



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



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

October 1, 2019

Steve Troxler, Commissioner
Scott Bissette, 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 Program (B.R.I.D.G.E.) for fiscal year 2019.

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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 N.C. Department of Public Safety (DPS) 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.

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 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 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 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 non-profit organizations.

The state has also benefited from lower costs and recidivism rates because 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 \$11.48 per hour. A five-person B.R.I.D.G.E. crew only costs the state \$5.00 per eight-hour shift, compared to \$459.20 for a five-person crew of emergency pickup firefighters. The Western North Carolina RSMeans average general laborer contractor rate is \$12.68 per hour, which equals a savings of 99 percent if a B.R.I.D.G.E. crewmen is used. 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.

A total of 73 inmate positions are obtained from Caldwell Correctional Center, Craggy Correctional Center, Foothills Correctional Institution and Marion Correctional Institution.

SUMMARY OF B.R.I.D.G.E. DATA FOR FY 2018-19

The number of young offenders eligible

Table 1. Inmates available by facility in N.C. Department of Public Safety custody eligible for participation in B.R.I.D.G.E.

FACILITY	NUMBER OF INMATES
Caldwell Minimum Custody Correctional Center	2
Foothills Minimum Custody Correctional Institution	6
Marion Minimum Custody Correctional Institution	1
All other State Correctional facilities	825
Total number of young offenders within the custody of the Division of Adult Correction eligible for B.R.I.D.G.E. between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019	834

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 a recommendation and then forward to the appropriate staff for final disposition; (4) Activity Grade 1 and 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 and 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 inmate's behavior, abilities and crime details may result in an exception of the standard criteria. Reviews are conducted on a per case basis. Consequently, there is no definitive way to determine whether all inmates in the above data will be approved for the program.

The number of young offenders participating in B.R.I.D.G.E.

In fiscal year 2019, 178 crewmen participated for various durations¹ in the B.R.I.D.G.E. program.

Average daily participation

Daily participation in B.R.I.D.G.E. is 58 crewmen².

Average duration of participation

The average duration of participation in B.R.I.D.G.E. is 186 days³ per crewman.

Summary of activities of B.R.I.D.G.E. participants

- 68,565 total work hours
- Fire control – 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, 2018, plus the total number of inmates who entered the program from July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

² Determined by taking daily inmate totals from July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019 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, 2019. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

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

Example of emergency response efforts

Thoroughly trained and readily available B.R.I.D.G.E. crews assisted in wildland fire suppression and disaster recovery activities following flooding in Western North Carolina. Although fire suppression activities were light for the period, crews were strategically placed on work projects during the high fire danger days. These wildland fire suppression activities totaled 15,898 man-hours.

In June, many counties were significantly affected by heavy rains and flooding primarily attributed to statewide heavy precipitation. Some individuals were identified as having pre-existing medical conditions and would likely require immediate access to medical facilities. BRIDGE crews responded to N.C. Emergency Management requests for individual and public assistance. Crews were dispatched to build foot bridges for victims who lost access to main roads. Multiple foot bridges were constructed in several counties totaling 442 man-hours.

The aforementioned emergency response total work-hours of 16,340 at a rate of \$0.125 per hour, equal a meager \$2,042.50 cost when utilizing inmates.

Examples of work projects

B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were dispatched to multiple Western NC counties for hemlock restoration. Crews assisted the N.C. Forest Service Forest Health Branch and Hemlock Restoration Initiative in administering insecticides to control the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA). The HWA is a tiny insect related to aphids that is native to East Asia. The HWA feeds by sucking sap from the hemlock causing widespread death and decline in the eastern United States, particularly in the southern Appalachian Mountains. Manual insecticide treatment is currently the only effective tool for preserving the hemlocks. Research is being conducted using predatory beetles and the development of resistant hemlocks. Crews measured tree diameter, recorded the number of trees treated, mixed and applied insecticide. Collected data illustrated that over 41,000 individual hemlock trees with more than 176,000 diameter inches have been treated thus far. This operation not only provided a forest health benefit and a significant cost savings for the state, but gave inmates valuable job training, work ethics, and essential life skills through the 5,607 man-hours contributed.

Table 2. B.R.I.D.G.E. crew project types and hours, FY19

Work Project Types	Project Hours
Community Service Projects	3,403
Construction/Repair/Maintenance Projects	30,328
Fire Control Projects / Disaster Relief	16,340
Nursery and Tree Improvement Projects	10,195
Other Projects	502
Training Projects	7,797
Total	68,565

B.R.I.D.G.E. Crews assisted 153 different agencies and organizations during the fiscal year such as DuPont State Recreational Forest, N.C. State Parks, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, various emergency management and volunteer fire departments, as well as city and county governments.

Table 3. Types of agencies assisted by B.R.I.D.G.E. participants in FY19

Agency Type	Project Hours
Civic/Non-Profit Groups	7,294
Federal Government	373
Local Government	2,978
N.C. Forest Service	41,821
Other State Agencies	15,915
Schools	184
Total	68,565

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

B.R.I.D.G.E. Crews trained and worked on projects in 33 counties from Cherokee County to Johnston County.

Table 4. B.R.I.D.G.E. project locations in FY19

County	Project Hours	County	Project Hours	County	Project Hours
Alexander	411	Henderson	5939	Surry	223
Alleghany	396	Iredell	505	Swain	323
Ashe	1417	Jackson	1669	Transylvania	1988
Avery	8687	Johnston	481	Wake	1185
Buncombe	8106	Lincoln	309	Watauga	214
Burke	16255	Macon	709	Wilkes	6383
Caldwell	1331	Madison	821	Yancey	519
Catawba	319	McDowell	1786	Multi-County	1543
Cherokee	587	Mitchell	356		
Davidson	185	Mitchell/Rutherford	1217		
Davie	209	Polk	580		
Gaston	1677	Rutherford	1786		
Haywood	199	Stokes	250		

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:

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