Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Mount Blanco, Texas	**Accident Number:**	CEN26LA168
Date & Time:	April 17, 2026, 10:40 Local	**Registration:**	N445JS
Aircraft:	ROBINSON HELICOPTER COMPANY R44	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Defining Event:	Loss of control in flight	**Injuries:**	2 Minor, 1 None
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Aerial observation		

Analysis

The purpose of the low-level flight was to perform the aerial hunting of wild pigs and coyotes in a remote area that the pilot had not flown in before. The doors were removed from the helicopter, and the two paying passengers onboard were equipped with firearms. During the flight at 75 ft agl and 50 kts, the pilot observed two coyotes and decided to maneuver the helicopter into the wind so the passengers could engage the coyotes with their firearms. The pilot turned the helicopter to the left, into the wind, and during the turn he heard the engine rpm decrease. After checking the cockpit gauges, he noticed that the engine rpm and the main rotor rpm were both decreasing. The pilot increased the throttle, lowered the collective; however, the engine rpm and the main rotor rpm were still decreasing. The pilot maneuvered the helicopter for a forced landing. The helicopter impacted terrain and came to rest on its left side in a remote canyon. The helicopter sustained substantial damage to the main rotor system, the fuselage, the tail cone, and the tail rotor system.

The pilot reported there were no preimpact mechanical malfunctions or failures with the airframe or the engine that would have precluded normal operation. The calculated density altitude for the closest metrological reporting station, near the time of the accident, was about 5,145 ft. The Robinson Helicopter Company has published Safety Notice SN-34 Aerial Survey and Photo Flights which provides pilot guidance that can also be applicable to aerial hunting flights and states that to “only fly the aircraft at speeds, altitudes, and wind angles that are safe and allow good escape routes.”

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 proper main rotor rpm during a low-level turn, which resulted in the main rotor rpm drooping, a loss of control at an altitude too low for recovery, and a subsequent impact with terrain.

Findings

Personnel issues	Aircraft control - Pilot
Personnel issues	Incorrect action performance - Pilot
Personnel issues	Task monitoring/vigilance - Pilot
Personnel issues	Identification/recognition - Pilot
Aircraft	Prop/rotor parameters - Not attained/maintained
Aircraft	Powerplant parameters - Not attained/maintained

Factual Information

History of Flight

Maneuvering-low-alt flying	Low altitude operation/event
Maneuvering-low-alt flying	Loss of control in flight (Defining event)
Maneuvering-low-alt flying	Attempted remediation/recovery
Emergency descent	Off-field or emergency landing
Landing-flare/touchdown	Hard landing
Landing-flare/touchdown	Roll over
Post-impact	Evacuation

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial; Flight instructor	**Age:**	43,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):	Helicopter	**Toxicology Performed:**	
Medical Certification:	Class 2 Without waivers/limitations	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	October 30, 2025
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	May 5, 2025
Flight Time:	1022.9 hours (Total, all aircraft), 414.4 hours (Total, this make and model), 898.7 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 132 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 30.5 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 2.5 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	ROBINSON HELICOPTER COMPANY	**Registration:**	N445JS
Model/Series:	R44 II	**Aircraft Category:**	Helicopter
Year of Manufacture:	2012	**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	**Serial Number:**	13278
Landing Gear Type:	Skid	**Seats:**	4
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	March 5, 2026 100 hour	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	2500 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	66.1 Hrs	**Engines:**	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	3328.1 Hrs as of last inspection	**Engine Manufacturer:**	Lycoming Engines
ELT:	Not installed	**Engine Model/Series:**	IO-540-AE1A5
Registered Owner:	AG RANCH SERVICES LLC	**Rated Power:**	235 Horsepower
Operator:	CONCHO AVIATION LLC	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	Rotorcraft external load (133), Agricultural aircraft (137), Certificate of authorization or waiver (COA)
Operator Does Business As:	CONCHO AVIATION LLC	**Operator Designator Code:**	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	**Condition of Light:**	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KLBB,3241 ft msl	**Distance from Accident Site:**	30 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	10:00 Local	**Direction from Accident Site:**	258°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Scattered / 15000 ft AGL	**Visibility**	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Broken / 25000 ft AGL	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	14 knots / None	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	None / Terrain-Induced
Wind Direction:	220°	**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	N/A / Light
Altimeter Setting:	29.83 inches Hg	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	22°C / 16°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Crosbyton, TX (None)	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	None
Destination:	Crosbyton, TX (None)	**Type of Clearance:**	None
Departure Time:	10:15 Local	**Type of Airspace:**	Class G

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 None	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	2 Minor	**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	2 Minor, 1 None	**Latitude, Longitude:**	33.769989,-101.22788(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Hodges, Michael
Additional Participating Persons:	Robert Smith; FAA Lubbock FSDO; Lubbock, TX
Original Publish Date:	May 21, 2026
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=202839