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Arizona man killed in elk hunting accident

By Darren Marcy/**Outdoor editor**

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. A Flagstaff man was shot and killed in a hunting accident Nov. 15.

Todd Halfast, 38, was shot in the back of the head and killed during an elk hunt.

Halfast was with his brother and two nephews when the accident happened. His death has been ruled an accident, said Detective Mike Rice of the Coconino County Sheriff's Department.

Rice said Halfast wasn't hunting, but was taking photos with the group when the shooting occurred.

The foursome were hunting together when they came across a herd of elk and split up.

Halfast and his 18-year-old nephew went one way, while his brother and other nephew went another direction. Halfast and the teenager found an elk, and the younger man was looking at the animal through his rifle scope.

He apparently didn't notice Halfast had moved about 50 feet away from him, Rice said.

At some point, the 18-year-old shot twice at the animal, following it through his scope as the animal ran. One of the shots struck Halfast in the back of the head.

"It looks like his uncle walked out in front of him," Rice said. "He was 50 feet away when the 18 year old shot at the elk."

The young hunter didn't know he had shot his uncle, and followed the elk. Later, he thought the pair had gotten split up in the thick growth and it wasn't until later then Halfast didn't show up in camp anyone realized anything was wrong.

They went back out and found the man's body later Friday.

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"He didn't even realize he had hit him," Rice said. "He continued to track the elk with his rifle. After the second shot he went after the elk. He just assumed they had gotten separated in the brush and trees."

The incident occurred near the Grand Canyon in Game Management Unit 9 about 21 miles west of Tusayan, Ariz., which is north of Williams, Ariz.

Rice said it didn't look like any charges would be filed in the case.

"The investigation is pretty much completed," Rice said. "There's no indication of foul play."

He said the only thing left to do was to determine positively which weapon of the three fired the fatal shot, but that was only to confirm what already appeared to be the facts in the case. Items were to be sent to the crime lab to check ballistics for confirmation.

The shooting was the first fatal hunting accident in Arizona since 1998 when a person was killed during an elk rifle season, according to an Arizona Department of Game and Fish news release. Arizona also had a hunting fatality in 1995.

Don Winslow, conservation education program manager for the Game and Fish said that despite three hunting accidents resulting in death in Arizona in the last eight years, hunting is a safe sport.

"Hunting accidents, especially fatalities, are rare," Winslow said. "It is a safe activity. Just like any other recreational activity, injuries and fatalities can occur."

Winslow said hunters should always know their target and what is beyond, and added target identification is one of the many topics discussed during hunter education courses.

It is recommended that people out hunting or accompanying hunters wear hunter orange, the department's news release said.

While Arizona encourages hunters to wear blaze orange, the state doesn't require it while hunting.

Rice said all the hunters, including Halfast, in the party of four were wearing camouflage.

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