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accused of setting fire to



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A West Manatee Fire Rescue crew extinguishes a brush fire May 10 at the Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage Preserve, 11655 Cortez Road W., Cortez. Islander Photo: Courtesy Roque Pastorius

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Jody D. Young faces a charge of malicious land burning. He's accused of setting fire to the Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage Preserve, 11655 Cortez Road W., Cortez, according to the Manatee County Sheriff's Office.

Witnesses said they saw Young use a lighter to set the fire.

The preserve is open to the public — owned and maintained by the nonprofit Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage to protect the Cortez coastline and provide a buffer against development for the village.

There were several 911 calls reporting the fire at 5:31 p.m. May 10.

Fire Marshal Rodney Kwiatkowski said the West Manatee Fire Rescue District had a rapid response to the fire, which covered a 50-by-50-foot area and was extinguished within 15 minutes.

WMFR was dispatched at 5:31 p.m. and arrived to the preserve at 5:34 p.m. They were assisted by Cedar Hammock Fire Rescue.

Young was arrested after being identified by a witness who had called 911, Kwiatkowski said.

He was in custody May 13 at Manatee County jail in Palmetto on a charge of third-degree felony malicious land burning. A conviction on the charge could result in a sentence of 10 years in prison.

Bond was set at \$1,500.

Young's arraignment will be 9 a.m. June 16 at the Manatee County Judicial Center in Bradenton.

Roque Pastorius, a Cortez resident, was on his way home and saw the fire as it was being extinguished.

"I just happened upon the scene," said Pastorius, who arrived as WMFR and Cedar Hammock crews were pulling in.

He continued, "They hadn't even started spraying water on it yet. The firefighters were running around getting the hoses and water turned on. So I shot a few pictures."

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“So it was pretty easily contained. It would have reached water had it kept going.”

Von Hahmann added, “I’ll be interested to watch and see how well things grow back.”

The preserve is undergoing the final phase of a four-part initiative to restore the land to its original natural state.

Crews, working under an \$800,000 Sarasota Bay Estuary Program grant remained focused on non-native tree removal and land clearing and SBEP staff scientist Jay Leverone said the fire did not interfere with the work.

“It was a very unfortunate thing,” Leverone said May 11. “Fortunately, people saw him actually starting the fire and called 911. So the emergency response was very quick. It didn’t get very far ... and was not directly within the section that we are currently restoring on the eastern portion of the property.”

SBEP, in partnership with FISH, is removing invasive trees, constructing a tidal wetland, planting native trees and is committed to routine maintenance for up to three months after completion of the project.

FISH also is partnering with the Southwest Florida Water Management District to mitigate drainage and filtration issues at the Sarasota Bay RV Park, 10777 Cortez Road W., Bradenton.

Allowing water from the park, adjacent to the preserve, to run through a wetland of mangroves will create natural filtration and keep pollutant-rich waters from entering the bay, according to Leverone.

Leverone, in a May 11 interview with The Islander, said the phase 4 project is on track to be completed in June.



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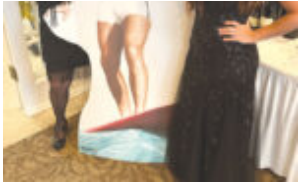
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