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July 24, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Watch Fire Arson Suspect Arrested

San Carlos Apache Reservation, Ariz. – A 22-year-old San Carlos Apache Tribe member has been arrested and charged with arson in connection with the Watch Fire that terrified hundreds of people as they fled for their lives, leaving many homeless.

The San Carlos Apache Police Department (SCAPD) and the Tribe’s Game & Fish Rangers arrested Keanu Dude 13 days after the fire was started. Dude was arrested at approximately 2 p.m., July 23 and is being held in the San Carlos Adult Detention & Rehabilitation Center. Dude lives in the Gilson Wash District and is unemployed. Dude has a criminal history of assault, domestic violence, and other charges.

The case remains under investigation.

“It saddens me deeply that a member of our Tribe has been charged with starting this fire that devastated our community,” said San Carlos Apache Tribe Chairman Terry Rambler. *“Arson is a senseless act that will never be tolerated under any circumstance. I am thankful for the swift and thorough investigation by tribal and federal law enforcement that has resulted in an arrest.”*

An arson investigation was initiated as the fire was still spreading by the San Carlos Apache Fire Investigation Task Force with the Tribe’s Game & Fish Rangers as the lead investigator. The Task Force included the FBI, the Tribe’s Forest Resources Fire Management team, the federal Complex Incident Management Team II - Southwest, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Police, and the Tribe’s Chief Prosecutor.

“I would like to commend SCAPD’s officers, Detectives, and the Tribe’s Game & Fish Rangers on how quickly they reacted and responded to this incident. Our priority is the safety of the community,” SCAPD Chief of Police Elliot Sneezy said. *“We all worked around the clock together with our partners from other agencies. With the community’s help, we were able to*

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come to a quick resolution. We will continue to support and pray for our community and its members affected by this tragedy.”

The Watch Fire began as a small brush fire around 11 p.m., July 10. It erupted into an uncontrolled wildfire the next afternoon when high winds from a thunderstorm caused the fire to rapidly spread in all directions. The fire burned 2,162 acres, destroyed 21 homes and 13 auxiliary structures, forced the evacuation of more than 400 and left about 73 members of the Tribe homeless.

“While thankfully no one was injured, many face extreme hardship, losing their homes and all their possessions and were left with only the clothes on their back,” Chairman Rambler said. *“It is imperative that everyone in our Tribe work together to overcome this criminal act and rebuild our community better and stronger than ever.”*

The Tribe continues to seek funds for rebuilding homes and infrastructure. Monetary donations can be sent [here](#).



Keanu Dude – San Carlos Apache Police Department