trail
no longer visible

Est. Heading
 $90-120^\circ$
Est. Alt. 200 AGL.

Est. Alt. 50 ft. AGL.
~~at 100 ft. AGL.~~
Impact