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AS-WPR

Date: July 29, 2024

Subject: WPR24FA255, Witness Interview Summary

Contact: John Kinman, Pilot, Aerial Timbers Applicators

The primary witness reported that the accident occurred during the third sortie of the day on the Falls Fire. The flight was operating as a two-ship formation with Kinman leading. The witness stated that initial conditions of the operating environment had visibility that was about 10 miles in clear air outside the smoke columns. The aircraft were operating at 7,000 feet MSL with a ground speed of approximately 200 mph (178 knots recorded on ADS-B).

He added that they approached a smoke column and elected to fly west around the smoke to remain in clear air, after their second suppression flight, while enroute back to their reloading base in Burns, OR. As they travelled southbound back to base on the eastern side of the fire area, they encountered hazy and smoke conditions and decided on their return to their designated drop site, they would travel west of the fire area.

After a successful reload of fire suppression chemical, the aircraft maneuvered to the west around the fire area. The witness pilot reported that ADS-B data indicated that on the accident leg, with the accident pilot still in the lead position, decided to maneuver near hazy airspace. The witness pilot reported that he did not want to fly in the same area, and the accident pilot told him to switch tactical position and to assume being the lead aircraft. The witness agreed and witnessed the accident airplane initiate a left turn but then tightened it into an 180-degree turn, heading back toward the smoke and the ridge line. Eventually, the witness pilot lost sight of the accident pilot and believes that the accident pilot may have been attempting to avoid a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) boundary. He added that the accident pilot entered the smoke and likely descended to maintain ground contact (flying "map of

the earth"). He further emphasized that smoke "draws you in like a magnet," and once forward visibility is lost, pilots often default to looking straight down, losing situational awareness of rising terrain ahead.