



Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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Media Release

From: Michael Terry
Deputy PIO, 352-797-3608

Re: Transient Man Arrested for Starting Brushfire at Sand Hill Scout Reservation
– 2023-15925

Date: May 17, 2023

On 05-17-2023 at 5:41 p.m., deputies with the Hernando County Sheriff's Office were at the Sand Hill Scout Reservation in Spring Hill conducting agency training when a training deputy observed a plume of smoke off in the horizon.

Deputy J. Nelson quickly responded to the origin of the smoke, which was just off the main road in the area of the power lines. Deputy Nelson immediately spotted a subject, later identified as **Marques Thomas DOB/09-23-1992**, standing in proximity to the brushfire. Thomas attempted to flee the area on foot upon seeing Deputy Nelson. Deputy Nelson was able to chase down Thomas and take him into custody without further incident. A lighter was located in Thomas' possession.

Hernando County Fire and Emergency Services and the Florida Forest Service responded to the scene to help extinguish the brushfire. A crew from the Pasco Sheriff's Office also responded with a helicopter equipped with a Bambi Bucket System to help battle the brushfire.

As of 9 p.m. Wednesday, fire officials said the brushfire had consumed 15 acres and was roughly 50 percent contained.

Thomas, a transient, was transported to the Hernando County Detention Center where he later confessed to starting the brushfire. Thomas was charged with **Intentional or Reckless Burning of Lands, Felony Criminal Mischief, Trespass, and Resisting an Officer without Violence**.

Thomas has an extensive criminal history spanning over a decade in Pinellas County for Home Invasion Robbery, Theft, and Felony Battery.

Additional charges are pending further investigation.

The Office of Sheriff:

The Office of the Sheriff is established by the Florida Constitution. As a constitutional officer, the Sheriff has the exclusive authority to administer his or her agency and is responsible for preserving the peace throughout the entire county, carrying out the laws of the state, the orders of Florida courts, and the ordinances of the Board of County Commissioners. The Sheriff is the chief law enforcement and correctional officer of the county.

Sheriff Al Nienhuis was initially appointed as the Sheriff of Hernando County by the Governor in January of 2011. He was then elected by the people of Hernando County in 2012, ran unopposed in 2016, and was re-elected in 2020. Sheriff Nienhuis remains accountable to the people of Hernando County.