

Fatal crash, overdue planes keep searchers busy

By BETH BRAGG

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Two people died in a plane crash near Sitka, two others - including the deputy commissioner of the state Department of Revenue - are missing on a plane that disappeared near Juneau, and troopers are on the lookout for a plane that may be missing on the Kenai Peninsula.

The three incidents kept searchers busy over the weekend and into today.

Dozens of people searched by air, boat and ground for deputy commissioner for revenue Brian Andrews, who has been missing since Saturday afternoon along with his 24-year-old son, Brandon.

"We're hopeful," said Jerry Burnett, a friend who works with Andrews in the Department of Revenue. "They're both lifelong Alaskans and they've spent a lot of time in the woods. They're capable woodsmen, they're both good pilots and they had a lot of survival gear.

"If there's any possibility they could survive, they would."

A look at the three incidents:

- Late Sunday night, the U.S. Coast Guard located the bodies of two people killed in the crash of a Baron-55 on Baranof Island, about 30 miles north of Sitka.

A crew from Air Station Sitka located the wreckage after the Coast Guard received a distress signal around 11:15 p.m. Sunday. The crew followed the signal and found the plane 200 feet up a hillside in a dense forest, Coast Guard petty officer Levi Read said Monday.

Names of the dead haven't been released yet. State troopers hoped to retrieve the bodies Monday.

- Searchers are scouring a vast area in Southeast - 1,000 square miles - for signs of the Andrews and their Cessna 182 float plane.

Brian, 56, and Brandon were returning from a family camping trip on Young Lake when the plane vanished, Read said.

They had already made one plane trip from the island to Juneau to drop off son B.J. and some gear. They returned to Young Island to collect the rest of their gear, a round trip that should have taken about 45 minutes, Read said. When two hours passed, B.J. reported them missing.

A search party found the camp site but no gear, Read said. It's believed the Andrews made it to Young Island but ran into trouble on their way back to Juneau.

The search area includes a lot of water, "but the fact they were in a float plane allows them to land on water," Read said.

The two men were last seen wearing inflatable jackets, he said, and the items they collected at Young Island included an assortment of survival gear.

Rain and fog hampered aerial searches on Saturday and Sunday, Read said. Fog limited helicopter searches each day to a single hour.

Helping the effort were the Civil Air Patrol and a number of private boats that happened to be in the search area, fishing in a Juneau salmon derby. The Juneau Mountain Rescue Team and Alaska State Troopers organized ground searches and a number of private search parties are also scanning the search area.

"We've had a lot of public help," Read said.

The public is urged to contact the Coast Guard before attempting personal searches.

- A 911 call late Saturday night launched troopers on a search for a missing plane at Lost Lake on the Kenai Peninsula.

But the call for help may have been a prank, spokeswoman Megan Peters said. No wreckage has been found and no reports of an overdue plane have been received, she said.

The caller told dispatchers that he crashed at Lost Lake after flying to the Peninsula from somewhere north of Denali National Park. Troopers fear the caller may be injured, disoriented and uncertain of his location, Peters said. They can't pinpoint the location of the 911 call because it was made from a cell phone, she said.

Anyone with information about an overdue plane is asked to call the troopers in Soldotna at 262-4453.

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