



Steven W. Troxler
Commissioner

**North Carolina Department of Agriculture
and Consumer Services**
N.C. Forest Service



Wib L. Owen
Assistant Commissioner
State Forester

September 28, 2012

Honorable Members of the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations, Senate and House Appropriations Subcommittee on Natural and Economic Resources, Senate and House Appropriations Subcommittee on Justice and Public Safety, Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety, Fiscal Research Division:

On behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, I respectfully submit the Annual Report on the B.R.I.D.G.E Young Offenders Program, completed in accordance with the requirements of S.L. 2012-142 HB 950 Part XI, Section 11.1 (b). I am available to answer questions regarding the results of the Department's review. I look forward to working with each of you to achieve the desired results of this report.

Respectfully,

Wib Owen

Attachment

Cc: Steve Troxler, Commissioner, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
David McLeod, Assistant Commissioner, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Ray Starling, General Counsel, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services



**NC DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AND CONSUMER SERVICES
NORTH CAROLINA FOREST SERVICE**



**YOUNG OFFENDERS FOREST CONSERVATION PROGRAM
B.R.I.D.G.E.**

BUILDING - REHABILITATING - INSTRUCTING - DEVELOPING - GROWING - EMPLOYING



B.R.I.D.G.E. ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE REPORT

October 1, 2012

Steve Troxler, Commissioner
Wib L. Owen, State Forester

Pursuant to SESSION LAW 2012-142 HOUSE BILL 950 PART XI, SECTION 11.1.(b), the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, North Carolina Forest Service respectfully submits this annual report on the B.R.I.D.G.E. Young Offenders Program.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

B.R.I.D.G.E. YOUNG OFFENDERS – PRIORITY AND REPORTING

SECTION 11.1.(b) The North Carolina Forest Service shall submit an annual report on the B.R.I.D.G.E. Young Offenders Program no later than October 1 of each year beginning October 1, 2012, to the Fiscal Research Division, the Chairs of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Natural and Economic Resources and the Senate Appropriations Committee on Natural and Economic Resources, the Chairs of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Justice and Public Safety and the Senate Appropriations Committee on Justice and Public Safety, the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations, and the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety. The report shall include the following information for the prior fiscal year:

- (1) The number of young offenders within the custody of the Division of Adult Correction eligible for B.R.I.D.G.E.
- (2) The number of young offenders participating in B.R.I.D.G.E.
- (3) The average daily participation in B.R.I.D.G.E.
- (4) The average duration of participation in B.R.I.D.G.E.
- (5) Summary of activities of B.R.I.D.G.E. participants.

OVERVIEW OF THE B.R.I.D.G.E. YOUNG OFFENDERS PROGRAM

The B.R.I.D.G.E. Program is a cooperative effort between the North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS) and the North Carolina Division of Adult Correction/Prisons (NCDPS). The program is based in Morganton, NC. In response to the horrific fire season of 1985 in which a single fire in Burke County destroyed approximately 5,000 acres and 27 homes, the 1986 North Carolina General Assembly funded the program to provide trained and readily-available crews for wildfire suppression primarily to the counties of Western North Carolina.

While wildfire suppression is the primary goal of B.R.I.D.G.E., inmates and the State as a whole benefit from this unique program in other ways. Inmates are given opportunities to learn a variety of vocational skills and develop strong work ethics so that they may become productive members of society upon release from prison. Crews assist with projects including trail maintenance and construction, painting and sandblasting, forest management, and electrical work. Inmates can earn training certificates in wildland firefighting, acquire forklift operator licenses, and even enroll in light construction courses offered through Western Piedmont Community College. The State has realized a significant return on its investment in the B.R.I.D.G.E. program, as crews help the NCFS nursery program provide direct services to citizens, assist North Carolinians clean up following natural disasters, and complete various work projects for state, county, and local government agencies, as well as schools and non-profit organizations.

The State has also benefited from lower costs and recidivism rates as a result of the B.R.I.D.G.E. Program. Each B.R.I.D.G.E. crewman earns 12.5 cents per hour compared to \$9.25 per hour for an emergency “pick-up” firefighter. Therefore, a five-person B.R.I.D.G.E. crew only costs the State \$5.00 per eight hour shift compared to \$345.20 for a five-person crew of emergency pickup firefighters. The Western NC RSMeans contractor rate for a general laborer on a work project has averaged \$12.68 per hour compared to the B.R.I.D.G.E. crewmen’s 12.5 cents per hour, a cost savings of 99%. Finally, a 2008 unofficial study of recidivism showed that only 7.3% of B.R.I.D.G.E. inmates returned to prison compared to the state average of 37.5%.

Recent changes to the program have included the transfer of seven Project Leader positions from the NCDPS to NCFS effective July 1, 2012. With this transfer, all B.R.I.D.G.E. staff is managed by the NC Forest Service. Due to a declining young inmate population at the Western Youth Institution, B.R.I.D.G.E. staff has in recent months begun working with NCDPS to obtain crewman from local minimum custody prisons.

B.R.I.D.G.E. DATA FOR FY12 (JULY 1, 2011 – JUNE 30, 2012)

(1) The number of young offenders within the custody of the Division of Adult Correction eligible for B.R.I.D.G.E.

Table 1: Inmates available for the program during FY12 by facility

Facility	Number of Inmates
Western Youth Institution	48
Foothills Minimum Custody	4
Caldwell Minimum Custody	4
Marion Minimum Custody	2
Catawba Minimum Custody	10
All other State Correctional facilities	473
Total	541

Data source: NC Department of Public Safety, Office of Research & Planning

Inmate eligibility¹ was determined based on standards provided by the B.R.I.D.G.E. program. These standards include, age, custody level, activity level, time left on sentence, infraction and

¹ B.R.I.D.G.E. eligibility standards:

1. 18 to 25 years old;
2. No sexual offenders;
3. Inmates who have been sentenced for serious assaultive crimes will be referred to the FCC (Facility Classification Committee) for review. For purpose of this policy, serious assaults are defined as assaults that are predatory and resulted in injury. The FCC will review, make recommendation and then forward to the appropriate staff for final disposition;
4. Activity Grade 1 (Grade 2 subject to approval by medical authority);
5. Minimum custody, Level 1;
6. No escape attempts in past 12 months;
7. Minimum time left on sentence 1-3 months from approval;
8. Acceptable to both Division of Forest Resources and Division of Prisons;
9. Final Approval Authority in regard to B.R.I.D.G.E. assignments will be the Unit Manager, the Program Director or in their absence, by an appropriate staff member in a higher classification;
10. Inmate must have remained infraction free for 30 days prior to assignment. Waivers of this rule may be requested on a case by case basis.

offense. Inmates with any infractions during the fiscal year and inmates whose sentence length was shorter than three months were excluded. A case review process also occurs, which may result in exceptions of the standard criteria. This process involves a more thorough review of the inmate's behavior, abilities, and details of the crime. As these reviews are done on a case-by-case basis, there is no definitive way to determine whether all inmates in the above data will be approved for the program.

(2) The number of young offenders participating in B.R.I.D.G.E.

- 191 crewmen participated in B.R.I.D.G.E. for various durations.²

(3) The average daily participation in B.R.I.D.G.E.

- The average daily participation was 42 crewmen.³

(4) The average duration of participation in B.R.I.D.G.E.

- The average duration of crewman participation was 117 days.⁴

(5) Summary of activities of B.R.I.D.G.E. participants.

In FY12, B.R.I.D.G.E. crews provided 72,369 project work hours on 1,552 projects. *Fire Control* accounted for 13,206 hours on 249 projects. *Fire Control* projects not only included direct fire suppression, but also pre-fire firebreak construction and prescribed hazard reduction burns. Other projects included *Community Service*, such as litter control, disaster relief, and education programs; *Construction/Repair/Maintenance*, such as carpentry, painting and equipment maintenance; and *Other Projects*, such as special projects to support search and rescue training and fisheries stocking. The B.R.I.D.G.E. crews also completed *Nursery and Tree Improvement* projects such as seed collection, seedling lifting, chainsaw work, timber stand improvement, and trail maintenance. Education of the B.R.I.D.G.E. crews is also an important part of the program as crewmen receive training in carpentry and constructions skills, fire control skills, and chainsaw and other small equipment operations.

² Determined by adding the total number of inmates assigned to B.R.I.D.G.E. on July 1, 2011 to the total number of inmates who entered the program from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

³ Determined by dividing the number of daily inmate totals from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012 by the total calendar days. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

⁴ Determined by dividing the total participation days from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012 by the total participating crewmen who have been released. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

Table 2: B.R.I.D.G.E. crew project types during FY12

Work Project Types	Project Count	Project Hours
Community Service Projects	47	4,332
Construction/Repair/Maintenance Projects	481	18,500
Fire Control Projects	249	13,206
Nursery And Tree Improvement Projects	614	27,676
Other Projects	5	164
Training Projects	156	8,491
Total	1,552	72,369

Data Source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

B.R.I.D.G.E. Crews assisted 188 different agencies and organizations during FY12, such as McDowell School System, State Parks, various Volunteer Fire Departments, and City and County Governments.

Table 3: B.R.I.D.G.E. crew agency types assisted during FY12

Agency Type	Project Count	Project Hours
Civic/Non-Profit Groups	200	8,038
Federal Government	174	7,738
Local Government	84	4,013
NC Forest Service	768	39,094
Other State Agencies	298	12,346
Schools	28	1,140
Total	1,552	72,369

Data Source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

B.R.I.D.G.E. Crews worked on projects in 35 counties in FY12 from Cherokee County in the west to Wake County in the Piedmont.

Table 4: B.R.I.D.G.E. crew project locations during FY12

County	Project Count	Project Hours	County	Project Count	Project Hours	County	Project Count	Project Hours
Alexander	19	904	Forsyth	1	27	Multi-County	206	9,344
Ashe	50	2,290	Gaston	35	1,515	Polk	2	81
Avery	208	10,974	Graham	2	112	Rutherford	9	342
Buncombe	93	3,892	Haywood	24	915	Surry	7	415
Burke	640	29,511	Henderson	26	1,249	Swain	17	872
Caldwell	24	1,393	Iredell	34	1,204	Transylvania	3	144
Catawba	5	277	Jackson	13	655	Wake	1	120
Chatham	1	32	Lincoln	14	481	Watauga	2	192
Cherokee	1	75	Macon	5	322	Wilkes	44	1,729
Clay	3	456	Madison	7	534	Yadkin	1	36
Cleveland	4	168	McDowell	8	420	Yancey	27	956
Davie	1	45	Mitchell	15	687	TOTAL	1,552	72,369

Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

EXAMPLE B.R.I.D.G.E PROJECTS

Example Forest Fire Project

On March 27, 2012 a B.R.I.D.G.E. crew was working at Dupont State Forest when a wildland fire was reported just a few miles away in Henderson County. Homes were being threatened and residents were being evacuated. When the local Forest Ranger arrived on the fire scene, a B.R.I.D.G.E. crew was ordered. The crew loaded into their vehicle and was dispatched to the fire from Dupont State Forest. They worked alongside other firefighters into the night constructing fireline and protecting homes. Once the fire was contained and determined to be in a monitoring stage, the crew was released for the night. Two B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were dispatched back to the fire scene the next day for a mop-up operation to make sure that the fire was safe for the surrounding homeowners. This fire was reported to have burned 80 acres, threatened and or damaged four homes and out buildings, and forced residents to be evacuated. B.R.I.D.G.E. crews worked a total of 144 crewman hours suppressing this wildland fire. The crews are strategically placed throughout Western North Carolina depending on factors exhibiting where the highest probability of a wildland fire would be.

Example Natural Disaster Project

On January 16, 2012 a request was made for multiple B.R.I.D.G.E. crews to assist local fire departments, volunteers, and municipal organizations with tornado damage debris in eastern Burke County. B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were dispatched and placed throughout the path of destruction where they removed all sorts of debris preparing it to be hauled away. Fourteen crews were on the scene through February 1, 2012. The B.R.I.D.G.E. crews worked a total of 488 crewman hours on debris removal, mostly helping local residents after all other help and support had went back to their normal duties.

Example Work Project

From June 25 - 27, 2012, B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were sent to complete a work request at the McDowell High School football field. This crew used chainsaws, brush cutters and a wood chipper to remove underbrush from the football field perimeter. The B.R.I.D.G.E. crews worked a total of 121 crewman hours cutting, dragging and clearing this underbrush. Completion of this task will prevent children from getting into areas with limited or no visibility and prevent damage to fences and turf. Tasks of this nature are used as training opportunities for BRIDGE crewmen. Time spent on tasks such as this give the crewmen hands-on experience with the tools and personal protective equipment (PPE) that they must be proficient in using when dispatched to a wildland fire or other incident.

CONTACT INFORMATION

The Young Offenders Forest Conservation Program (B.R.I.D.G.E.) trains and utilizes the available inmate population providing rehabilitation and educational opportunities to inmates while providing cost effective services for the protection, development, management, and enjoyment of North Carolina's natural, cultural, and economic resources. For further information, please contact:

Greg Yates
NC Forest Service – Region 3
Regional Forester
Greg.Yates@ncagr.gov
828-665-8688
14 Gaston Mtn. Road
Asheville, NC 28806

Travis Ruff
NC Forest Service – B.R.I.D.G.E.
Camp Director
Travis.Ruff@ncagr.gov
828-438-6267
2161-B Mount Home Church Road
Morganton, NC 28655