



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, 2015

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.).

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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 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 FY2015

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

Table 1: Inmates available for the program by facility

FACILITY	NUMBER OF INMATES
Caldwell Minimum Custody	9
Catawba Minimum Custody	1
Foothills Minimum Custody	2
Marion Minimum Custody	1
All other State Correctional facilities	919
Number of young offenders within the custody of the Division of Adult Correction eligible for B.R.I.D.G.E. between July 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015	932

Data source: NC 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 conducted on an each 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:

- 61 per crewmen²

(4) Crewman average duration:

- 212 days³

(5) Summary of activities:

- 76,777 total work hours
- Fire Control – 19,951 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. as of July 1, 2014 plus the total number of inmates who entered the program from July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

² Determined by taking daily inmate totals from July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015 divided by total calendar days. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

³ Determined by taking total participation days by crewmen who have been released prior to June 30, 2015. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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.

Wildfire suppression is the primary goal of B.R.I.D.G.E.; however, 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 that 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, natural disasters assistance, 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 \$9.21 per hour. A five-person B.R.I.D.G.E. crew only costs the State \$5.00 per eight hour shift compared to \$368.40 for a five-person crew of emergency pickup firefighters. The Western NC RSMeans general laborer contractor rate averaged \$12.68 per hour, a B.R.I.D.G.E. crewmen would be a 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%.

Inmates are obtained from Caldwell Correctional Center, Craggy Correctional Center, Foothills Correctional Institution, and Marion Correctional Institution.

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

Example Forest Fire Suppression Project

During FY2015, ten well-trained and readily available B.R.I.D.G.E. crews assisted with suppression activities on multiple wildfires. The crews responded to Western NC Counties requests via helicopter or vehicle providing initial and extended attack manpower. Crews were strategically placed throughout Western NC dependent upon exhibiting factors of the highest wildland fire probability.

On March 31, 2015, four crews were dispatched for initial attack on the Buncombe County Weed Lane Wildfire; two crews were dispatched by suburban, one by helicopter, and one by engine. Two hours later, two more crews consisting of six staff members and 31 inmates joined the suppression efforts. Crewmen worked long hours in extremely harsh conditions, taking some into the next day before being relieved. On the second day, three of crews that had been released the night before returned to the fire relieving those who worked throughout the night.

Simultaneously, two additional crews were dispatched to the Mitchell County Poplar Fire where no man power was available. The efforts of the initial attack crews was essential in the suppression of both multiday fires.

Example Work Project

B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were dispatched to the NCFS Mountain Training Facility in Crossnore, NC to remodel an antiquated restroom. All aspects of a remodeling project from demolition to finish work was successfully accomplished, providing restroom facilities for men and women, transforming one restroom into two. Crews removed and replaced walls, floors, floor tile, commodes, sinks, and showers.

This project not only provided inmates with valuable job training, work ethics, and essential life skills through the 528 man-hours contributed, it also saved the state a substantial amount in tax paying dollars. The informal contractual cost estimate was \$45,000; whereas under \$10,000 was spent on materials.

Table 2: Crew Project Types & Hours

Work Project Types	Project Count	Project Hours
Community Service Projects	54	2,970
Construction/Repair/Maintenance Projects	704	32,766
Fire Control Projects	431	25,754
Nursery And Tree Improvement Projects	126	8,343
Other Projects	6	492
Training Projects	195	6,452
TOTAL	1,506	76,777

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

B.R.I.D.G.E. Crews assisted 133 different agencies and organizations during the fiscal year such as Claridge Nursery, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, DuPont Recreational State Forest, 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	172	8,417
Federal Government	48	2,584
Local Government	86	4,389
NC Forest Service	916	47,525
Other State Agencies	277	1,3510
Schools	7	352
TOTAL	1,506	76,777

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

B.R.I.D.G.E. Crews worked on projects in 34 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	6	285	Henderson	91	4,627	Wake	1	75
Alleghany	8	540	Iredell	16	730	Watauga	6	542
Ashe	26	1,250	Macon	2	228	Wilkes	60	2,796
Avery	233	13,634	Madison	20	1,041	Yadkin	1	45
Buncombe	129	7,379	McDowell	68	3,989	Yancey	4	210
Burke	401	18,761	Mitchell	44	2,463	Multi-County	194	7,696
Caldwell	41	2,042	Polk	3	156			
Catawba	5	338	Rutherford	8	429			
Cleveland	36	1,706	Stokes	6	437			
Cumberland	1	27	Surry	3	207			
Gaston	46	2,190	Swain	8	558			
Haywood	3	224	Transylvania	36	2,172	TOTAL	1,506	76,777

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

CONTACT INFORMATION

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