



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Final Report

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| Location: | Laurel, MT | Accident Number: | SEA04LA077 |
| Date & Time: | 05/01/2004, 1245 MDT | Registration: | N5483H |
| Aircraft: | Piper PA-18-105 | Aircraft Damage: | Substantial |
| Defining Event: | | Injuries: | 2 None |
| Flight Conducted Under: | Part 91: General Aviation - Personal | | |

Analysis

The pilot reported that he and his wife were sightseeing along the Yellowstone River just south of Laurel, Montana, when he spotted what he described as unusual animal tracks on a gravel sand bar adjacent to the river. He applied one notch of flaps and executed a 180 degree course reversal for a "low and slow look." The aircraft subsequently struck the water and nosed over. The pilot reported that there was no mechanical malfunction or failure with the aircraft or its powerplant/systems.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: The pilot's failure to maintain adequate clearance/altitude while maneuvering resulting in the inadvertent in-flight collision with water/terrain.

Findings

Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER
Phase of Operation: MANEUVERING

Findings

1. TERRAIN CONDITION - WATER
2. (C) ALTITUDE/CLEARANCE - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND

Factual Information

On May 1, 2004, approximately 1245 mountain daylight time, a Piper PA-18-105, N5483H, registered to and being operated/flown by a private pilot sustained substantial damage during inadvertent flight into terrain while maneuvering approximately two nautical miles south of Laurel, Montana. Neither the pilot nor the passenger was injured. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed and no flight plan had been filed. The local flight, which was personal, was operated under 14 CFR 91, and originated from Billings, Montana, at 1157.

The pilot reported that he and his wife were sightseeing along the Yellowstone River just south of Laurel, Montana, when he spotted what he described as unusual animal tracks on a gravel sand bar adjacent to the river. He applied one notch of flaps and executed a 180 degree course reversal for a "low and slow look." He further reported "...In a moment I was hitting the water and then flipped forward and onto the back of the plane..." (refer to attached NTSB Form 6120.1/2. The pilot reported that there was no mechanical malfunction or failure with the aircraft or its powerplant/systems.

Pilot Information

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|--|----------------------------|
| Certificate: | Private | Age: | 48, Male |
| Airplane Rating(s): | Single-engine Land | Seat Occupied: | Front |
| Other Aircraft Rating(s): | None | Restraint Used: | Seatbelt, Shoulder harness |
| Instrument Rating(s): | None | Second Pilot Present: | No |
| Instructor Rating(s): | None | Toxicology Performed: | No |
| Medical Certification: | Class 3 Valid Medical--w/ waivers/lim. | Last FAA Medical Exam: | 12/27/2002 |
| Occupational Pilot: | | Last Flight Review or Equivalent: | 11/15/2003 |
| Flight Time: | 903 hours (Total, all aircraft), 13 hours (Total, this make and model), 903 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 76 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 26 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft) | | |

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Aircraft Make: | Piper | Registration: | N5483H |
| Model/Series: | PA-18-105 | Aircraft Category: | Airplane |
| Year of Manufacture: | | Amateur Built: | No |
| Airworthiness Certificate: | Normal | Serial Number: | 18-74 |
| Landing Gear Type: | Tailwheel | Seats: | 2 |
| Date/Type of Last Inspection: | 03/17/2004, Annual | Certified Max Gross Wt.: | 1750 lbs |
| Time Since Last Inspection: | 15 Hours | Engines: | 1 Reciprocating |
| Airframe Total Time: | 3317 Hours at time of accident | Engine Manufacturer: | Lycoming |
| ELT: | Installed, activated, did not aid in locating accident | Engine Model/Series: | O-360-C2A |
| Registered Owner: | Harmon, Thomas M. | Rated Power: | 180 hp |
| Operator: | Harmon, Thomas M. | Operating Certificate(s) Held: | None |

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

| | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Conditions at Accident Site: | Visual Conditions | Condition of Light: | Day |
| Observation Facility, Elevation: | BIL, 3649 ft msl | Distance from Accident Site: | 15 Nautical Miles |
| Observation Time: | 1256 MDT | Direction from Accident Site: | 35° |
| Lowest Cloud Condition: | Scattered / 9000 ft agl | Visibility | 10 Miles |
| Lowest Ceiling: | None | Visibility (RVR): | |
| Wind Speed/Gusts: | 3 knots / | Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual: | / |
| Wind Direction: | Variable | Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual: | / |
| Altimeter Setting: | 30.26 inches Hg | Temperature/Dew Point: | 16° C / -6° C |
| Precipitation and Obscuration: | | | |
| Departure Point: | Billings, MT (BIL) | Type of Flight Plan Filed: | None |
| Destination: | | Type of Clearance: | None |
| Departure Time: | 1157 MDT | Type of Airspace: | Class G |

Wreckage and Impact Information

| | | | |
|----------------------------|--------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Crew Injuries: | 1 None | Aircraft Damage: | Substantial |
| Passenger Injuries: | 1 None | Aircraft Fire: | None |
| Ground Injuries: | N/A | Aircraft Explosion: | None |
| Total Injuries: | 2 None | Latitude, Longitude: | 45.635833, -108.791667 |

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC): Steven A McCreary **Report Date:** 09/29/2004

Additional Participating Persons: John D Russell; FAA FSDO; Helena, MT

Publish Date:

Investigation Docket: NTSB accident and incident dockets serve as permanent archival information for the NTSB's investigations. Dockets released prior to June 1, 2009 are publicly available from the NTSB's Record Management Division at pubinq@ntsb.gov, or at 800-877-6799. Dockets released after this date are available at <http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/>.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), established in 1967, is an independent federal agency mandated by Congress through the Independent Safety Board Act of 1974 to investigate transportation accidents, determine the probable causes of the accidents, issue safety recommendations, study transportation safety issues, and evaluate the safety effectiveness of government agencies involved in transportation. The NTSB makes public its actions and decisions through accident reports, safety studies, special investigation reports, safety recommendations, and statistical reviews.

The Independent Safety Board Act, as codified at 49 U.S.C. Section 1154(b), precludes the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an incident or accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report. A factual report that may be admissible under 49 U.S.C. § 1154(b) is available [here](#).