



NORTH CAROLINA 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



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

Oct. 1, 2022

Steve Troxler, Commissioner
Scott Bisette, Assistant Commissioner
David Lane, State Forester

Pursuant to SESSION LAW 2012-142 HOUSE BILL 950 PART XI, SECTION 11.1. (b), the North Carolina Forest Service, a division of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, respectfully submits this annual report on the Young Offenders Forest Conservation Program (B.R.I.D.G.E.) for fiscal year 2022.

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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 Young Offenders Forest Conservation Program (B.R.I.D.G.E.) no later than Oct. 1 of each year beginning Oct. 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 offenders within the custody of the N.C. Department of Public Safety (DPS) Division of Adult Corrections (DAC) eligible for B.R.I.D.G.E.
- (2) The number of 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 YOUNG OFFENDERS FOREST CONSERVATION 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 Correction (DAC). The program was created in response to the horrific 1985 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.

Wildfire suppression is the primary goal of B.R.I.D.G.E., however, crewmen and the state benefit from this unique program in additional ways. Crewmen are given opportunities to learn a variety of vocational skills and develop strong work ethic so they may become productive members of society upon parole. Crewmen can earn National Wildfire Coordinating Group certificates in wildland firefighting and forklift operator licenses. The state has realized a significant return on its investment from the B.R.I.D.G.E. Program. Crews assist in work projects including trail maintenance and construction, painting and sandblasting, forest management,

natural disaster assistance, aiding the NCFS nursery program as well as providing direct services to residents by completing various work projects for state, county, and local government agencies in addition to schools and nonprofit organizations.

The state has also benefited from an immense reduction in project costs when utilizing the B.R.I.D.G.E. program crewmen. A B.R.I.D.G.E. crewman earns just \$0.125/hour compared to an emergency pickup firefighter at \$12.05/hour. The cost comparison of a daily five-person crew from B.R.I.D.G.E. is just \$5.00 while an emergency pickup firefighter's cost is \$482.00, resulting in a daily savings of \$477.00.

The Western North Carolina RSMeans average pay rate for a general laborer contractor is \$15.18 per hour, which equals a savings of 99% when B.R.I.D.G.E. crewmen are used. In addition, a 2008 unofficial study of recidivism showed that only 7.3% of inmates in the B.R.I.D.G.E. program returned to prison compared to the state average of 37.5%.

A total of 75 inmate positions are obtained from Caldwell Correctional Center and Foothills Correctional Institution.

SUMMARY OF B.R.I.D.G.E. DATA

Eligible Offenders

Eligible Inmates Available for Participation by NCDPS

Facility	Number of Inmates
Caldwell Correctional Center	16
Foothills Correctional Institution	13
Other State Correctional facilities	782
Total eligible offenders within DAC custody between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022	811

Data source: NCDPS, Office of Research & Planning

Crewman eligibility is determined according to standards provided by the B.R.I.D.G.E. program that include: male; ages 18 to 36; minimum custody level; no sexual offenders or serious assaults predatory in nature or resulting in injury; no escape attempts in the past 12 months; 30 days infraction-free; and, acceptable to both NCFS and DOC. Rule waivers may be requested on a per case basis.

Offenders Participating in B.R.I.D.G.E.

Data source: NCDPS statistics youthful offenders' eligibility and enrollment report

- Participated for various durations: 24 crewmen
- Daily average participation: 9 crewmen
- Average duration of participation: 133 days per crewman

Summary of Activities

20,931 Total Work Hours in FY22

Fire control – including fire control skills, direct fire suppression, pre-fire suppression firebreaks, helitack and prescribed hazard reduction burns.

Construction repair and maintenance – including carpentry, basic electrical and plumbing, painting and equipment maintenance.

Support emergency management – aid during search and rescue missions, construct footbridges, assist with training requests, perform chainsaw work and removal of downed trees in response to disasters such as ice/snowstorms, hurricanes and flooding.

Nursery and tree improvement – complete projects such as seed collection, Fraser fir reproduction, tree planting, lifting seedlings, chainsaw work and timber stand improvement.

Education – crewmen receive training in wildland firefighting, helitack, type IV engine operation, chainsaw, first aid, carpentry and construction, forklift and UTV operation, mowing equipment, chipper and other small equipment operations.

Community service – trail/grounds construction and maintenance, NCDOT litter sweep in designated area, landscape and groundskeeping.

PROJECT EXAMPLES and HOURS

Significant Forest Fire Suppression Efforts

Thoroughly trained B.R.I.D.G.E. crews worked long hours in extreme conditions conducting suppression activities on multiple wildfires during fire season. Crews were staged throughout western North Carolina based on fire danger and resource availability to provide initial and extended attack manpower.

Efforts of initial attack crews were essential in Surry County multiday fires including the Sauratown Mountain Fire and the Grindstone Fire on Pilot Mountain. Crewman also worked multiple operational periods on the Huntsville Mountain Fire in McDowell County that burned over 400 acres. B.R.I.D.G.E. crews contributed over 5,600 working hours on seasonal fire incidents.

Natural Disaster Project

Tropical Storm Fred flooded the town of Cruso in August 2021. Emergency Management requested B.R.I.D.G.E. crews to assist local fire departments, volunteers, and emergency personnel with debris clearing and foot bridge construction. Crews were placed throughout the path of destruction utilizing chainsaw operations to clear trees and underbrush to support emergency personnel during extensive search and rescue missions.

Multiple foot bridges were constructed for stranded residents, some with disabilities, in need of medical assistance or supplies, nourishment, or in areas that vehicle transportation was not accessible. B.R.I.D.G.E. crews contributed over 1,300 working hours during this effort.

Work Projects

In November 2021, crews contributed approximately 200 working hours at the North Carolina Governor's Western Residence to remove hazardous trees utilizing chainsaw and chipper operations. In addition to being a significant cost savings to the state, the project provided beneficial saw training for the project leaders as well as valuable training and work ethics for the crewmen.

Crews provided over 800 working hours at the Western North Carolina Agriculture Center on painting projects, ground maintenance, livestock shows and preparations for the 2021 WNC Mountain State Fair.

Crews painted the Asheville NCDA&CS Soil and Water Conservation building and the NCFS Region 3 Headquarters. They also constructed the NCFS Aviation rock sign which provided the state with savings of approximately \$41,000.

Project Types

B.R.I.D.G.E. crews utilize their classroom and field training for a variety of work projects including natural disaster assistance, forest management, trail maintenance and construction.

Crew Work Project Types	Hours
Community Service Projects	1,443
Construction/Repair/Maintenance Projects	5,614
Fire Control Projects/Disaster Relief	9,217
Nursery and Tree Improvement Projects	1,607
Other Projects	588
Training Projects	2,462
Total	20,931

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

Agencies Assisted

B.R.I.D.G.E. crews assisted 84 agencies and organizations during the 2022 fiscal year such as the N.C. Western Agricultural Center, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, DuPont State Recreational Forest, Emergency Management, Volunteer Fire Departments and local governments.

Agency Type Assisted	Hours
Civic/Nonprofit Groups	2,443
Federal Government	243
Local Government	2,301
N.C. Forest Service	12,702
Other State Agencies	3,066
Schools	176
Total	20,931

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

Counties Assisted

B.R.I.D.G.E. crews are subject to work in all North Carolina counties but primarily work within the 32 counties in Region 3.

Project Locations & Hours

County	Project Hours	County	Project Hours	County	Project Hours
ALEXANDER	120	HENDERSON	712	SWAIN	482
AVERY	2408	HOKE	15	TRANSYLVANIA	615
BUNCOMBE	4243	JACKSON	819	WAKE	58
BURKE	3086	MADISON	213	WATAUGA	36
CALDWELL	144	MCDOWELL	1449	WILKES	705
CATAWBA	348	MITCHELL	180	YANCEY	78
CHEROKEE	139	MITCHELL/RUTHERFORD	350	MULTI-COUNTY	2402
DAVIDSON	24	POLK	30		
GASTON	259	RUTHERFORD	183		
GRAHAM	60	STOKES	526		
HAYWOOD	914	SURRY	333	Total Hours	20,931

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

CONTACT INFORMATION

For further information about the B.R.I.D.G.E. program, please contact:

Greg Smith
N.C. Forest Service – Region 3 Mountain Division Director
N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Greg.Smith@ncagr.gov
828-665-8688
14 Gaston Mountain Road, Asheville, NC 28806

Kenneth Burns
North Carolina Forest Service – B.R.I.D.G.E. Director
N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Kenneth.Burns@ncagr.gov
828-544-6601
2161-B Mount Home Church Road, Morganton, NC 28655