

Starr Blum
Air Safety Investigator
Western Pacific Region

Date: March 1, 2023

Subject: WPR23LA111 Witness Statement

Contact: Matthew D'Ambrosi, National Park Service

On February 19th 2023, Maegan Stephenson and I were driving west along the Loran Station Road when a small plane circled low over us two or three times. It then began to approach us head on and landed on the road just behind us and taxied out of sight. We turned around to see if they were ok or needed any assistance and we found the plane sideways in the road. We got out and the pilot told us that they had struck a yucca tree with the left wing while taxiing. The left wing had a large dent and some of the aluminum framing was broken. The pilot, John, and his wife Elise were trying to turn the plane around so they could take off again. They initially landed there to go for a hike in the area but canceled that plan after damaging the plane. Maegan and I helped dig the wheels out of the sand and pushed the plane around, moving it to be out of the way of the yucca that they had struck.

At this point, John and Elise were discussing what they should do next, and they decided to fly to the airstrip in CalNevAri and land there to assess the damage and get repairs. Elise asked John to explain to her why he thought it was safe to fly, and he showed her that the structure of the wing was still intact and should be ok to fly the short distance to the airstrip. Elise asked Maegan and I to give her a ride in our truck to the airstrip. Maegan, Elise and I drove west down the Loran Station Road and John taxied behind while we looked for a place to turn off the road so John could take off.

We backed the truck onto an intersecting road and John taxied to the intersection and started his takeoff. As the plane got airborne, it immediately started pitching to the left. It got about 20-40 feet into the air before coming down. As soon as the plane started pitching Elise took off running towards it, and Maegan and I went back to the truck to drive over, so I am not sure how the plane hit the ground. We drove over and while I was on the phone with Lake Mead National Recreation Area dispatch, Maegan went to the plane. The plane was upside down, and John had gotten out with a fire extinguisher. He had a large gash on his head that was bleeding. While on the phone with the dispatcher, I provided basic first aid and John told me he thought his clavicle was also

broken but did not think there were any other injuries. He told us that he thought his wheel had hit a sandy rut in the road as he was taking off. Maegan and I stayed with John and Elise until Nevada Highway Patrol and Lake Mead Park Rangers arrived and took over the scene.