



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Sullivan, Missouri	Accident Number:	CEN26LA101
Date & Time:	January 29, 2026, 13:00 Local	Registration:	N916VK
Aircraft:	ROBINSON HELICOPTER COMPANY R44 II	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:	Low altitude operation/event	Injuries:	2 Minor, 2 None
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Aerial observation		

Analysis

The pilot stated while conducting a wildlife survey the helicopter contacted and severed a powerline which resulted in the separation of the main rotor system at the rotor mast. The fuselage and tail boom came to rest inverted and submerged in a river. The pilot stated there were no issues with the helicopter that would have precluded normal operations.

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 powerlines during low-level operations.

Findings

Personnel issues	Identification/recognition - Pilot
Aircraft	Altitude - Not attained/maintained
Environmental issues	Wire - Awareness of condition

Factual Information

History of Flight

Maneuvering-low-alt flying	Low altitude operation/event (Defining event)
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Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	Age:	61, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	None	Seat Occupied:	Right
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	Restraint Used:	3-point
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	
Medical Certification:	Class 2 With waivers/limitations	Last FAA Medical Exam:	January 2, 2026
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	October 31, 2025
Flight Time:	7185 hours (Total, all aircraft), 6500 hours (Total, this make and model), 6800 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 68 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 6 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 6 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	ROBINSON HELICOPTER COMPANY	Registration:	N916VK
Model/Series:	R44 II	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Year of Manufacture:	2006	Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	11162
Landing Gear Type:	Skid	Seats:	4
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	December 12, 2025 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	2500 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	15 Hrs	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	7145 Hrs at time of accident	Engine Manufacturer:	Lycoming
ELT:	Not installed	Engine Model/Series:	IO-540-AE1A5
Registered Owner:	NOVEMBER ALPHA LLC	Rated Power:	245 Horsepower
Operator:	On file	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	Commercial air tour (136)

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KUUUV,933 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	4 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	13:00 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	289°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Visibility	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	/	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	None / None
Wind Direction:		Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	N/A / N/A
Altimeter Setting:	30.25 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	0°C / -12°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Sullivan, MO (UUV)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	Sullivan, MO (UUV)	Type of Clearance:	VFR
Departure Time:	11:54 Local	Type of Airspace:	Class G

Airport Information

Airport:	SULLIVAN RGNL UUV	Runway Surface Type:	
Airport Elevation:	933 ft msl	Runway Surface Condition:	
Runway Used:		IFR Approach:	None
Runway Length/Width:		VFR Approach/Landing:	None

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 None	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	2 Minor, 1 None	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	2 Minor, 2 None	Latitude, Longitude:	38.212926,-91.089232(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Ellis, John
Additional Participating Persons:	Freddie Hill; FAA; St. Louis, MO Kim Reid; FAA; St Louis, MO
Original Publish Date:	March 19, 2026
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class 4
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=202365

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant events in other modes of transportation—railroad, transit, highway, marine, pipeline, and commercial space. We determine the probable causes of the accidents and events we investigate, and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. In addition, we conduct transportation safety research studies and offer information and other assistance to family members and survivors for each accident or event we investigate. We also serve as the appellate authority for enforcement actions involving aviation and mariner certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and US Coast Guard, and we adjudicate appeals of civil penalty actions taken by the FAA.

The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for an accident or incident; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, “accident/incident investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties ... and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person” (Title 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* section 831.4). Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB’s statutory mission to improve transportation safety by investigating accidents and incidents and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report (Title 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b)). A factual report that may be admissible under 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b) is available [here](#).