

Deputies and Firefighters Pull Drowning Pair from Columbia River

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One man told deputies he could swim no longer, the other had already gone under and come back up several times.

Deputies from the Columbia County Sheriff's Office and firefighters from Columbia River Fire and Rescue rushed to the north end of Sand Island in the Columbia River on a sheriff's patrol boat when witnesses called out two swimmers in distress.

Two men, who identified themselves as Kawai Niau, 24, and Kyle Snider, 19, both of St. Helens, were pulled from the water at 1:26 p.m. after deputies found the pair floating helplessly downstream. Niau called out to Undersheriff Andy Moyer, Lieutenant Dustin Hald and firefighters Tom Moug and Nolan Gerety, saying he could no longer tread water. Approximately 100 yards, downstream, Snider was losing consciousness and going under.

Rescuers quickly pulled Niau on board the sheriff's patrol boat, and sped off to rescue Snider, who was unresponsive and unable to grasp the rescue rope. Firefighter Moug jumped into the river and secured Snider. Both were pulled back on board. Snider, however was unconscious. He also had sustained a puncture wound, presumably from the wing dam around which they had been swimming.

Niau refused additional medical attention after he was taken to shore. Columbia River Fire and Rescue medics transported Snider to Emanuel Hospital in critical condition.

"This was a matter of seconds before both men would have been beyond our help," said Sheriff Jeff Dickerson. "The quick action of our deputies and the firefighters from Columbia River Fire made the difference today."