



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

**REPORT OF THE INVESTIGATION
INTO THE
ALLISION AND LOSS OF LIFE ONBOARD THE
INSPECTED SMALL PASSENGER VESSEL
WILDERNESS I (LA8393GG), ON
BAYOU SEGNETTE IN
WESTWEGO, LOUISIANA ON JULY 28, 2023**



U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



Commandant
United States Coast Guard

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16732/IIA #7828267
23 June 2026

**ALLISION OF THE SMALL PASSENGER VESSEL WILDERNESS I (LA8393GG)
WITH TREES ALONG THE EASTERN BANK OF BAYOU SIGNETTE RESULTING
IN THE LOSS OF ONE LIFE NEAR WESTWEGO, LOUISIANA ON JULY 28, 2023**

ACTION BY THE COMMANDANT

The record and the report of investigation completed for this marine casualty have been reviewed by the Office of Investigations & Casualty Analysis. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analyses, and conclusions are approved. This marine casualty investigation is closed.



E. B. SAMMS
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard
Office of Investigations & Casualty Analysis (CG-INV)



16732

**ALLISION AND LOSS OF LIFE ONBOARD THE INSPECTED SMALL PASSENGER
VESSEL WILDERNESS I (LA8393GG), ON BAYOU SEGNETTE IN WESTWEGO,
LOUISIANA ON JULY 28, 2023**

**ENDORSEMENT BY THE COMMANDER,
COAST GUARD HEARTLAND DISTRICT**

The record and the report of the investigation convened for the subject casualty have been reviewed. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations are approved. It is recommended that this marine casualty investigation be closed.

COMMENTS ON THE REPORT

1. I extend my deepest condolences to the family and friends of the mariner who lost his life in this tragic accident.
2. In addition to the findings contained within the report, this investigation reveals the importance of traveling at speeds that are within the safe parameters of the operating characteristics of this unique vessel type.
3. It is noted and agreed upon that two-person operations in this scenario would likely have resulted in safer operations; however, the regulations do not require multiple-person operations, nor should they be expected following an incident of this nature.
4. The investigation and report contain valuable information which can be used to address the factors that contributed to this marine casualty and prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.

J. B. WHEELER
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard
Chief of Prevention
Coast Guard Heartland District
By Direction



16732
October 31, 2025

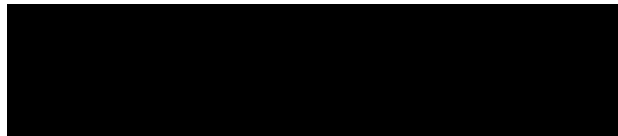
**ALLISION AND LOSS OF LIFE ONBOARD THE INSPECTED SMALL PASSENGER
VESSEL WILDERNESS I (LA8393GG), ON BAYOU SEGNETTE IN WESTWEGO,
LOUISIANA ON JULY 28, 2023**

ENDORSEMENT BY THE OFFICER IN CHARGE, MARINE INSPECTION

The record and report of the investigation convened for the subject casualty have been reviewed. The record and the report, including the findings of fact, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations are approved subject to the following comments. It is recommended that this marine casualty investigation be closed.

COMMENTS ON REPORT

The loss of the mechanic was a preventable and tragic accident. I offer my sincere condolences to the family and friends of the individual who lost their life.



G. A. CALLAGHAN
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard
Officer in Charge, Marine Inspection



16732
October 31, 2025

**ALLISION AND LOSS OF LIFE ONBOARD THE INSPECTED SMALL PASSENGER
VESSEL WILDERNESS I (LA8393GG), ON BAYOU SEGNETTE IN
WESTWEGO, LOUISIANA ON JULY 28, 2023**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On July 28, 2023, at approximately 1810 local time, the airboat *Wilderness I*, owned and operated by Ultimate Swamp Adventures Inc., was transiting in Bayou Segnette Main Channel in Westwego Louisiana, when it allided with tree branches on the eastern bank of the channel. After the initial allision, the *Wilderness I* traveled another 20 yards before alliding with a second tree and coming to a stop. A mechanic was the only person onboard the vessel, conducting engine trials following the recent completion of repairs.

At 1815, the Ultimate Swamp Adventures' airboat, *Captain Nash's Wings* was completing a swamp tour in the area when the operator discovered the *Wilderness I* against a tree along with the unconscious mechanic. The operator of *Captain Nash's Wings* attempted to wake the unconscious mechanic and contacted 911 for Emergency Medical Services (EMS).

At 1822, the Westwego Fire Department and EMS arrived on scene and transported the mechanic back to the Ultimate Swamp Adventures dock. The Westwego Fire Department provided cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) to the mechanic during the journey to the pier.

Once at the pier, the mechanic was transferred to an ambulance and transported to University Medical Center (UMC) in New Orleans. At 1858, they arrived at UMC, and the mechanic was sent into emergency surgery where he experienced cardiac arrest and was pronounced deceased at 2213.

As a result of its investigation, the Coast Guard determined this incident met the criteria for a reportable marine casualty and a serious marine incident (SMI) under 46 CFR Part 4. The level of investigative effort was an enhanced investigation, as the incident resulted in a loss of life. The initiating event was the allision of the *Wilderness I* with tree branches on the eastern bank of Bayou Segnette Main Channel, followed by a subsequent allision with a second tree. During the allisions, the mechanic suffered blunt force trauma injuries and was subsequently pronounced deceased.

The causal factors contributing to this incident were: 1) Operating close to shore, 2) Inadequate lookout, 3) Failure to proceed at safe speed, 4) Lack of policy or procedure, 5) Unique handling characteristics of airboats, 6) Delay in medical care, 7) Fatal injuries.



16732
October 31, 2025

**ALLISION AND LOSS OF LIFE ONBOARD THE INSPECTED SMALL PASSENGER
VESSEL WILDERNESS I (LA8393GG), ON BAYOU SEGNETTE IN
WESTWEGO, LOUISIANA ON JULY 28, 2023**

INVESTIGATING OFFICER'S REPORT

1. Preliminary Statement

1.1 This marine casualty investigation was conducted, and this report was submitted in accordance with, Title 46, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Subpart 4.07, and under the authority of Title 46, United States Code (USC) Chapter 63.

1.2 No individuals, organizations, or parties were designated as a party-in-interest in accordance with 46 CFR Subsection 4.03-10.

1.3 The Coast Guard was the lead Federal agency in this investigation, and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) was the lead State agency. The Westwego Fire Department and the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office both assisted Coast Guard investigators with initial casualty scene response and identifying potential witnesses for interviews. No other persons or organizations assisted in this investigation.

1.4 All times listed in this report are in Central Daylight Time (CDT) using a 24-hour format and are approximate.

2. Vessel Involved in the Incident

Official Name:	<i>Wilderness I</i>
Identification Number:	LA8393GG – Registration Number (LA)
Flag:	United States
Vessel Class/Type/Sub-Type	Passenger Ship/River Cruise Vessel over 6 Passengers less than 100 Gross Tons
Build Year:	2001
Gross Tonnage:	3 GT
Length:	23 feet
Beam/Width:	9 feet
Draft/Depth:	2 feet
Main/Primary Propulsion	Gasoline/Air Propeller/425 H.P.
Owner/Operator:	Ultimate Swamp Adventures Inc. Westwego, Louisiana



Figure 1 Pre-incident picture of *Wilderness I*, port side aspect
(July 2023/Ultimate Swamp Adventures)

3. Deceased, Missing, and/or Injured Persons

Relationship to Vessel	Sex	Age	Status
Mechanic	Male	63	Deceased

4. Findings of Fact

4.1. The Incident

4.1.1. On July 5, 2023, at 1000, the airboat, *Wilderness I*, owned and operated by Ultimate Swamp Adventures Inc., was operating in Bayou Segnette in Westwego, Louisiana, when it received an engine error code for a faulty engine oil cooling system. The *Wilderness I* was subsequently taken out of the water and trailered to Mark's Airboats Inc. in Franklin, LA for analysis and repairs.

4.1.2. On July 28, 2023, Mark's Airboats Inc. completed the repairs on the *Wilderness I*. The Ultimate Swamp Adventures' company manager and mechanic drove to Mark's Airboats Inc. to pick up the *Wilderness I*.

4.1.3. At 1222, the company manager and mechanic tested the engine of the *Wilderness I* at Mark's Airboats Inc. Following the satisfactory results of the test, they trailered the vessel for transport to the Bayou Segnette Landing pier on Louisiana Street in Westwego, Louisiana.

4.1.4. At 1610, the company manager and the mechanic arrived at Bayou Segnette Landing pier and fueled the *Wilderness I*. The company manager then tasked the mechanic to get underway on the *Wilderness I* and transit to the Ultimate Swamp Adventures dock on Laroussini Street. There, the mechanic was instructed to wait for the manager. They would then proceed underway together, onboard the *Wilderness I*, to conduct engine trials.

4.1.5. While the mechanic got the *Wilderness I* underway, the company manager drove the trailer back to the Ultimate Swamp Adventures dock.

4.1.6. At 1640, the mechanic and the *Wilderness I* arrived at the Ultimate Swamp Adventures dock on Laroussini Street.

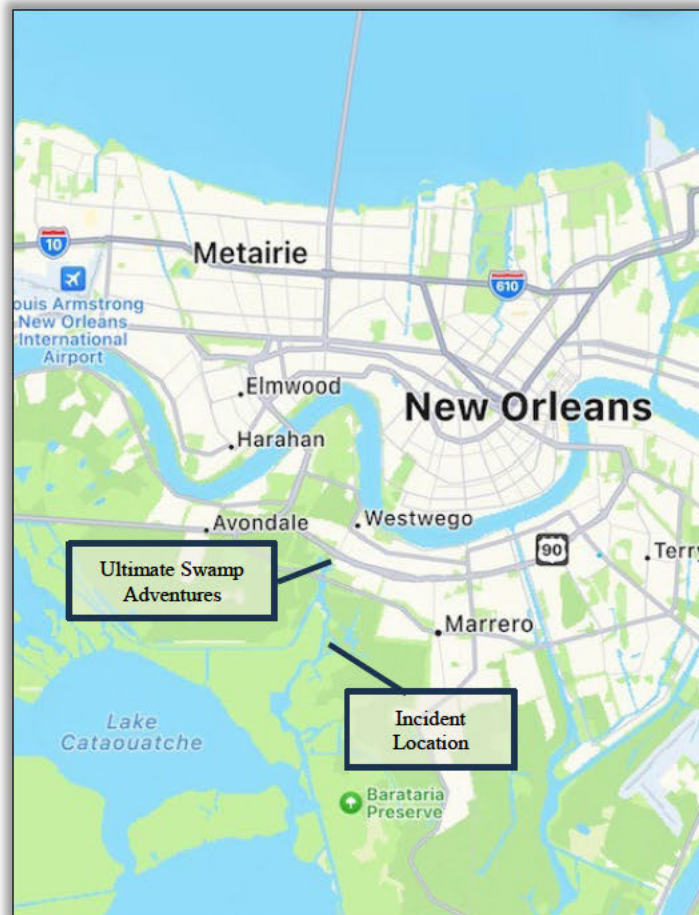


Figure 2 Google Earth incident location (January 2024)

4.1.7. A receptionist employed by Ultimate Swamp Adventures, who was manning the cash register at the dock, saw the mechanic depart alone on the *Wilderness I*, outbound toward Bayou Segnette.

4.1.8. At 1750, the company manager arrived at the Ultimate Swamp Adventures dock. He noted that the *Wilderness I* and the mechanic were not waiting at the dock as instructed. The receptionist told the company manager that the mechanic got underway on the *Wilderness I*, alone.

4.1.9. At approximately 1800, the airboat *LA4094GE* got underway from the Ultimate Swamp Adventures dock for a swamp tour with an operator and four passengers onboard. The operator headed southbound on the Bayou Segnette main channel. This channel was 50 yards wide and provided access to Lake Cataouatche.

4.1.10. While transiting the Bayou Segnette main channel, the operator of *LA4094GE* did not see the *Wilderness I*.



Figure 3 Picture of Bayou Segnette Main Channel taken after the incident (July 2023/USCG)

4.1.11. At approximately 1810, while heading northbound on Bayou Segnette Main Channel, the *Wilderness I* allided with tree branches on the eastern bank.

4.1.12. The *Wilderness I* continued forward for approximately 20 yards and where it then allided with a large tree, which stopped the vessel's forward momentum. The vessel's final resting place was approximately one mile from the Lapalco Boulevard Bridge.

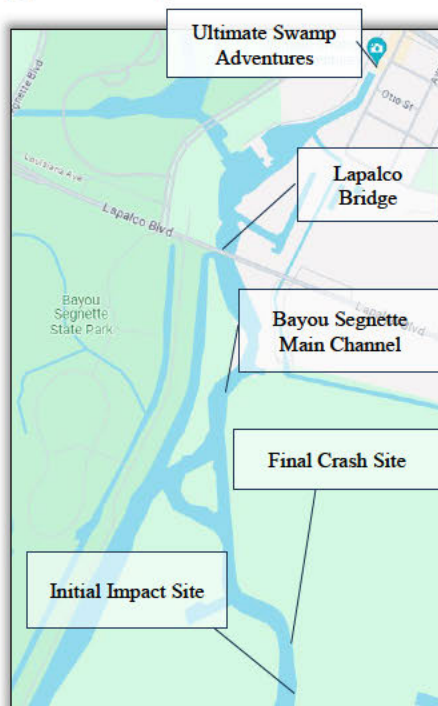


Figure 4 Google Earth incident locations (January 2024)



Figure 5 Initial impact site (left) and found location of *Wilderness I* (July 28, 2023/Ultimate Swamp Adventures)

4.1.13. At 1815, the Ultimate Swamp Adventures' airboat, *Captain Nash's Wings*, was completing a swamp tour with 15 passengers onboard when the operator discovered the *Wilderness I* against a tree, covered in branches. The operator saw that the mechanic was unconscious in his seat. The *Captain Nash's Wings* operator noted a large tree branch laying across the *Wilderness I* at the same height as the operator's seat. This large branch was in front of the mechanic's chest, not touching him. Additionally, the starboard side of the vessel was against the base of a tree trunk and a blade tip of the propellor was broken.



Figure 6 Post-incident picture of *Wilderness I* with branches on and around the operator's seat. (July 28, 2023/ Ultimate Swamp Adventures)

4.1.14. The operator of the *Captain Nash's Wings* and a passenger, who was an off-duty fireman, boarded the *Wilderness I* to assess the mechanic, who remained unresponsive. The mechanic was wearing a hat, shoes, and hearing protection. His head was upright, but his body was slouched over. He had abrasions on his head and arms. The operator of the *Captain Nash's Wings* then called 911 for Emergency Medical Services (EMS).

4.1.15. At 1821, the operator of the *Captain Nash's Wings* called the company manager of Ultimate Swamp Adventures to notify him of the incident.

4.1.16. Immediately following the call, both the company and operations managers left the Ultimate Swamp Adventures dock on airboat *LA1599GF* and transited to the incident location.

4.1.17. At 1822, Westwego Fire Department and EMS arrived at the Ultimate Swamp Adventures dock and boarded the airboat *LA5180GC* with another Ultimate Swamp Adventures operator and transited to the incident location.

4.1.18. At 1825, the managers arrived at the incident location. They saw branches on the deck of the *Wilderness I* and abrasions on the mechanic's arms and head. The managers yelled for the mechanic to wake up, but the mechanic remained unresponsive. Shortly after, the Westwego Fire Department and EMS arrived on scene and determined the mechanic was injured, unresponsive with a pulse, and had shallow breathing.

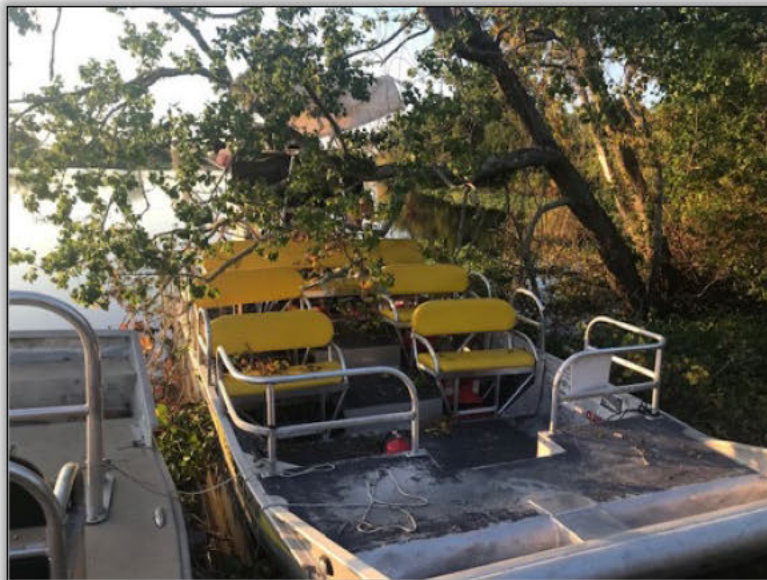


Figure 7 Post-incident picture of *Wilderness I* (July 28, 2023/ Ultimate Swamp Adventures)

4.1.19. Members from the Westwego Fire Department and the Ultimate Swamp Adventures managers lifted and carried the mechanic to the *LA1599GF* for transport back to the Ultimate Swamp Adventures dock. The Westwego Fire Department provided cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) during the journey to the pier.

4.1.20. At 1837, *LA1599GF* arrived at the dock where EMS took over CPR and began advanced life support efforts. The mechanic was then transferred to a stretcher and into an ambulance and transported to University Medical Center (UMC) in New Orleans.

4.1.21. At 1858, the mechanic arrived at UMC and was sent into emergency surgery.

4.1.22. At 2213, while undergoing emergency surgery, the mechanic experienced cardiac arrest and was pronounced deceased.

4.1. Medical Evaluation

4.1.1. The autopsy revealed that the mechanic sustained blunt force trauma to his abdomen, face, and head, perforations of the aorta, an L4 vertebrae fracture, a rib fracture, bruising, and multiple lacerations. The coroner determined the injuries sustained from the collision were the main contributing factors to the mechanic's death, which occurred during emergency surgery at UMC. The cause of death was cardiac arrest.

4.1.2. The mechanic had several pre-existing health conditions including critical coronary heart disease with the left anterior descending coronary artery narrowing by 90 percent, the right coronary and left circumflex coronary arteries narrowing by 50 percent, and a fatty liver. The coroner's report determined that these pre-existing health conditions were not the cause of death. The mechanic was known to experience fatigue and numbness in his extremities.

4.1.3. The mechanic's postmortem toxicology report identified caffeine, cotinine, oxycodone, bupropion, hydroxy bupropion, ketamine, and amphetamines in his system. The toxicology sample was taken after the mechanic was provided ketamine, oxycodone, and epinephrine at UMC. The coroner provided that both epinephrine and bupropion can yield positive results for amphetamines. The report determined that there was no alcohol in the mechanic's system.

4.2. Vessel Damage

4.2.1. On July 28, 2023, Marine Inspectors from Sector New Orleans conducted a post-casualty damage assessment of the *Wilderness I* and found the vessel's steering components to be in good working order. There was significant damage to the vessel's canopy, and a blade tip of the propeller blade was broken. The starboard quarter had a smooth inset.

4.2.2. The post-casualty diagnostic report for the *Wilderness I's* engine showed no evidence of mechanical failure, indicating proper operation of the engine, without error codes.



Figure 8
Wilderness I
starboard quarter
(July 28, 2023/
Ultimate Swamp
Adventures)

4.3. Vessel Configuration and Operation

4.3.1. The *Wilderness I* is a 23 foot, flat-bottomed, aluminum hull airboat. The *Wilderness I*'s propellor blades were protected by a metal cage. Large metal rudders were mounted on the metal cage behind the propellor blades. The *Wilderness I* had no protective barrier between the operator's seat and the environment.

4.3.2. The *Wilderness I* is powered by an internal combustion engine that turns a propellor, which moves air across the propellor blades. As the propellor rotates, thrust is produced to pull the vessel into forward propulsion. The speed of the forward thrust is controlled by a foot pedal, *i.e.*, the throttle. Rudders are mounted aft of the propeller and are controlled by a cable connected to a lever in the operator's hand. Pulling back on the lever turns the vessel to port and pushing on it turns the vessel to starboard. There is no method to quickly halt or reverse the forward thrust and the vessel does not possess the ability to operate astern.

4.3.3. Airboats like the *Wilderness I* turn with a delayed response when compared to other vessel types. When an operator moves the lever controller, thereby directing the rudders, the airboat's bow will point in the direction the operator intends to travel, but the vessel will not move in that direction until the momentum in the previous direction dissipates and is overcome by forces in the new direction. This effect is known as drifting. The *Wilderness I* was known by its owners and previous operators to drift more when operating at a lighter weight, such as when the vessel was operating without passengers.



Figure 9 Post-incident picture of *Wilderness I*'s operator lever controller and pedal (July 28, 2023/ Ultimate Swamp Adventures)

4.4. Vessel Background

4.4.1. The *Wilderness I* was built in Florida in 2002. It was purchased by Ultimate Swamp Adventures Inc. and brought to New Orleans in 2018.

4.4.2. As a small passenger vessel carrying more than six passengers, with at least one for hire, the *Wilderness I* was required to be inspected and to comply with applicable regulations found in 46 CFR Subchapter T, *Small Passenger Vessels (Under 100 Gross Tons)*. Under these regulations, the *Wilderness I* was required to hold a Certificate of Inspection (COI). The most recent COI was issued on March 7, 2023 by Sector New Orleans, and was due to expire on March 7, 2028.

4.4.3. The COI required that the *Wilderness I* be manned by one master and carry a maximum of ten passengers. The vessel's route was restricted to not more than 1000 feet from shore in Bayou Segnette and the Bayous of the Salvador Wildlife Management Area.

4.4.4. Small passenger vessels inspected under 46 CFR Subchapter T are required to comply with the stability standards outlined in 46 CFR Subchapter S, except where simplified alternative methods are permitted to assess the vessel's stability. In accordance with 46 CFR 178.320(c), the *Wilderness I* was eligible to use a simplified stability proof test (SST) as an alternative method.

4.4.5. The *Wilderness I's* stability letter was issued on May 23, 2006, following a satisfactory SST conducted on May 22, 2006. An addendum to the original stability letter was issued on December 1, 2011, following the regulatory change of the assumed average weight per person (aawpp) to 185 pounds.

4.4.6. The SST conducted on the *Wilderness I* followed the requirements set forth in 46 CFR 178.330. This SST assessed the *Wilderness I's* ability to withstand applied forces and remain in a stable condition. The test was deemed satisfactory if the applied force did not cause a change in the vessel's available freeboard beyond a predetermined limit.

4.4.7. Ultimately, the SST results determined that the *Wilderness I* had adequate stability for the carriage of 16 persons on protected waters¹. This determination was later changed in the addendum issued in 2011, authorizing the carriage of a maximum of 10 passengers and two crewmembers on the same protected route.

4.5. Company/Owner History

4.5.1. Ultimate Swamp Adventures Inc. was a privately owned airboat company that conducted sightseeing tours on Bayou Segnette in Westwego, Louisiana since 2016.

4.5.2. The company owned and operated eight airboats ranging from uninspected passenger vessels carrying six or less passengers, to inspected small passenger vessels under 100 gross tons capable of carrying seven or more passengers.

4.5.3. Ultimate Swamp Adventures had no written policies or procedures for post repair testing or engine trials. There was no policy that required the mechanic (or any other employee) to operate company airboats with an additional person onboard.

4.5.4. While in the Bayou Segnette Main Channel, the standard practice for Ultimate Swamp Adventures' operators was to navigate the airboats in the center of the 50 yard

¹ 46 CFR 175.400 defines protected waters to be a term used in connection with stability criteria and means sheltered waters presenting no special hazards, such as most rivers, harbors, and lakes and that is not determined to be exposed waters or partially protected waters by the cognizant OCMI.

wide channel, which was done to reduce the risk of allision with tree branches from trees that lined the edge of the waterway.

4.6. Mechanic Training and Experience

4.6.1. Ultimate Swamp Adventures employed the mechanic for approximately one year prior to the date of the incident. The mechanic maintained and repaired the eight airboats owned and operated by Ultimate Swamp Adventures during this time.

4.6.2. The mechanic routinely got underway by himself, without supervision, when testing Ultimate Swamp Adventures' airboats upon completion of repairs.

4.6.3. According to the company, the mechanic had a positive employment record, and it was uncommon for the mechanic not to comply with tasking.

4.6.4. In 2023, the mechanic satisfactorily completed an approved airboat operator course required by the state of Florida. This course complied with the minimum standards for airboat safety in accordance with Florida state law, enforced by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

4.6.5. The mechanic did not routinely operate or test the *Wilderness I*, and did not possess any specific training or experience in operating the vessel.

4.7. Cell Phone Records

4.7.1. The mechanic's cell phone records indicated no data usage, no incoming or outgoing calls, nor any texts at the time of the incident.

4.8. Weather Conditions

4.8.1. The weather at the time of the incident was sunny, approximately 87 degrees Fahrenheit, with unrestricted visibility. There was no record of any precipitation in the area. Wind speeds were recorded at six miles per hour out of the northeast, and the sun set at 1958 at the casualty scene. The operator of *Captain Nash's Wings*, who was conducting an airboat tour at the time of the incident, claimed the weather was perfect for airboat operations.

5. Analysis

5.1. *No evidence of mechanical failure.* The post-casualty diagnostic report for the *Wilderness I*'s engine showed no evidence of mechanical failure, indicating proper operation without error codes. After the incident, Coast Guard Marine Inspectors conducted a damage survey and determined that the steering system appeared to be in good working order. Evidence collected during the investigation supported the conclusion that a mechanical failure of the vessel's engine or steering system did not contribute to the incident.

5.2. *Operating close to shore.* The Main Channel of Bayou Segnette is approximately 50 yards wide. While in the Bayou Segnette Main Channel, Ultimate Swamp Adventures' operators commonly navigated the company's airboats in the center of the channel to reduce the risk of allision with the tree branches from the numerous trees that lined the edge of the waterway. Though the investigation could not obtain the trackline of the *Wilderness I* for the

date of the incident, it is reasonable to believe that the mechanic may have been operating the vessel out of the center of the main channel, close to the edge of the waterway. Had the mechanic operated the vessel in the center of the channel, the *Wilderness I* may not have allided with the trees on the eastern bank of Bayou Segnette.

5.3. *Inadequate Lookout.* The mechanic was operating the *Wilderness I* alone and was solely responsible for maintaining a proper lookout. The company manager told the Coast Guard that he intended to be onboard the *Wilderness I* with the mechanic to conduct engine trials but the mechanic did not wait for him to arrive before getting underway. 33 CFR 83.05, *Inland Navigation Rules, Look-out (Rule 5)* states: “Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper look-out by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision”. Because the vessel allided with trees, it is likely the mechanic did not provide adequate lookout while operating the vessel alone. Had an additional crewmember been onboard the *Wilderness I*, such as the company manager, that crewmember could have aided in maintaining a proper lookout, and the initial allision may have been prevented.

5.4. *Failure to proceed at a safe speed.* The multiple blunt force injuries the mechanic sustained in addition to the vessel damage indicate that the *Wilderness I* was transiting at a high speed at the time of incident. Airboats can transit at high speeds but have no means to reverse or brake, which impacts their ability to maneuver. For these reasons, airboat operators must maintain safe speed so they can take proper and effective action to avoid collision and stop within a distance appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions, as required by 33 CFR 83.06 *Inland Navigation Rules, Safe Speed (Rule 6)*. When operating the vessel, the mechanic needed to consider the specific maneuvering characteristics of the *Wilderness I*. The vessel’s speed may have afforded little time for the mechanic to take action to avoid allision. There was no evidence to suggest that a mechanical failure, nor distraction of the operator contributed to the incident. It was reasonable to believe that if the mechanic was operating the *Wilderness I* at a safe speed, the initial allision may have been prevented.

5.5. *Lack of policy or procedure.* Ultimate Swamp Adventures had no written policies or procedures describing how to conduct engine trials or vessel tests after repairs. No specific instruction existed to designate the steps to conduct these tests or the required specific manning for these evolutions. Existing Federal regulations do not require Ultimate Swamp Adventures to have such policies or procedures. Without a company policy, the mechanic relied on manufacturer instructions and his own personal experience to conduct engine trials. If Ultimate Swamp Adventures had a policy or procedure for these types of evolutions, the mechanic may have conducted the engine trial for the *Wilderness I* with another member onboard and followed specific steps to ensure safe completion of the trial. These measures may have prevented the initial allision from occurring.

5.6. *Unique handling characteristics of airboats.* Airboats like the *Wilderness I* are designed with an open, flat-bottom, aluminum hull allowing the vessel to be driven in shallow water, through swamps, and over land masses. They are a unique class of vessels that have a shallow draft, which is further reduced when operating at high rates of speed. Airboats have a “planing” hull, that is designed to rise and glide on top of the water as opposed to slicing through it. Airboats experience a significant change in underwater displacement, freeboard, and buoyant force when underway at different rates of speed. Furthermore, the *Wilderness I*’s engine and propeller were located above the water line at the rear of the vessel behind the operator’s seat. Compared to other vessel types, airboats have a higher center of gravity due to the location of their engine, propellor, and seats. These factors negatively

affect the vessel's ability to conduct sudden corrective or emergency steering maneuvers. Additionally, the only way to slow an airboat's momentum is to stop providing thrust and allow friction with the water to act upon the vessel. Airboats typically do not have the ability to operate astern. Therefore, operators cannot arrest the forward momentum in the same manner as other vessel types with conventional propulsion systems. This combination of factors makes operating an airboat particularly unique and challenging. It is likely the handling characteristics of the vessel are causal factors to the initiating event and reduced the efficiency of any emergency or evasive maneuvers that may have been taken to avoid the initial allision.

5.7. *Delay in medical care.* There were no other crew members on board and no witnesses that saw the *Wilderness I* allide with the trees at approximately 1810. At 1815, the *Wilderness I* was discovered against a large tree with the mechanic onboard and unresponsive. After this discovery, EMS was called. The mechanic was given CPR at 1825 when the first responders arrived at the incident scene. At 1837 the mechanic arrived back to the Ultimate Swamp Adventures dock and Westwego EMS provided advanced life support measures. Approximately 27 minutes elapsed from the time of the incident to the time the mechanic received advanced medical care at the dock. If there was another crewmember on board or a witness to the casualty, faster emergency response could have been provided, potentially preventing the death of the mechanic.

5.8. *Fatal Injuries.* The autopsy revealed the mechanic sustained blunt force trauma to the abdomen, face and head, perforations of the aorta, an L4 vertebrae fracture, a rib fracture, bruising, and multiple lacerations. The coroner determined the injuries sustained from the allision were the main contributing factors to the mechanic not surviving the emergency surgery at UMC. The injuries resulted from blunt force trauma that likely occurred during the allisions.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Determination of Cause:

6.1.1. The initiating event was the first allision of the *Wilderness I* with branches 20 yards from the vessel's final location. The likely causal factors contributing to this event were:

6.1.1.1. Operating close to shore.

6.1.1.2. Inadequate lookout.

6.1.1.3. Failure to proceed at safe speed.

6.1.1.4. Lack of policy or procedure.

6.1.1.5. Unique handling characteristics of airboats.

6.1.2. Following the initiating event, the *Wilderness I* allided with a second large tree and its branches. The causal factor contributing to this event was:

6.1.2.1. Unique handling characteristics of airboats.

6.1.3. The allision resulted in the next event, which was the mechanic sustaining fatal injuries. The causal factor contributing to this event was:

6.1.3.1. Failure to proceed at safe speed.

6.1.4. The final event was the mechanic pronounced deceased. The causal factors contributing to this event were:

6.1.4.1. Delay in medical care.

6.1.4.2. Fatal injuries.

6.2. Evidence of Act(s) or Violation(s) of Law by Any Coast Guard Credentialed Mariner Subject to Action Under 46 USC Chapter 77: This investigation did not identify acts or violations of law by a credentialed mariner identified as part of this investigation.

6.3. Evidence of Act(s) or Violation(s) of Law by U.S. Coast Guard Personnel, or any other person: This investigation did not identify potential acts of misconduct, incompetence, negligence, unskillfulness, or violations of law by Coast Guard employees or any other person that contributed to this casualty.

6.4. Evidence of Act(s) Subject to Civil Penalty: The mechanic failed to provide an adequate lookout in accordance with 33 CFR 83.05, *Inland Navigation Rule, Look-out (Rule 5)*, and failed to proceed at safe speed in accordance with 33 CFR 83.06, *Inland Navigation Rule, Safe Speed (Rule 6)* while operating the *Wilderness I*. The mechanic did not survive the incident. No enforcement action will be taken.

6.5. Evidence of Criminal Act(s): This investigation did not identify any potential violations of criminal law.

6.6. Need for New or Amended U.S. Law or Regulation: This investigation did not identify a need for new or amended U.S. laws or regulations. See details in paragraph 8.1 below.

6.7. Unsafe Actions or Conditions that Were Not Causal Factors:

6.7.1. Postmortem toxicology report identified caffeine, cotinine, oxycodone, bupropion, hydroxy bupropion, ketamine, and amphetamines in the mechanic's body. The toxicology sample was taken after the mechanic was treated at UMC with ketamine, oxycodone, and epinephrine. The coroner confirmed that both epinephrine and bupropion can give false positive results for amphetamines. Bupropion is an antidepressant medication that is used to quit smoking, and when metabolized becomes hydroxy bupropion. Additionally, cotinine is a chemical substance that this produced by the body after exposure to nicotine. The Physicians and Lawyers of National Drug Policy (PLNPD) at Brown University concluded that the use of illegal substances does impair reaction ability. The investigation could not determine which, if any, of the substances listed in the toxicology report were in the mechanic's system prior to his treatment at UMC. As such, the investigation could not determine if the use of any of these substances contributed to the incident.

6.7.2. The coroner's autopsy report documented several pre-existing health conditions of the mechanic to include critical coronary heart disease and a fatty liver. The coroner reported that these pre-existing health conditions were not the cause of death. Rather, the coroner attributed the mechanic's death by cardiac arrest during emergency surgery at UMC to the blunt force injuries the mechanic sustained from the allision. The mechanic's preexisting health conditions, however, cannot be eliminated as a potential contributing factor to the allisions. *Wilderness I* was controlled by a foot pedal and hand lever. The

numbness the mechanic routinely experienced in his extremities may have reduced his ability to operate the vessel's foot pedal and hand lever. With a reduced ability to operate combined with the unique handling characteristics of the vessel, the mechanic may have been unable to alter course and/or speed adequately, resulting in the incident. While the coroner stated that the mechanic's pre-existing conditions did not contribute to his death, the investigation ultimately could not determine if the mechanic's pre-existing conditions were causal factors to the incident. The investigation determined that the mechanic's pre-existing health conditions coupled with tendency to operate of Ultimate Swamp Adventures' airboats alone represented an unsafe condition.

7. Actions Taken Since the Incident:

- 7.1. Following the damage survey of the *Wilderness I* by Sector New Orleans, a CG-835V Vessel Inspection Requirement, was issued to the vessel requiring the completion of permanent repairs prior to the carriage of passengers.
- 7.2. On June 6, 2024, Ultimate Swamp Adventures surrendered the *Wilderness I*'s COI and the vessel was placed in laid-up status.
- 7.3. On March 27, 2025 the *Wilderness I* received a scheduled inspection to return to service with Coast Guard Sector New Orleans. The vessel was issued a work list of items and discrepancies that need to be corrected prior to return to route and service.
- 7.4. Since the date of the incident, Coast Guard Sector New Orleans has conducted 80 scheduled inspections on airboats and swamp boats operating in Southeast Louisiana to ensure regulatory compliance and maximize crew and passenger safety.
- 7.5. Since the date of the incident, Coast Guard Sector New Orleans has conducted 4 marine casualty investigations on airboats including 2 enhanced investigations involving passenger deaths that are in progress.

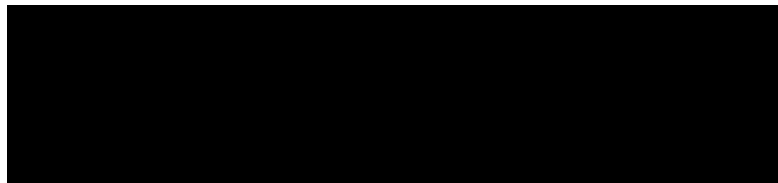
8. Recommendations

8.1. Safety Recommendations:

8.1.1. There are no proposed actions to add new or amend existing U.S. laws or regulations, international requirements, industry standards, or U.S. Coast Guard policies and procedures as a result of this investigation.

8.2. Administrative Recommendations:

8.2.1. Recommend no other administrative or enforcement actions.



Lieutenant, U.S. Coast Guard
Investigating Officer