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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Multiple agencies battle 11-acre wildfire on Key Peninsula

Key Peninsula Fire Department says its resources are stretched “dangerously thin”

The Key Peninsula Fire Department (KPF) began looking for a fire at 7:30 am Friday morning after receiving calls from residents smelling smoke and seeing ash on their cars. An air search assist from the Washington State Patrol helped to determine the source as coming from a 400-acre timber property near Wright Bliss Road and 150th Avenue.

As of 9:00 pm tonight, 40 fire fighters from seven jurisdictions have responded, including KPF, four other Pierce County fire districts, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, and crews from Mason and Kitsap counties. Fire fighters have contained the blaze at this time, but it is expected to burn for a few days. No structures are at risk from the fire, and no injuries have been reported. The cause of the fire is unknown at this point.

“Mutual aid is critical with fires of this size,” said Chief Tom Lique. “We couldn’t fight a fire like this without it, and multiple calls today have stretched our emergency resources dangerously thin.”

KPF has received four calls for emergency medical service throughout the day unrelated to the fire. Chief Lique says that the protocol is to send an ambulance with two emergency personnel, which leaves the fire district with two less fire fighters battling the blaze on site.

“Under normal conditions our fire department struggles to provide an adequate emergency response because we simply don’t have enough personnel,” said Chief Lique. “If we didn’t have mutual aid on the scene, we might have had to decide which emergency to handle – fight the fire or respond to a medical call. It’s a terrible thing to think about.”

KPF has spent the past year communicating with local residents about its long response times and need for more fire fighters. The National Fire Protection Association says that fire districts its size should be able to respond to a fire or emergency medical call within five minutes 90% of the time. Because of staffing shortages, the department failed to meet this basic standard 85% of the time for fires and almost 92% of the time for medical calls in 2011. As a result, KPF has the fifth highest property losses from fires in Pierce County because of its inability to provide an adequate response. Homeowners have faced higher insurance premiums, as well.

The Board of Fire Commissioners is placing a Maintenance and Operations levy on the November 6th General Election ballot to fund eight full-time fire fighter positions. The levy would cost the owner of a \$175,000 home an additional \$6.42 per month. Better response times are the key to saving lives and property, as well as reducing homeowner insurance premiums, medical and ambulance fees.

The Key Peninsula Fire Department serves 17,000 people over 65 square miles. For more information about the department, visit www.keypeninsulafire.org.

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