



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



Steven W. Troxler
Commissioner

Scott Bissette
Assistant Commissioner

October 1, 2013

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 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,

Scott Bissette

Attachment

Cc: Steve Troxler, Commissioner, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
David Smith, Chief Deputy Commissioner, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Tina Hlabse, General Counsel, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Joy Hicks, Policy Development Analyst, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services



**N.C. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AND CONSUMER SERVICES
NORTH CAROLINA FOREST SERVICE**



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

Building - **R**ehabilitating - **I**nstructing - **D**eveloping - **G**rowing - **E**mploying



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

October 1, 2013

Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler
Assistant Commissioner Scott Bissette

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; in addition to helping the NCFS nursery program, crews provide direct services to citizens by assisting North Carolinians to clean up following natural disasters, and completing 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 \$8.63 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 incorporation of three additional minimum custody prisons. Inmates are now obtained from Foothills Minimum Custody, Caldwell Minimum Custody, Marion Minimum Custody and Western Youth Institution. Due to a declining young inmate population and the closing of the Western Youth Institution, B.R.I.D.G.E. staff has in recent months begun working with NCDPS to obtain crewman from Buncombe Minimum Custody Prison and increased the age range from 18 - 25 to 18 - 32 years of age.

B.R.I.D.G.E. DATA FOR FY13 (JULY 1, 2012 – JUNE 30, 2013)

(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 FY13 by facility

FACILITY	NUMBER OF INMATES
Western Youth Institution	48
Foothills Minimum Custody	2
Caldwell Minimum Custody	3
Marion Minimum Custody	3
Catawba Minimum Custody	8
All other State Correctional facilities	385
Number of young offenders within the custody of the Division of Adult Correction eligible for B.R.I.D.G.E. 7/1/2012 to 6/30/2013	541

Data source: N.C. 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 the N.C. Forest Service 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.

- 146 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 45 crewmen.³

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

- The average duration of crewman participation was 111 days.⁴

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

In FY13, B.R.I.D.G.E. crews provided 67,729 project work hours. *Fire Control* accounted for 8,958 hours. *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. Training and 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 taking the total number of inmates assigned to B.R.I.D.G.E. on July 1, 2011 plus the total number of inmates who entered the program from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

³ Determined by taking daily inmate totals from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013 divided by total calendar days. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

⁴ Determined by taking total participation days from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013 divided by 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 FY13

Work Project Types	Project Count	Project Hours
Community Service Projects	28	5,071
Construction/Repair/Maintenance Projects	119	20,373
Fire Control Projects	37	8,958
Nursery And Tree Improvement Projects	68	23,994
Other Projects	3	225
Training Projects	9	9,108
TOTAL	264	67,729

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

B.R.I.D.G.E. Crews assisted 110 different agencies and organizations during FY13, such as Community Centers, State Parks, Volunteer Fire Departments, City and County Governments.

Table 3: B.R.I.D.G.E. crew agency types assisted during FY13

Agency Type	Project Count	Project Hours
Civic/Non-Profit Groups	38	5,204
Federal Government	9	4,245
Local Government	38	4,707
N.C. Forest Service	118	39,427
Other State Agencies	60	14,058
Schools	1	88
TOTAL	264	67,729

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

B.R.I.D.G.E. Crews worked on projects in/for 30 counties in FY13 from Haywood County in the west to Columbus County in the east.

Table 4: B.R.I.D.G.E. crew project locations during FY13

County	Count	Hours	County	Count	Hours	County	Count	Hours
Alexander	4	218	Davidson	1	54	Polk	2	484
Ashe	13	1,536	Gaston	5	1,254	Rutherford	4	547
Avery	45	13,527	Graham	1	72	Surry	4	1,255
Buncombe	7	1,138	Haywood	6	3,640	Transylvania	9	2,875
Burke	85	24,890	Henderson	3	754	Wake	2	315
Caldwell	14	3,515	Iredell	1	936	Watauga	1	250
Catawba	4	289	Lincoln	1	130	Wayne	2	377
Chatham	3	338	Madison	4	625	Wilkes	15	2,772
Columbus	2	474	McDowell	9	2,256	Yadkin	1	165
Cumberland	2	207	Mitchell	7	1,698	Yancey	7	1,138

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

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

Example Forest Fire Project

On November 26, 2012 B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were working in Burke and Wilkes Counties when a wildland fire was reported just a few miles away in Caldwell County where homes were being threatened. When the local Forest Ranger arrived on the fire scene, two B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were ordered. The crews loaded into their vehicles and were dispatched to the fire from the work locations. They worked alongside other firefighters into the night constructing fireline and protecting homes. Suppression efforts were unsuccessful during the night and the fire remained uncontained for five days. Seventeen B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were dispatched back to the fire scene over the next four days for suppression and mop-up operations to make sure that the fire was safe for the surrounding homeowners. This fire was reported to have burned approximately 175 acres of woodland. B.R.I.D.G.E. crews worked a total of 1,216 crewman hours suppressing this wildland fire. As fire danger increases crews are strategically placed throughout Western NC.

Example Natural Disaster Project

During June and July requests were made for multiple B.R.I.D.G.E. crews to assist local fire departments, volunteers, and N.C. Emergency Management for flood response in Madison, Lincoln and Caldwell Counties. B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were dispatched and placed throughout the path of destruction where they constructed multiple foot bridges across creeks for residents who had been stranded. The installation of foot bridges is necessary for residents who have medical disabilities and possible life threatening situations if transportation is not made accessible.

Ten B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were utilized and worked a total of 628 crewman hours during this effort. Although this was a year with an unusually high rainfall amount B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were prepared and available for this response. These crews have met the needs of flood victims for over twenty years. This experience has developed an equipped well trained group who responds to immediate requests.

Example Work Project

During March and April B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were sent to Burke and Mitchell Counties to assist N.C. Emergency Management with logistical support for two extensive Search and Rescue Training events. These crews were utilized daily to meet the logistical needs for the entire Incident Command Post. These events included emergency services personnel from all over the Southeastern United States. The B.R.I.D.G.E. crews worked a total of 882 crewman hours during these events. Tasks of this nature are used as training opportunities for B.R.I.D.G.E. crewmen providing 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:

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