



Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report

Location:	Wainwright, AK	Accident Number:	ANC23FA056
Date & Time:	July 20, 2023, 11:05 Local	Registration:	N311MH
Aircraft:	Bell 206-L4	Injuries:	4 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 135: Air taxi & commuter - Non-scheduled		

On July 20, 2023, about 1105 Alaska daylight time, a Bell 206L-4 helicopter, N311MH, was destroyed when it was involved in an accident near Wainwright, Alaska. The pilot and three passengers were fatally injured. The helicopter was operated by the pilot as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 135 on-demand charter flight.

The Helicopter was owned and operated by Maritime Helicopters, Homer, Alaska, and according to the director of operations, the helicopter was under contract to the State of Alaska's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) being used to transport scientific crews to various remote locations within the North Slope region.

The Alaskan North Slope is bounded on the north by the Beaufort Sea and runs from the Canadian border to the maritime boundary with Russia in the west. The North Slope region includes a portion of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) and National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPRA).

Maritime Helicopters' director of operations reported that the accident helicopter and DNR crew members were based in Utqiagvik, Alaska for the duration of the contract. He added that when the accident helicopter departed from Utqiagvik, about 1001, the anticipated route included a brief stop at the Atkasuk Airport, Atkasuk, Alaska, then continuing on to a remote site(s) to the east of Wainwright before ultimately returning to Utqiagvik. The accident helicopter was expected to return to Utqiagvik by 2030. When the helicopter did not arrive back in Utqiagvik, a North Slope Borough (NSB) Search and Rescue Sikorsky S-92 helicopter was dispatched to search for the missing helicopter.

On July 21, about 0315, NSB search and rescue crews found the partially submerged, fragmented helicopter wreckage in the shallow waters of Lake Itinik located about 30 miles east of Wainwright. See figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1 Aerial view Lake Ttinik with wreckage noted in circle (North Slope Borough Search and Rescue photo).



Figure 2 Aerial view of fragmented wreckage, partially submerged in Lake Itinik (North Slope Borough Search and Rescue photo).

The accident helicopter was equipped with a Honeywell Sky Connect Tracker system enabling real-time, flight following capabilities. The Sky Connect Tracker system broadcasts flight status data in 3-minute intervals to satellite-based receivers.

A review of archived Sky Connect data revealed that the accident helicopter departed from Utqiagvik at 1001, then it proceeded southwest to the Atkasuk Airport. After a brief stop at the Atkasuk Airport, the helicopter departed, and traveled in a northwesterly direction. The Sky Connect data ends as the helicopter passed over the southeastern shoreline of Lake Itinik, while continuing to travel in a northwesterly direction, at an altitude of 144 ft above mean sea level, with a ground speed of 93 knots.

Lake Itinik is a large, oval shaped, arctic lake, measuring more than three miles across in some areas. The terrain around Lake Itinik consists of flat, featureless, arctic tundra-covered terrain. The elevation of Lake Itinik is reported to be about 56 ft above mean sea level.

The National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) investigator-in-charge (IIC) traveled to Utqiagvik, along with parties to the investigation and a wreckage recovery team. On July 30, the NTSB IIC and recovery personnel successfully recovered the helicopter wreckage to the shoreline of Lake Itinik. The wreckage was later transported, by helicopter, to Utqiagvik that same day.

An initial post-accident wreckage examination was accomplished on July 30 and 31, in Utqiagvik, with parties to the investigation in attendance. The wreckage was subsequently transported to Anchorage, Alaska, and additional detailed wreckage examinations are pending.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Bell	Registration:	N311MH
Model/Series:	206-L4	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Amateur Built:			
Operator:	MARITIME HELICOPTERS INC	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	Rotorcraft external load (133), Commuter air carrier (135), Agricultural aircraft (137)
Operator Designator Code:			

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	VMC	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	PATQ, 96 ft msl	Observation Time:	10:56 Local
Distance from Accident Site:	25 Nautical Miles	Temperature/Dew Point:	18°C / 14°C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility:	8 miles
Altimeter Setting:	29.91 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	CVFR
Departure Point:	Ataqsuk, AK (PATQ)	Destination:	Utqiagvik , AK (BRW)

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	3 Fatal	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:		Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	4 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	70.653972,-158.55984 (est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Ward, Mark
Additional Participating Persons:	Craig Kenmonth; FAA; Fairbanks, AK Dennis Busch; Maritime Helicopters; Homer , AK Mark C. Stuntzner; Bell Helicopter Flight Safety; Fort Worth , TX Matt McLuckie; Bell Helicopter Flight Safety; Fort Worth , TX Nick Shepler; Rolls Royce Engines; Indianapolis, IN
Investigation Class:	Class 3
Note:	

