



**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, 2017

Steve Troxler, 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, 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 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 in providing direct services to citizens, and completing various work projects for state, county, and local government agencies, 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 more than \$11.00 per hour. A five-person B.R.I.D.G.E. crew only costs the state \$5.00 per eight-hour shift, compared to more than \$440.00 for a five-person crew of emergency pickup firefighters. The Western NC 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.

## **B.R.I.D.G.E. DATA FOR FY 2016-17**

- (1) The number of young offenders in DPS 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 Correctional Center	1
Foothills Minimum Custody Correctional Institution	9
Marion Minimum Custody Correctional Institution	1
All other State Correctional facilities	679
Number of young offenders within the custody of the Division of Adult Correction eligible for B.R.I.D.G.E. between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017	690

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.

- (2) Number of young offenders participating:  
◦ 160 crewmen for various durations<sup>1</sup>
- (3) Average daily participation:  
◦ 55 crewmen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Determined by taking the total number of inmates assigned to B.R.I.D.G.E. as of July 1, 2017, plus the total number of inmates who entered the program from July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

<sup>2</sup> Determined by taking daily inmate totals from July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017 divided by total calendar days. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

- (4) Crewman average duration:
  - 166 days<sup>3</sup>
- (5) Summary of activities:
  - 91,785 total work hours
  - Fire Control – 37,359 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

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

### **Example of Significant Forest Fire Suppression Efforts**

Thoroughly trained and readily available B.R.I.D.G.E. crews assisted with suppression activities on multiple wildfires during the 2016 fall fire season in Western North Carolina. The crews responded to requests via helicopter or vehicle providing initial and extended attack manpower. Crews were strategically placed throughout Western North Carolina dependent upon exhibiting factors of the highest wildland fire probability.

An average of 11 crews were deployed daily from November 1 - November 28, 2016, logging a total of 18,759 inmate man hours. Crews performed fire suppression efforts on 25 different major wildland fires and 35 additional smaller fires.

The November man hours of 18,759, at a rate of \$0.125 per hour, equals \$2,345 utilizing inmates. The November man hours of 18,759 at a rate of \$11 per hour equals \$206,349 utilizing pickup firefighters. Total savings using inmate crews versus pickup firefighter crews was over \$204,000.

### **Example Work Project**

B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were dispatched to the Western North Carolina Agriculture Center in Fletcher to remove all standing trees from a site dedicated for a new parking area. Crews used chainsaws and heavy equipment to remove trees, which allowed the N.C. National Guard equipment operators clear access to grade the area.

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<sup>3</sup> Determined by taking total participation days by crewmen who have been released prior to June 30, 2017. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

This project proved to be beneficial while providing an opportunity for multiple Project Leaders to obtain the highest national classification as a Class I faller (chainsaw operator class). It presented a tremendous amount of training for several Project Leaders whom obtained Class II/III faller as well.

This project not only provided inmates with valuable job training, work ethics, and essential life skills through the 1,165 man-hours contributed. It was also a significant cost savings for the state.

Table 2: Crew Project Types & Hours

Work Project Types	Project Hours
Community Service Projects	1,670
Construction/Repair/Maintenance Projects	33,948
Fire Control Projects	39,873
Nursery and Tree Improvement Projects	6,505
Other Projects	444
Training Projects	9,279
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>91,785</b>

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 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 Hours
Civic/Non-Profit Groups	6,690
Federal Government	1,105
Local Government	2,770
N.C. Forest Service	67,436
Other State Agencies	13,342
Schools	442
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>91,785</b>

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 Hours	County	Project Hours	County	Project Hours
Alexander	1020	Haywood	105	Surry	84
Ashe	2011	Henderson	3520	Swain	999
Avery	8685	Iredell	1000	Transylvania	4279
Buncombe	9594	Johnson	48	Wake	3020
Burke	29053	Lincoln	32	Watauga	503
Caldwell	3374	Macon	547	Yadkin	40
Chatham	444	Madison	256	Yancey	932
Cherokee	274	McDowell	7451	Multi-County	9347
Clay	1129	Mitchell	455		
Cleveland	54	Polk	96		
Gaston	741	Rutherford	2211		
Graham	239	Stokes	242	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>91,785</b>

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

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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