

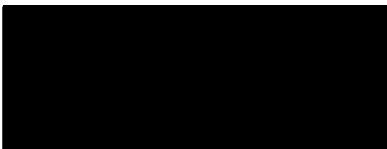
October 12 , 2022

My name is Michael Hans Wallner.

I am a 4,500 hour, instrument and sea plane rated pilot.

On the morning of October 2, 2022 I met up with my friend, Rick Stapleton (N892SP) at the Polson Airport (8S1) with my friend and passenger Sam Richardson for a flight on the lower Flathead River. There was no plan about where to go prior as I was planning on going on this flight with my passenger alone. Rick heard me on 122.8 and asked to join us.

Rick was flying solo that day and he was in the lead. We followed him in my plane (N323WF) for more than 30 miles down the Flathead River, passed Dixon and onto Perma. Shortly after Dixon I advised Rick that I needed to return as I didn't leave with too much fuel because I had a passenger. Rick continued for a short time after I made that call. I was at his 5:30 position near Perma when Rick's aircraft pitched violently upward and then descended into a steep spiral decent. I could see the aircraft break up as I passed him from above. I immediately made a left turn and attempted to land but there were sandbars. I made another left turn and found ample water depth to make a safe landing. When I first arrived at the crash site I noticed that Rick was upright and not submerged in water, he was unconscious. The second time I circled he had come to and was flagging me away as though he either meant for me to get help or there was danger or both? The current was fairly strong and there was no place to properly beach. I decided to take off. We then flew on to Plains MT (S34) to get help. While enroute, I radioed on 121.5 for help. When we arrived at Plains, we were met by an airport operations person who advised us that help was enroute to Rick due to his ELT sounding.



Mike Wallner