



State of California • Department of Fish and Game
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NEWS

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Helicopter Crash Kills Biologists in Madera County

Three Department of Fish and Game (DFG) employees and a contract helicopter pilot died in a helicopter crash today. They were on a routine aerial deer survey when the crash occurred in a remote section of Madera County. An investigation is under way into the cause of the crash.

Clu Cotter, DFG Senior Biologist Supervisor, 48 years old, Kevin O'Connor, DFG Associate Biologist, 40 years old, and Tom Stolberg, DFG Seasonal Aid, 31 years old, all of Fresno, lost their lives in the helicopter crash. Helicopter pilot Dennis (Mike) Donovan of Landells Aviation, also lost his life. The families of the victims have been notified.

"We are deeply saddened at the loss of our esteemed colleagues," said John McCamman, director of DFG. "Our employees are like family and this sudden loss during a routine operation has left us stunned and with heavy hearts."

An investigation of the crash is under way and no cause of the crash has been determined.

DFG annually conducts helicopter surveys to track trends in California deer populations. Surveys are conducted from the air because of cost-effectiveness compared to ground surveys, access to remote locations and to reduce bias compared to road-based observation. DFG has grounded all helicopter surveys and captures until further notice.

McCamman immediately instituted critical incident counseling teams to work with DFG staff to help them deal with the loss of their coworkers. Many other DFG staff across the state knew Clu, Kevin and Tom, personally, and the loss is palpable to many in the department.

McCamman will be available for interviews at 6:15 p.m. in front of the Natural Resources Agency Building.

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Clu Cotter



Kevin O'Connor



Tom Stolberg