PRESS RELEASE
Case #14-513116

Fire Destroys Boat and Burns Dock at Hagg Lake

August 24, 2014—A boat caught fire and destroyed part of the boat dock at Henry Hagg Lake. There was significant damage, fortunately there were no injuries.

On August 24, 2014, at about 10:13 a.m., Sheriff's Marine Patrol Deputies responded to boat ramp "C" at Henry Hagg Lake in the community of Gaston, concerning a fully engulfed boat fire. The fire was reportedly also burning part of the boat dock.

Sheriff's Marine Patrol Deputies arrived and found a 1978 Mantaray fiberglass boat tied to the boat dock, burnt down to the water line. The boat dock was made of a composite plastic material and the fire destroyed a 30 foot section from the intense heat. Gaston Fire Department responded to extinguish the fire.

Deputies contacted the boat operator, Stephen Graham, 50, from Saint Helens. Mr. Graham told the deputies that when he started the boat engine, it backfired causing the fire. He discharged his fire extinguisher, but the fire spread too rapidly and the heat drove others back until the fire department arrived.

The Washington County Sheriff's Office Marine Patrol conducts over 1200 boat safety examinations every year. Adequate life jackets, a horn or whistle, proper engine ventilation, a clean "backfire flame arrester" and a fire extinguisher are some of the safety equipment required on motorized boats. The flame arrester is designed to cool and disperse the flame in the event of an engine backfire. There was a flame arrester on the engine. Deputies could not confirm the operating condition because the intense heat destroyed the device.

Park officials estimate the damage to the boat dock will exceed $50,000. Boat ramp "C" will remain open, traffic will be slowed from three to two lanes for the remainder of the season.

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