

Cote Hadlock

The People & Places Behind Cote's Story:

L1 helicopter transport from North Woods to Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center

CommSpec JR Roebuck

Pilot Kirk Donovan

Nurse Andrew Hughes

Paramedic Stephen Leavins

31-year-old Cote Hadlock makes his living as a commercial fisherman and lobsterman, and when he's not on the ocean or at home with his young family in Otis, he takes to the woods to go fishing, hunting, and backcountry snowmobiling.

In March of 2022, he and five buddies headed west into the North Woods to take advantage of the powder and pristine conditions. An experienced snowmobiler, Cote took a jump, went flying, and got bucked off his sled. "As soon as I hit the ground, I knew something was wrong," Cote remembers. "My legs were numb."

Out of cell phone range, one friend headed off in search of a cell signal, while another built a fire to keep him warm. Even though he couldn't move, Cote used the first aid training he learned on the Ellsworth Fire Department to have his friends evaluate him and immobilize his spine by packing him in snow.

After staying in a snowbank for three hours, a game warden was the first to arrive on scene. 40 minutes later, a LifeFlight helicopter landed on a snowmobile trail, and the crew immediately began hiking through waist deep snow to reach Cote who was now hypothermic. With temperatures dropping and losing daylight, Cote's friends, the Warden, and the LifeFlight crew had no choice but to carry Cote back through the snow to the waiting helicopter. By nightfall, he was safely at Eastern Maine Medical Center.

Cote considers himself very lucky. Had he been evacuated on a toboggan to an ambulance instead of taken by helicopter, his doctors told him he likely would have more permanent damage to his spine.

He underwent a lumbar fusion, followed by 10 days in the hospital, and months of physical therapy. While he's not as limber as he once was, he's back to commercial fishing. He did sell his sled this year, but he's not ruling out future adventures. "I'm an outdoor guy," he says. "It's in my blood."

