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PRESS RELEASE

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Serial Arsonist Faces 20 Years In State Prison

A Willits man decided to enter guilty pleas to 19 separate counts of arson Thursday instead of going to trial in January, according to the Mendocino County District Attorney's Office.

Steven Gene Hensley, 36, faced felony charges of setting 19 fires in various locations in and around the Willits area starting on July 4, 2011 and continuing through August 21, 2011. District Attorney David Eyster, who has handled Hensley's prosecution from its inception, on Thursday announced in the Mendocino County Superior Court a sentence agreement requiring Hensley to be sentenced to a stipulated 20 years in state prison when he returns to court on January 27, 2012.

Hensley will also be required to register for life as an arson offender and each count of arson as admitted by Hensley is a "strike" for purposes of any future felony misconduct under the Three Strikes law. DA Eyster will also be seeking an order in January requiring Hensley to pay restitution to property owners and Cal Fire in the amount of \$354,138.

DA Eyster Thursday thanked fire personnel around the county who day in and day out protect and serve public safety. He was particularly complimentary of the investigation work undertaken in Hensley's case by Cal Fire Captains Shawn Zimmermaker and Craig Dudley.

"The defendant had no way out of this one and realized it. We have Zimmermaker and Dudley to thank for this," said Eyster.