

Report: Firefighter Deaths Blamed on Arizona Forestry Division

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The crew of 19 elite Hotshot firefighters led by an Ashe County native died needlessly in June, that according to a report from Arizona safety officials Wednesday, a damning report that accused state forestry officials of valuing land over firefighters' safety. Eric Marsh, 44, native of Ashe County, died in the firefighting effort. The report by the state Industrial Commission is seen as a blunt repudiation of the state Forestry Division's review in September, which assigned no blame but said the firefighters and their supervisor failed to "communicate effectively" as they were battling the catastrophic Yarnell Hill fire south of Prescott. In fact, the Industrial Commission charged the Forestry Division was squarely to blame, saying it "unnecessarily and unreasonably" put the Granite Mountain Interagency Hotshot Crew members in a pointlessly hazardous situation because it "prioritized protection of non-defensible structures and pastureland over firefighter safety," that according to NBC News.