

## VI. PRELIMINARY CAUSAL AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

### A. Causal factors

- 1 The helicopter experienced a mechanical malfunction 15 to 30 feet above the treetops causing it to settle into the trees. (Finding A.4)
2. The aircraft was in a high-risk profile when the mechanical malfunction occurred. (Finding E.10)

### B. Contributing factors:

- 1 The IHOG interpretation and direction on the operation was not clearly defined (Finding E.8)
- 2 Aviation operational control and oversight was not clearly defined, understood, nor administered starting with delegation of authority and continuing through instruction to helicopter crewmembers. (Findings E.3, E.4, E.9, E.12, E.15, E.22, E.23, F.16)
- 3 Safety mitigation factors were not always in place. In some cases safety mitigation factors were in place, but were not adhered to. For example, the maximum number of crewmembers allowed on board the helicopter. (Findings E.7, F.15)
4. Management stated intent for helicopters not to perform the low-level search profile over timbered areas was communicated to flight crewmembers. (Findings E.7, F.3, F.5)
- 5 USFS failed to provide clear guidance and direction on agency involvement and oversight responsibilities. (Findings C.1, E.3, E.5, E.8, E.12, E.13)