Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Waterford, California	**Accident Number:**	WPR25LA112
Date & Time:	March 15, 2025, 11:00 Local	**Registration:**	N402TA
Aircraft:	Enstrom 280FX	**Aircraft Damage:**	Destroyed
Defining Event:	Low altitude operation/event	**Injuries:**	1 Serious, 1 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

A witness video showed the helicopter flying very low over a lake before it impacted the water. During postaccident interviews with news outlets, the pilot stated he and a passenger were flying the helicopter low over clear water, when his “depth perception got a little off”, and he drove the helicopter into the water. The helicopter fuselage, tail boom, and main rotor blades were substantially damaged. The pilot did not complete a NTSB Form 6120.1 Accident/Incident Report.

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 clearance from water while operating at a low altitude.

Findings

Personnel issues	Decision making/judgment - Pilot
Personnel issues	Aircraft control - Pilot
Aircraft	Altitude - Incorrect use/operation
Aircraft	Altitude - Not attained/maintained
Environmental issues	Water/moisture - Effect on equipment

Factual Information

History of Flight

Maneuvering-low-alt flying	Low altitude operation/event (Defining event)
Maneuvering-low-alt flying	Miscellaneous/other

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	**Age:**	71,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land	**Seat Occupied:**	Unknown
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	**Restraint Used:**	
Instrument Rating(s):	None	**Second Pilot Present:**	
Instructor Rating(s):	None	**Toxicology Performed:**	
Medical Certification:	Unknown	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	
Occupational Pilot:	UNK	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	
Flight Time:			

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Enstrom	**Registration:**	N402TA
Model/Series:	280FX	**Aircraft Category:**	Helicopter
Year of Manufacture:	2006	**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	**Serial Number:**	2122
Landing Gear Type:	Skid	**Seats:**	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:		**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	2600 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		**Engines:**	1
Airframe Total Time:		**Engine Manufacturer:**	
ELT:		**Engine Model/Series:**	
Registered Owner:	On file	**Rated Power:**	
Operator:	On file	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	**Condition of Light:**	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KMOD,87 ft msl	**Distance from Accident Site:**	14 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	10:53 Local	**Direction from Accident Site:**	260°
Lowest Cloud Condition:		**Visibility**	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Overcast / 4200 ft AGL	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	/	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	/
Wind Direction:		**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	/
Altimeter Setting:	30.17 inches Hg	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	12°C / 7°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:		**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	None
Destination:		**Type of Clearance:**	None
Departure Time:		**Type of Airspace:**	Class G

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Minor	**Aircraft Damage:**	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	1 Serious	**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:		**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	1 Serious, 1 Minor	**Latitude, Longitude:**	37.66654,-120.6631(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Baker, Daniel
Additional Participating Persons:	Mike McMilan; FAA; Fresno, CA
Original Publish Date:	July 3, 2025
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class 4
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=199873