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PRESS RELEASE

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Man Pleads Guilty in Deadly Boat Collision

A former Chico resident plead guilty in Butte County Superior Court today to charges involving a Boating under the Influence case on Lake Oroville that left one person dead and another severely injured.

Brandon Michael Smith, 31, was driving a speed boat filled with 5 passengers on the North Fork of Lake Oroville on May 13, 2018 when he collided with the shoreline. The collision ejected Walter Drew Gerken, 27, of Paradise, from the boat, killing him. A 19-year-old female was also ejected from the boat and sustained major injuries to her left leg. The other passengers sustained minor injuries as well.

State Parks Rangers were called to the scene of the collision and determined Smith was intoxicated at the time of the collision and was also driving too close to the shoreline without an adequate lookout positioned on the boat.

Smith plead guilty today to charges of Vehicular Manslaughter in the Operation of a Vessel while Intoxicated and Operation of a Vessel while Under the Influence causing Great Bodily Injury. He is facing 7 years, 8 months state prison.

Sentencing has been set in the case for April 2, 2020 at 1:30pm. Smith remains out of custody pending sentencing in this matter.