



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



**YOUNG OFFENDERS FOREST CONSERVATION PROGRAM
(BRIDGE Program)**

BUILDING - REHABILITATING - INSTRUCTING - DEVELOPING - GROWING - EMPLOYING



**BRIDGE ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE REPORT
Fiscal Year 2016**

Submitted October 1, 2016

Steve Troxler, Agriculture Commissioner
Scott Bissette, Assistant Commissioner

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

BRIDGE YOUNG OFFENDERS – PRIORITY AND REPORTING

SECTION 11.1.(b) The North Carolina Forest Service shall submit an annual report on the 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 North Carolina Division of Adult Corrections (NCDAC) eligible for BRIDGE.
- (2) The number of young offenders participating in BRIDGE.
- (3) The average daily participation in BRIDGE.
- (4) The average duration of participation in BRIDGE.
- (5) Summary of activities of BRIDGE participants.

BRIDGE DATA FOR FY16

- (1) The number of young offenders in NCDAC custody eligible for BRIDGE

Table 1: Inmates available for the program by facility

FACILITY	NUMBER OF INMATES
Caldwell Minimum Custody	1
Catawba Minimum Custody	1
Foothills Minimum Custody	3
Marion Minimum Custody	2
All other State Correctional facilities	725
Number of young offenders within the custody of the NCDAC eligible for BRIDGE between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2016	732

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

Eligibility to serve as a crewman is determined based on standards provided by the BRIDGE program. Standards include: (1) 18 to 32 years old; (2) No sexual offenders; and, (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 result in injury. The FCC reviews, makes recommendation, and then forwards 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 NCDAC; (9) Final approval authority by 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. Since reviews are conducted 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) Number of young offenders participating:
 - 163 crewmen for various durations¹
- (3) Average daily participation:
 - 53 crewmen²
- (4) Crewman average duration:
 - 209 days³
- (5) Summary of activities:
 - 74,524 total work hours
 - Fire Control - 24,249 hours during FY16 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

¹ Determined by taking the total number of inmates assigned to BRIDGE as of July 1, 2015 plus the total number of inmates who entered the program from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016. Data source: NCFS BRIDGE.

² Determined by taking daily inmate totals from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016 divided by total calendar days. Data source: NCFS BRIDGE.

³ Determined by taking total participation days by crewmen who have been released prior to June 30, 2016. Data source: NCFS BRIDGE.

- 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

OVERVIEW OF THE BRIDGE PROGRAM

The BRIDGE 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 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 BRIDGE. 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 BRIDGE Program. Crews assist with projects such as trail maintenance and construction, painting and sandblasting, forest management, electrical work, natural disasters assistance, assisting the NCFS nursery program in providing direct services to citizens, and completing various work projects for state, county, local government agencies, schools, and non-profit organizations.

The State has also benefited from lower costs and recidivism rates as a result of the BRIDGE Program. A BRIDGE crewman earns 12.5 cents per hour in comparison to an emergency pick-up firefighter at \$9.21 per hour. A five-person BRIDGE crew only costs the State \$5.00 per eight-hour shift compared to \$368.40 for a five-person crew of emergency pickup firefighters. At the Western NC RSMeans general laborer average contractor rate \$12.68 per hour, a BRIDGE crewmen is a savings of 99%. Finally, a 2008 unofficial study of recidivism showed that only 7.3% of BRIDGE inmates returned to prison compared to the state average of 37.5%.

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

SIGNIFICANT FOREST FIRE SUPPRESSION

Western North Carolina experienced extreme fire conditions during Spring 2016 in which BRIDGE Crews participated in numerous fire suppression projects. Examples:

- North Peak Fire in McDowell County - Beginning on March 23, temperatures in the upper 70's, RH's near single digits, and winds at 10 mph gusting to 19 mph created extreme fire behavior. The burned area was 570 acres. BRIDGE Crewmen logged 1,208 hours in four days on this fire.
- State Line Fire in Madison County - Began on April 16 with unseasonably hot and dry weather. Fire line construction was very difficult requiring mostly hand work. BRIDGE Crewmen logged 502 hours in four days on this fire while also working additional regional fires.
- Silver Mine Fire in Hot Springs, Madison County – Began on April 21 near a prepositioned fire suppression BRIDGE Crew. The BRIDGE Crew and BRIDGE HELITACK Crew began protecting structures while the North Carolina Air Resources supported with water drops. Approximately 600 acres burned the first few hours and about 2,000 the following day. BRIDGE Crewmen logged 357 hours over the next few days. The fire was 5,700 acres, which is extremely large for Western North Carolina.

Considering the extreme fire behavior conditions and steep Western North Carolina terrain, the loss of homes and properties would have been much greater without the fire suppression efforts of BRIDGE Crews.

PROJECT ASSISTANCE

BRIDGE Crews assisted multiple agencies and organizations during the fiscal year, such as Claridge Nursery, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, DuPont Recreational State Forest, NC State Parks, various Emergency Management and Volunteer Fire Departments, and many City and County Governments.

Table 2: Crew Project Types

Work Project Types	Project Hours
Community Service	1921
Construction/Repair/Maintenance	30270
Fire Control	26430
Nursery and Tree Improvement	6960
Other Projects	271
Training	8672
TOTAL	74,524

Table 3: Agency Types Assisted

Agency Type	Project Hours
Civic/Non-Profit Groups	8184
Federal Government	3039
Local Government	4379
NC Forest Service	47000
Other State Agencies	11922
Schools	0
TOTAL	74,524

BRIDGE Crews worked on projects in 34 counties from Cherokee County to Wayne County.

Table 4: Project Locations

County	Project Hours		County	Project Hours		County	Project Hours
Alexander	948		Davidson	314		Polk	523
Alleghany	551		Gaston	1423		Rutherford	609
Ashe	1209		Graham	333		Surry	235
Avery	11763		Haywood	184		Swain	176
Buncombe	7977		Henderson	4179		Transylvania	1492
Burke	7545		Iredell	902		Wake	537
Caldwell	1782		Jackson	735		Watauga	149
Catawba	458		Lincoln	32		Wilkes	3146
Chatham	28		Macon	40		Yadkin	664
Cherokee	354		Madison	1520		Yancey	660
Clay	117		McDowell	5020		Multi-County	17610
Cleveland	553		Mitchell	756		TOTAL	74,524

Tables 2- 4 Data Source: NCFS BRIDGE

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