

Rim Fire's alleged igniter will not face charges

By Kurtis Alexander, Fresno Bee

Federal prosecutors said Friday that they intend to drop charges against the bow hunter accused of starting the devastating Rim Fire that burned through Yosemite two years ago and convulsed into the largest wildfire in Sierra history.

In a motion to dismiss the case, U.S. Attorney Benjamin Wagner said the two witnesses who needed to show that Keith Emerald, 33, of Columbia ignited the blaze by making an illegal campfire had died.

One person who spoke with Emerald shortly after Emerald was rescued from the fast-moving fire via helicopter died in a workplace accident in February, according to prosecutors. The second witness, the helicopter pilot, died last month of cardiac arrest, prosecutors said.

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