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JUVENILE SUSPECT IDENTIFIED AS STARTING WILLOW FIRE

By Mark Evan Smith, Sierra Star

MADERA, CA. – A juvenile male was identified by U.S. Forest Service investigators Tuesday afternoon as the alleged suspect who sparked the Willow Fire near North Fork and Bass Lake.

Because of the suspect's minor status and charges have yet to be filed, authorities did not provide further details, such as how or why the boy allegedly started the blaze.

“We will continue working with the USFS investigators throughout the judicial process,” Madera County District Attorney David Linn said.

Linn said he, his office's chief investigator John Markle, and Mountain Area investigator David Engstrom went to North Fork Tuesday morning to meet with “relevant witnesses.”

Charges are expected to be filed in the next few days, and if found guilty, the suspect will face punishments that range from probation to time in juvenile hall under the California Division of Juvenile Justice.

Linn said the Willow Fire suspect's alleged actions are completely unrelated to those of a high school student who is serving one year probation after convicted for intentionally starting 13 fires in the areas of John West and Jean East roads between July and September last year.

Further information on the Willow Fire case will be made available if, or when, charges are brought forward.

The Willow Fire grew to 1,739 acres since its start on Saturday, July 25 at 2 p.m., and is only 5% contained.