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Idaho Press

'Juliana will not be forgotten': Idaho-based company pilot dies in crash fighting Montana fire

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July 17, 2024



Juliana Turchetti, a native of Brazil, was killed last week when her plane hit a mountainside while she was responding to a wildfire in Montana.

Courtesy of Dauntless Air

A pilot working for an Idaho-based company died in a crash last week while fighting a wildfire in Montana.

Juliana Turchetti, 45, was a pilot for Dauntless Air, a company contracting with the Idaho Department of Lands and on loan to the U.S. Forest Service.

“The department and the wildland fire community was dealt a heavy blow last Wednesday,” Idaho Department of Lands Director Dustin Miller said Tuesday at a Board of Land Commissioners

meeting. "... these are certainly things that happen in wildland fire, as we all know, but this one hits home and it hits us hard."

She had been responding to the Horse Gulch fire in Helena, Montana, when her Fire Boss AT-802 plane hit the mountainside and landed in Hauser Lake, the [Daily Montanan reported](#).



Juliana Turchetti
Courtesy of Dauntless Air

Turchetti was a native of Brazil and is survived by a 17-year-old son and "numerous family members," according to the Montanan.

Dauntless Air on July 12 released a statement on social media about Turchetti, calling her "an incredible aviator."

"More important than that, she was an incredible person. The outpouring of love and joyful memories we have received for Juliana over the past 24 hours are a testament to the impact she made on people around the world," the post said. "She blazed trails as one of Brazil's first female ag pilots. She moved big jets. She was a flight instructor and international ferry pilot. She also owned a small business, studied welding and trained horses. Every person fortunate enough to come across Juliana was embraced with her enthusiasm, kindness and care — whether she knew you for a moment or for a lifetime. You could feel her passion for flying right away; it was infectious. Her belief in our mission to protect people and communities was unwavering. She had a commitment, determination and energy that inspired us all."

This was Turchetti's first season flying with Dauntless, according to a spokesperson for the company.

Turchetti wrote on her LinkedIn profile that she had more than 6,500 hours of flight experience. She said she started her aviation career as a flight instructor in 2007, and she got her green card and moved to the U.S. in 2018.

She wrote, "Flying and fighting fires is the ideal combination of different skills, challenges, team work, and the excitement of operating in an environment in constant need of discipline, coordination, courage, dedication, and desire to serve. ... Aviation for me is the deepest proof of how infinitely far humanity can go."

IDL Chief of Fire Management Josh Harvey said at the meeting that IDL staff stayed in Helena to assist Dauntless and Turchetti's family, who traveled to the U.S. to take the pilot home. Harvey said

that Idaho pilots did a voluntary “stand down” the day of the accident and stopped working for 24 hours. Montana and Washington state provided back-filled aircraft support, he said.

Montana Gov. Greg Gianforte and Idaho Gov. Brad Little issued a joint statement on July 10 after learning about Turchetti’s death. The governors said they were saddened to learn of her death.

“Our first responders and wildland firefighters put their lives on the line to quickly respond to threats and protect our communities,” the statement said. “It’s a true act of bravery to run toward a fire. We join all Montanans and Idahoans in praying for the fallen hero’s family and friends during this tragic time.”

Turchetti had been flying a single-engine amphibious air tanker, and she was the only occupant. Harvey said the National Transportation Safety Board had completed its investigation into the crash on Saturday and would likely release a report within 10 to 15 days.

Miller said Tuesday it had been “an emotional several days for IDL and the wildland fire community.”

“Our hearts are heavy,” he said, “but certainly Juliana will not be forgotten.”