



Steven W. Troxler
Commissioner

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



Scott Bissette
Assistant Commissioner

October 1, 2014

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 - REHABILITATING - INSTRUCTING - DEVELOPING - GROWING - EMPLOYING



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

October 1, 2014

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 Young Offenders Program (B.R.I.D.G.E.).

STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

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

SECTION 11.1.(b) The North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS) shall submit an annual report on the Young Offenders Program (B.R.I.D.G.E.) 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 Corrections (DAC) 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.

B.R.I.D.G.E. DATA FOR FY 2013-14

- (1) **The number of young offenders in DAC custody eligible for B.R.I.D.G.E.**

Table 1: Inmates available for the program during FY 2013-14 by facility

FACILITY	NUMBER OF INMATES
Caldwell Minimum Custody	3
Catawba Minimum Custody	5
Foothills Minimum Custody	5
Marion Minimum Custody	2
All other State Correctional facilities	779
Number of young offenders within the custody of the Division of Adult Correction eligible for B.R.I.D.G.E. between July 1, 2013 and June 30, 2014	794

Data source: N.C. Department of Public Safety, Office of Research & Planning

Crewmen eligibility is determined based on standards provided by the B.R.I.D.G.E. program. Standards include: (1) 18 to 32 years old; (2) No sexual offenders; (3) Inmates who have been sentenced for serious assaultive crimes will be referred to the Facility Classification Committee (FCC) 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 sentence

remainder length one-three months from approval; (8) Acceptable to both NCFS and DAC; (9) Final approval authority will be the Unit Manager, Program Director, an appointed 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.

A thorough case review of the inmates' behavior, abilities and crime details may result in an exception of the standard criteria. Reviews are done on a case-by-case basis, therefore no definitive way to determine whether all inmates in the above data will be approved for the program.

(2) Number of young offenders participating:

- 171 crewmen for various durations¹

(3) Average daily participation:

- 55 crewmen²

(4) Crewman average duration:

- 160 days³

(5) Summary of activities:

- 85,539 total work hours
- Fire Control - 18,964 hours – including fire control skills, direct fire suppression, pre-fire firebreak construction, and prescribed hazard reduction burns
- Construction Repair and Maintenance – including carpentry, painting, and equipment maintenance
- Projects to support search and rescue training and fisheries stocking
- Nursery and Tree Improvement - projects such as seed collection, seedling lifting, chainsaw work, timber stand improvement, and trail maintenance
- Education - crewmen receive training in carpentry and constructions skills, forklift operation, ATV, chipper, mower, chainsaw and other small equipment operations
- Community Service - litter sweep assigned areas and disaster relief

¹ Determined by taking the total number of inmates assigned to B.R.I.D.G.E. on July 1, 2013 plus the total number of inmates who entered the program from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

² Determined by taking daily inmate totals from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014 divided by total calendar days. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

³ Determined by taking total participation days from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014 divided by total participating crewmen who have been released. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

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

The B.R.I.D.G.E. Program is a cooperative effort between the North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS) and the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NCDPS) – Division of Adult Corrections (DAC). The program was created in response to the 1985 horrific fire season 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 dispatch on wildfire suppression primarily to the counties of Western North Carolina.

While wildfire suppression is the primary goal of B.R.I.D.G.E., crewmen and the state as a whole benefit from this unique program in other ways. Crewmen are given opportunities to learn a variety of vocational skills and develop strong work ethics so they may become productive members of society upon parole. Crewmen can also earn training certificates in wildland firefighting, acquire forklift operator licenses, and 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; crews assist with projects including trail maintenance and construction, painting and sandblasting, forest management, electrical work, provide assistance following natural disasters, aid the NCFS nursery program in providing direct services to citizens, 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. A B.R.I.D.G.E. crewman earns 12.5 cents per hour in comparison to an emergency pick-up firefighter at \$8.73 per hour. A five-person B.R.I.D.G.E. crew only costs the state \$5.00 per eight hour shift compared to \$349.20 for a five-person crew of emergency pickup firefighters. The western North Carolina RSMeans general laborer contractor rate averages \$12.68 per hour, a B.R.I.D.G.E. crewmen is a savings of 99 percent. Finally, a 2008 unofficial study of recidivism showed that only 7.3 percent of B.R.I.D.G.E. inmates returned to prison compared to the state average of 37.5 percent.

Recent changes to the program have included the incorporation of an additional minimum custody prison. Inmates are now obtained from Caldwell, Craggy, Foothills and Marion Minimum Custody Units. Due to a declining young inmate population the age range has been increased from 18 - 25 to 18 - 32 years of age.

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

Example Forest Fire Suppression

During FY 2013-14, 13 well-trained and readily available B.R.I.D.G.E. crews assisted with suppression activities on multiple wildfires. The crews responded to western North Carolina counties requests via helicopter or vehicle providing initial and extended attack manpower. Crews were strategically placed throughout the western part of the state, dependent upon exhibiting factors of the highest wildland fire probability.

Example Prescribed Burning

During FY2013-14, the N.C. Forest Service, U.S. Forest Service, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, N.C. State Parks, and the N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services requested and utilized B.R.I.D.G.E. crews in various counties to maintain control of prescribed burns of various sizes. Through prescribed burning, B.R.I.D.G.E. crews gain an abundance of knowledge in fire behavior, which develops experienced firefighters for future wildfire dispatch. Having trained and skilled firefighters available for immediate dispatch is an invaluable benefit to the citizens of western North Carolina.

Example Work Project

B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were dispatched to DuPont State Recreational Forest in Transylvania County to assist in the development of a large visitor parking lot. Crews operated chainsaws and brush chippers to clear trees and underbrush for excavating. Crews also created sediment stabilization through landscaping, seeding, and placing riprap and silt fences. The new visitor parking area allowed for the installation of a large foot bridge that opened on July 1, 2014. The project has enhanced the overall experience and significantly improved the safety for visitors.

B.R.I.D.G.E. DATA FOR FY 2013-14

Table 2: Crew Project Types & Hours

Work Project Types	Project Count	Project Hours
Community Service	34.00	2,037.00
Construction/Repair/Maintenance	682.00	24,149.00
Fire Control	295.00	15,962.00
Nursery and Tree Improvement	678.00	32,933.00
Other	19.00	1,517.00
Training	280.00	9,323.00
TOTAL	1,988.00	85,921.00

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

B.R.I.D.G.E. Crews assisted 127 different agencies and organizations during the fiscal year such as the NCFS Claridge Nursery, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, DuPont State Recreational Forest, N.C. State Parks, various emergency management and volunteer fire departments, as well as, city and county governments.

Table 3: Agency Types Assisted

Agency Type	Project Count	Project Hours
Civic/Non-Profit Groups	217.00	9,445.00
Federal Government	107.00	4,055.00
Local Government	97.00	4,802.00
N.C. Forest Service	1,260.00	53,245.00
Other State Agencies	296.00	13,826.00
Schools	11.00	548.00
TOTAL	1,988.00	85,921.00

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

B.R.I.D.G.E. Crews worked on projects in 35 counties from Cherokee County to Wayne County.

Table 4: Project Locations

County	Project Count	Project Hours	County	Project Count	Project Hours	County	Project Count	Project Hours
Alexander	4	141.00	Davidson	7	196.00	Mitchell/Rutherford	19	870.00
Ashe	30	1,469.00	Gaston	28	1,315.00	Polk	14	848.00
Avery	291	15,432.00	Graham	3	452.00	Richmond	1	35.00
Bladen	38	707.50	Haywood	28	1813.00	Rutherford	8	496.00
Buncombe	137	6,395.00	Henderson	145	6,014.50	Swain	21	1,144.00
Burke	716	27,106.00	Iredell	21	1,017.00	Transylvania	40	1,652.00
Burke/Catawba	1	40.00	Jackson	6	254.00	Wake	1	48.00
Caldwell	39	1,827.00	Lenoir	1	60.00	Wayne	55	2,336.00
Catawba	28	1,254.00	Lincolnton	1	32.00	Wilkes	92	4,246.00
Cherokee	1	56.00	Macon	8	726.00	Yadkin	1	54.00
Clay	1	80.00	Madison	17	773.00	Yancey	6	241.00
Cleveland	19	919.00	McDowell	93	3,576.00	TOTAL	1,988	85,921.00
Cumberland	12	156.00	Mitchell	55	2,140.00			

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

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