DIVISION OF FOREST RESOURCES
YOUNG OFFENDERS FOREST CONSERVATION PROGRAM

BRIDGE

BUILDING  REHABILITATING  INSTRUCTING  DEVELOPING  GROWING  EMPLOYING

CONTINUATION REVIEW LEGISLATIVE REPORT

FEBRUARY 26th, 2010
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

North Carolina experienced a devastating wildland fire season in the spring of 1985. On April 4, 1985 numerous homes and thousands of acres of valuable timberland were consumed in a matter of hours. That year the North Carolina General Assembly appropriated $973,364 (SL 1985-1014) for the construction and operation of the Youthful Offenders Forest Conservation Program, also known as the BRIDGE Program (BUILDING, REHABILITATING, INSTRUCTING, DEVELOPING, GROWING, EMPLOYING). In 1987, the North Carolina General Assembly in the Appropriations Act SL 1987-738 established the manner in which The Division of Forest Resources and Department of Corrections would cooperate in the development of the program and establishment of a related facility to house the program. A concept paper was developed that stated in part “the basic premise of this concept is to assist the state of North Carolina in the rehabilitation of young offenders, through forestry training and work programs, and to reduce operating cost for both agencies North Carolina Division of Forest Resources (NCDFR) and North Carolina Division of Prisons (NCDOP) in on-going programs.”

BRIDGE was established to provide trained and readily available firefighting personnel to assist with the suppression of wildland fire throughout North Carolina. Inmates for the BRIDGE Program are housed and screened for the program at the Department of Corrections Western Youth Institution in Morganton. Program staff receives assignments and pick inmates up at approximately 8am each day. Inmates participate in a variety of work projects in various locations when not engaged in the suppression of wildland fires. These work projects provide valuable vocational training for the inmates and provide cost savings for the tax payers of North Carolina. Crews construct trails in State Parks; provide assistance to North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission for prescribed fire, and numerous other projects for a wide variety of agencies.

The Continuation Review Analysis has found that:

- BRIDGE is a model of cooperation between the Division of Forest Resources and Department of. The program has also cooperated with more than 382 state, federal, local governmental agencies, civic, and non-profit organizations to provide services. (See Appendix J).

- In the 22 year history of the program, 3,922 inmates have participated, providing 2,135,052 man hours of labor. Crews have assisted with fire suppression, controlled burns, nursery operations, disaster relief, reforestation projects, and community projects throughout North Carolina.

- BRIDGE staff contributed more than 10,000 man hours to fire suppression efforts in 2008.

- “North Carolina ranks first in the nation (ahead of California) in number of wildland urban interface acres and fifth in the number of wildland urban interface homes.”

1 Many North Carolina homes are located in steep mountainous terrain where suppression efforts are limited to the use of hand crews to construct suppression lines. BRIDGE is the only readily available resource for this mission.

1 NCDFR 2008 Annual Report
Inmate labor costs have remained at $1 per day from the inception of the program while state pickup firefighter and federal (Administratively Determined) AD rates have steadily risen. Current rates: state pickup firefighter $9.05 per hr; AD firefighter $17.08 per hr.

BRIDGE crews have indirectly provided services for all 100 North Carolina counties through involvement with the nursery, tree improvement, and stewardship programs.

Results of an informal recidivism study conducted by North Carolina Division of Forest Resources for calendar year 2008 showed a 7.3% rate of return for the BRIDGE Program as opposed to a “37.5% rate of return for the general population of inmates of the same age as shown by NCDOC.”

Unemployment rates in North Carolina are very high throughout the state and employment chances for an ex-inmate with no job skills are minimal at best. Inmates enrolled in the BRIDGE Program and are taught valuable job skills and exposed to numerous job experiences.

BRIDGE works. A recent program participant received his Associates of Applied Science Degree in Forest Management from Haywood Community College in May 2009 and is now employed as an Assistant County Ranger with the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources.

Six of the Western District State Parks have realized a $75,900 cost savings for the period January 2008 through October 2009 based on $7.25 per hour for state park seasonal worker. This is but one example of cost savings realized by the State of North Carolina.

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2 NCDOC web site
PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

PROGRAM HISTORY

On April 4, 1985, within a one-hour period, three large wildfires broke out in the foothills and mountains of Western North Carolina. These fires, along with numerous smaller fires, destroyed thousands of acres of woodland and more than forty homes and outbuildings. The High Peak Fire destroyed 27 structures and 5,000 acres of woodland in Burke County alone. Resources were stretched to their breaking point and often unavailable.

Following the devastating 1985 fire season, the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources began exploring ways to supplement their wildland firefighting capabilities. After visiting an inmate program in Washington, and researching programs in California and Utah, the Division of Forest Resources, in conjunction with the North Carolina Division of Prisons, developed the concept of the BRIDGE Program. The concept focused on the training of inmate crews to be used and readily available when needed to suppress wildfires. A concept paper was developed that stated in part “the basic premise of this concept is to assist the state of North Carolina in the rehabilitation of young offenders, through forestry training and work programs, and to reduce operating cost for both agencies (NCDFR and NCDOP) in on-going programs.” The North Carolina General Assembly appropriated funding for the program in 1985. The first inmate crews began work in January 1987 working from an empty house on the campus of Broughton Hospital.

Numerous attempts to find a location for the BRIDGE Camp in Burke County failed due to public sentiment. The Avery County Board of Commissioners drafted a resolution requesting the BRIDGE Camp be located in Avery County in September 1987. The camp would be located on state owned property near the Altamont Correctional Facility in the Three Mile Community of Avery County. Ground was broken for Blue Ridge Youth Center in May 1988. The first 13 BRIDGE crewmen were moved into the Blue Ridge Youth Center BRIDGE Camp in November 1990. During construction of Avery County BRIDGE Camp, public sentiment in Burke County reversed and requested the BRIDGE Program remain in Burke County. The decision was then made that both Avery and Burke Counties would house a BRIDGE Camp. Blue Ridge Youth Center (BRIDGE II) was closed in July 2002 due to elimination of Division of Prisons budget for the center after twelve years of operation. All operations and personnel were combined with the Burke County BRIDGE Program at Western Youth Institution.

Although the program was established to provide trained and readily available crews for suppression of wildfire, there are times when fire activity is low and program participants can be taught many valuable job and life skills to aid them in becoming more productive taxpaying citizens when released from prison. Crews assist with the Division’s receipt based nursery operations to reduce cost, learn carpentry skills through the local community college system, and develop self-esteem and a strong work ethic by participating in a program that requires them to take responsibility not only for themselves, but for other members of their team. Crews have assisted citizens in numerous natural disasters including Hurricane Hugo in Alexander, Cabarrus, and Union Counties, Hurricane Opal in Jackson, Haywood and
Macon Counties, blizzards in Watauga and Avery Counties, floods in Madison and Mitchell Counties, and ice storms in Moore, Polk, and Henderson Counties. These are but a few of the incidents crews have been called upon for assistance.

In the 22-year history of the program nearly 4,000 thousand inmates have participated in the program contributing nearly 2,135,052 man hours of labor to more than 382 state, federal, local government agencies, schools, civic, and non-profit organizations. These man hours have saved these entities millions of dollars. Most of the agencies assisted, and accomplishments achieved, have occurred in the 32 most western counties of the state. However, crew use is not limited to this area and crews have assisted on projects as far away as Johnson County.

![Inmate Work Hours](image)

**Figure 1:** Inmate work hours (Significant decrease in 2002 due to closing of Blue Ridge Youth Center)

**DIVISION OF FOREST RESOURCES MISSION**

The mission of the Division of Forest Resources is to develop, protect, and manage the multiple resources of North Carolina’s forests through professional stewardship, enhancing the quality of life for our citizens while ensuring the continuity of these vital resources.

**BRIDGE PROGRAM MISSION**

The Young Offenders Forest Conservation Program (BRIDGE) trains and utilizes the available inmate population providing rehabilitation and educational opportunities to inmates, while providing cost effective services for the protection, development, management, and enjoyment of North Carolina’s natural, cultural, and economic resources.
OPERATIONS

The BRIDGE Program operates as a joint venture between the North Carolina Division of Prisons and the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources. The BRIDGE Program has ten Division of Forest Resources and seven Department of Correction personnel assigned to the daily operations. An Organization chart included in Appendix A. Western Youth Institution (WYI) has the capacity to assign and house 84 inmates assigned to the Program. Inmates are screened for program eligibility by corrections personnel and assigned by WYI. Criteria for BRIDGE Program participants are very stringent and all participants must be acceptable to both Forestry and Correction criteria (See Appendix B for criteria).

BRIDGE is neither a work-release or community work program. Unlike community work crew or work-release programs, BRIDGE participants receive classroom training in national fire suppression courses (Appendix C). Crews are not limited to litter pick-up, not limited by time or location for work projects, receive numerous vocational training opportunities, work a minimum forty hour week, and are paid $1.00/day.

Staff members are crossed trained by the North Carolina Division of Prisons and the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources; Forestry personnel are certified custodial agents and Correction personnel are trained wildland fire fighters. This cross training allows all 14 project leaders to operate independently, not side-by-side due to custody or forestry related issues, as all project leaders have the same responsibilities. Administrative responsibilities for the correctional employees are handled through chain of command at WYI.

Project Leaders report to the BRIDGE Assistant Camp Director for daily operational and crew assignments. Inmates are then picked-up at WYI at approximately 8:00am and returned to WYI by 5:00pm each day. During periods of higher fire danger inmates may work a twelve to sixteen hour day. A crew consists of five to ten inmates. Assignments are based on work orders submitted to the BRIDGE Camp Director by various agencies or groups. Requests are reviewed in order to assure compliance with Correction, Forestry, and Program policies and procedures. Priority is given to fire control, control burns, and other time sensitive requests. Projects are normally one to two weeks in duration.
PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the program is to provide a trained and readily available work force for use in the suppression of wildland fires in Western North Carolina. Early in the developmental stages, it was obvious that the program could provide many more benefits to the inmates and the citizens of North Carolina.

Objectives for the program include but are not limited to:

➢ Provide forces for the suppression of wildland fire.

➢ Reduce cost to the Division of Forest Resources to suppress wildland fire.

➢ Provide cost effective labor resource for the Division of Forest Resources statutorily mandated programs, e.g., reforestation, sedimentation control, and pest control.

➢ Assist state and local emergency services in times of natural and man-made disasters.

➢ Provide assistance to sister Department of Environment and Natural Resources agencies, such as the Division of Parks and Recreation and Wildlife Resource Commission.

➢ Provide assistance to federal natural resource agencies, such as the US Forest Service and US Park Service.

➢ Teach valuable job and life skills to youth offenders assigned to the program.

➢ Reduce recidivism rates thus reducing cost for the Division of Prisons.
The BRIDGE Program operates consistently with the legislative directive provided in SL 1985-1014 and SL 1987-738 (see Appendix D). The Division of Forest Resources use of BRIDGE reduces cost and provides assistance in meeting numerous statutes and administrative codes (Appendix E). The following are but a few of the ways in which BRIDGE assist with the Division of Forest Resources in its’ statutory mission.

Volunteer Fire Departments are a valuable resource in every county, they have their limitations and most are experiencing a shortage of volunteers. Due to job scarcity and unemployment rates, individuals are less likely to request time away from work, and employers are less likely to allow extended periods away from work. Of the 32 counties in the Division’s western region, only 8 counties have a certified position to carry out this statute (25%). BRIDGE crews often comprise the bulk of the typical western county’s fire control organization. BRIDGE is often the only available resource during extended attack incidents. Due to changes in training requirements in fire suppression, the summons; or the legal authority appointed to forest rangers to require citizens to assist with the suppression of wildfires. This no longer a feasible way of acquiring assistance for fire suppression and could have legal implications should a summoned individual become injured while engaged in suppression activities. The required minimal training for a wildland firefighter (S-130 Firefighting Training, S-190 Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior, I-100 Introduction to ICS, and L-180 Human Factors in the Wildland Fire Service) requires a minimum period of one week to complete. (Appendix C) Prescribed fire is a very important tool for the management of North Carolina’s natural resources. The Division of Forest Resources uses prescribed fire to prepare sites for reforestation and hazard reduction burns reduce fuel loading, thus making wildfire more controllable. The NC Wildlife Commission uses fire to control under brush and improve wildlife habitat. The US Forest Service and NC State Parks use fire to reduce competition for endangered plant and animal species and eliminate invasive species. The BRIDGE Program supplies crews to all of these agencies enabling them to reach resource management goals by cost effective means. These agencies would lose burning as a management tool without the services provided by BRIDGE.

Due to budget cuts and reductions many of the programs administered by the Division of Forest Resources are suffering from shortages in personnel and monies to complete mandated responsibilities. The most cost effective solution to this situation is the use of inmate labor which is readily available through the BRIDGE Program. The Linville River Nursery received an estimate of $30,000 for a contractor to provide labor to lift Fraser fir seedlings for the 2009 season; BRIDGE crews completed the task for $426. This is but one example of the cost savings for the Division.

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3 NWCG 310-1 Wildland Fire Qualifications System Guide
PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

HISTORY OF PROGRAM FUNDING

The program was funded under SL 1985-1014 in 1985 and $973,364 was the amount of funds appropriated for the program. Current appropriations for the program are $1,048,272 this is an increase of just 7.7% in the past twenty-five years. While transportation, operational, and personnel cost have risen statewide the program budget grew by only 0.308% per year.

COST COMPARISON

As a result of the appropriations from the General Assembly for this program, the State has been able to take advantage of cost savings in other areas. Services provided by BRIDGE inmates, such as crews to staff helicopters on high fire danger days are unavailable by contract or seasonal employees in the State of North Carolina. Funds are often limited and the use of inmate labor results in a tremendous cost savings for the requesting agency. In many instances, projects would never come to fruition without the use of inmate labor. For example, a contractor bid $30,000 to replace the flooring in the kitchen of the DFR Mountain Training Facility, which was cost prohibitive due to budget reductions. BRIDGE inmates provided the labor for the project, providing a savings to the state of $22,574. Cost to obtain contractual or seasonal employees for fire suppression has steadily risen while inmate labor cost has remained constant at $1 per day.

Figure 2: BRIDGE Helitack crew on standby at Hickory Airport.
PERFORMANCE DATA

Cost performance data shown in Figure 3 is based upon the number of man hours worked per year. Savings calculations are based on the cost per man hour. Minimum wage rates and federal pay rates for AD (Administratively Determined) firefighters were the rate for the years 1998 through 2008.

For example, in 2006 there were 102,444 man hours worked. To employee AD firefighters would have cost $1,397,336; minimum wage employees $527,587; and $12,806 for BRIDGE inmate labor.

Figure 3: 10 year cost comparison is based on number of inmate work hours per year.

**INMATE COST** = HOURS WORKED ÷ 8 = DAYS x $1.00/DAY = TOTAL

**FEDERAL AD COST** = HOURS WORKED x ANNUAL AD FF RATE = TOTAL

**MINIMUM WAGE COST** = HOURS WORKED x ANNUAL HOURLY MIN WAGE RATE = TOTAL
REHABILITATION AND RECIDIVISM

Results of an informal recidivism rate study conducted by the North Carolina Forest Service for calendar year 2008 showed a 7.3% rate of return for inmates participating in the BRIDGE Program. The NC Department of Correction showed a return rate of 37.5% for general population inmates of the same age group and conviction status.

Based on statistics from the North Carolina Department of Correction the population of male prison youths has “increased by 12% from January to July 2009 as compared to the same period in 2008, and total admissions have increased by 16%.” Using the Department of Correction Automated System Query for information, the population of male offenders between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five is 6,906 inmates. Statistics from the “Pathways to Corrections Future: North Carolina Department of Correction Strategic Development Plan 1998-2020” show trends are toward increases in North Carolina’s general population along with significant increases in the population of males between the ages of 18 and 24 (Figure 4). These numbers would suggest that the number of offenders in the 18 to 24 age group would increase, this being the target group of participants for the BRIDGE Program.

Figure 4: Pathways to Corrections Future: North Carolina Department of Correction Strategic Development Plan 1998-2020

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4 Offender population Statistics August 2009
5 NCDOC Pathways to Corrections Future
“Cost to house minimum custody inmates is $60.87 per day per inmate for FY 2007-2008.” Using the rate of $60.87 per day to house minimum custody inmates any increase in inmate population would be a burden to the tax payers of North Carolina. If you assumed the BRIDGE Program had the full complement of 84 inmates, the reduction in recidivism rate, and $60.87 (Based on figures from DOC) per day to house a minimum custody inmate, the BRIDGE Program has the potential to result in an annual savings of $563,659 in incarceration costs alone. (See figure 5). The annual average number of inmates participating in the program is approximately 130.

COST SAVINGS BASED ON RECIDIVISM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>84 INMATES</th>
<th>BRIDGE PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>NON-BRIDGE INMATES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recidivism Rate</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Number of Returning Prisoners</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Cost for Housing of Returning Inmates</td>
<td>$136,193.58</td>
<td>$699,852.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5:** Cost savings based on recidivism.

**Inmates Enrolled in Program**

**Figure 6:** PROGRAM ENROLLMENT (Decline in 2002 after closing Blue Ridge Youth Center)

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6 NCDOC Research Bulletin March 2009
OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED

The BRIDGE Program has met or exceeded all program objectives and established its self as one of the most efficient and cost effective programs in the state. BRIDGE should be a model for other agencies in as far as cooperation, coordination, and consistency of program delivery. Objectives were listed on page seven of this document and the following bullet list gives details on the impact of each of these objectives:

- In 22 years the BRIDGE Program has provided 353,525 man hours of fire suppression services. Based on today’s cost of $17.08 AD rate or state pick-up firefighter rate of $9.05 the state has realized a savings of $6,038,207 (AD rate) or $3,199,402 dollars (state firefighter rate).

- Program participants have received 238,460 hours classroom training in fire suppression, carpentry, safety, and other job related skills.

- An informal study revealed the program had a 7.3% recidivism rate as compared to 37.5% for the general population of inmates in the same category.

- The program provides a cost effective labor force to met statutory and non-statutory programs such as nursery operations, seed collection, and facilities maintenance.

- Natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, and ice storms have required the program provide 41,444 of man hours in relief to the citizens of North Carolina.

- Sister DENR agencies such as State Parks and the NC Wildlife Commission have realized substantial benefits from the 203,647 man hours of labor provided to their programs for such projects as control burns, storm clean-up, trail maintenance, and fire control. State Parks alone realized a savings of $75,900 for the period January 2008 through October 2009.

- BRIDGE has provided services to over 382 state, federal, and local agencies.
OTHER PROGRAM IMPACTS

Governmental Impacts

Since its inception, BRIDGE has played a major role in allowing many federal, state, and local government agencies to complete projects which would never come to fruition without the program. BRIDGE participates in many activities which allow the citizens of North Carolina to have much improved outdoor experiences. Through BRIDGE’s participation in the Adopt-A-Highway Program (20 years) the NC State highways are cleaner, trails are safer due to participation in the Federal Adopt-A-Trail Program, and state waterways are cleaner due to participation in the Big Sweep Program.

BRIDGE is a model of cooperation unlike any other in the state. Many projects undertaken by the program require working with a variety of agencies with diverse agendas and expected outcomes. A recent project in which BRIDGE provided all labor for construction was a combined effort between the City of Morganton, Burke County Tourism Board, US Forest Service, North Carolina Department of Transportation, and the Boys Scouts of America which established an overlook on State Highway 181 for the Brown Mountain area of Burke, Caldwell, and Avery Counties. This project was completed for materials cost and has solicited numerous positive comments from the traveling public and citizens traveling Highway 181.

Figure 7: Crew after completion of Brown Mountain Overlook
Community Impacts

The counties of Western North Carolina currently have some of the highest unemployment rates in the state. Rates of unemployment in the 32 most western counties range from 15.3% in Caldwell to 7.1% in Watauga County with an average of 11.4%.

This has led to a reduced tax base for many counties and cities with limited amounts of funds to apply towards non-essential services. The BRIDGE Program provides the resources to maintain some of these services which often results in improved quality of life for the residence of these counties.

Higher unemployment rates also limit job possibilities for inmates released from prison. Exposure to numerous vocational skills and training while in BRIDGE Program make program participants more desirable as employees. Currently one program participant is employed by the Division of Forest Resources and others are actively pursuing positions with wildland fire companies.

NORTH CAROLINA CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE ESTIMATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Labor Force</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Unemployment</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALEXANDER</td>
<td>18,055</td>
<td>15,437</td>
<td>2,618</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALLEGHANY</td>
<td>4,630</td>
<td>4,110</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BURKE</td>
<td>39,280</td>
<td>33,716</td>
<td>5,564</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALDWELL</td>
<td>37,741</td>
<td>31,952</td>
<td>5,789</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATAWBA</td>
<td>75,500</td>
<td>64,602</td>
<td>10,898</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHEROKEE</td>
<td>10,346</td>
<td>8,812</td>
<td>1,534</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLEVELAND</td>
<td>50,125</td>
<td>42,709</td>
<td>7,416</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCDOWELL</td>
<td>21,169</td>
<td>18,099</td>
<td>3,070</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUTHERFORD</td>
<td>31,379</td>
<td>26,659</td>
<td>4,720</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILKES</td>
<td>30,128</td>
<td>26,232</td>
<td>3,896</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not Seasonally Adjusted Estimates subject to revision early in the next calendar year

Employment Security Commission of North Carolina
Labor Market Information Division
Local Area Unemployment Statistics  (919) 733-2936
Table 1: NC Labor Force Estimates

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Table 1: NC Labor Force Estimates

7 NC Employment Security Commission
Many federal, state, and local projects are funded through grants which may or may not provide for “in-kind matches”. BRIDGE assists with labor, which may be considered an “in-kind-match that often prevents the loss of these grant monies. Due to the recent loss of the Department of Correction Community Work Crews, we are currently receiving an increased amount of work orders from Volunteer Fire Departments (VFD’s) and schools to provide services. These entities have limited; if any, additional funds for construction of such things as nature trails which provide a more enriching educational experience for the children of North Carolina or provide fire danger signs to VFD’s to inform the public of daily fire danger. As with many state agencies, local governments have eliminated or frozen vacant positions necessary to completing critical but non essential duties such as trail maintenance or recreational complex maintenance, BRIDGE has provided crews to assist with these duties.

**Rehabilitation of Inmates**

Many facts can be relayed through statistics, graphs, and charts, but the intrinsic values of the BRIDGE Program cannot be measured by numbers. The young men enrolled in the program have often lacked guidance in their lives and many times all it takes to engage them is to give them a sense of responsibility and ownership in the task they are assigned. It is impossible to relate in words or numbers the self-satisfaction these young men feel when a landowner thanks them for saving their home from a wildfire or thanks them for completing an almost insurmountable task which was performed in a safe professional manner. You can see the pride and the transformation in attitude of these young men when such events occur. A recent program participant received his Associates of Applied Science Degree in Forest Management from Haywood Community College in May 2009 and is now employed as an Assistant County Ranger with the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources. While we realize we cannot rehabilitate all of these young men, everyone that follows the path chosen by the afore mentioned young man is one more productive taxpaying citizen contributing to the State of North Carolina and society as a whole.

**Figure 8**: Total of 1,084,495 Work Hours by Category

![1998 - 2008 HOURS WORKED BY CATEGORY](image)

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16
ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

One of the more important benefits of the program is the project leaders and associated staff and the training they receive. The 21 BRIDGE employees have a variety of job skills, but the most important training received is Incident Command Training which allows them to participate in one of three State Incident Management Teams fielded by the NC Division of Forest Resources. Staff members have participated as command staff, logistical support, and operations personnel on numerous incidents. These personnel have filled positions on wildland fire, hurricane, and flooding incidents nationwide. If these personnel were unavailable to fill these positions, it would require the state to seek these resources through the federal system at a much higher cost to the state.

COST EFFICIENCY

Paying an inmate $1 per day as opposed to wages paid for a pick-up firefighter, Federal AD firefighter, or paying contract crews is the most cost effective method available to the state. The cost analysis shown below demonstrates fire suppression savings alone are worth the cost of the program. Fire suppression crews are expensive if available at all. In times of elevated fire danger time is of the essence and it make take hours or days to arrange for trained and properly equipped suppression forces to arrive. During that time period numerous homes could be lost and lives placed in danger. BRIDGE crews are available seven days per week twenty-four hours-a-day and are under the direct control of the Division of Forest Resources, as opposed to another state, the federal government, or a private contractor.

Cost includes supervision (AD $18.88 State $9.05), 5 person crew (AD $17.08 State $8.63 per person) transportation (Large 4x4 $102), meals, and lodging (in state per-diem of $101.05).

EXAMPLE: Using Year 2004

14,031 = 351 crew days x $1542.54 (rate for AD Crew per day using above) = $541,431.54

14,031 = 351 crew days x $1125.70 (rate for State Crew per day using above) = $395,120.70

Figure 9: Cost Analysis for Fire Suppression Crews. Cost figures are for fire suppression only.
While the program predominately serves the 32 western counties of North Carolina, it also provides services for the Division of Forest Resources programs statewide. There were two BRIDGE Camps until July of 2002; one operating from Western Youth Institution in Burke County and the other was Blue Ridge Youth Center in Avery County. Due to Department of Correction budget reductions, Blue Ridge Youth Center was closed in July 2002. Expansion of the program was slated for Bladen Correctional Facility, but due to budgetary constraints the Division of Forest Resources could not meet obligations for the program. In July of 1999, a legislative field day was held at Glenville Lake in Jackson County to demonstrate the new CL 215 firefighting plane and discuss the possibility of expanding the BRIDGE Program to the Haywood Correctional Facility. Plans were to enable the Haywood Unit to remain open while expanding BRIDGE Program further west. This additional program would provide service to more communities and reduce response time to wildland fires. The plan was never completed due to Department of Correction budget discussions regarding closing of the unit.

- Expansion of the program is more critical than ever before. Response times to wildland fires in the far western counties of Clay, Cherokee, Graham, and Swain are in excess of three hours. Response times to fires within or threatening urban interface are critical in reduction of homes and lives. Higher fire danger days dictate the use of BRIDGE Crews for stand-by in these counties which constitutes a six-hour, four-hundred mile round-trip. Establishing an additional BRIDGE Camp in Haywood County would greatly reduce response time and provide much needed resources to the western counties of North Carolina. This expansion, in addition to providing needed resources, could provide employment opportunities through hiring staff. When fully staffed the BRIDGE Program can provide 14 crews for suppression of wildland fire or other project work. On high fire danger days all 14 BRIDGE crews are assigned to ongoing wildfires or on standby to assist with new fires and often request for crews remain unfilled because all 14 crews are committed. BRIDGE crew availability incurs considerable cost savings to the state as demonstrated earlier in this document, as opposed to in-state pick-up firefighters or federal resources dispatched from out-of-state.

- Current guidelines state an inmate must be 18 to 24 years of age to participate in the program which coincides with age policies at WYI, yet limits the selection program participants. Prior to the closing of Blue Ridge Youth Center, age requirements were modified to allow for expanded access to inmate populations up to age 35. This change not only allowed for a greater population too select from, but also provided the unexpected benefit of introducing inmates into the program who possessed some level of job skills. Providing a larger more diverse inmate population from which to select would greatly enhance the programs overall effectiveness.
**COST SAVINGS**

While the current program operates as efficiently as possible the expansion of the program would eliminate excess cost due to extensive travel distances, reduce employee overtime, and reduce excessive wear on equipment. Expansion would allow more flexibility in resource allocation during periods of high fire danger. Crews could be used to provide services to numerous state agencies, which provide cost savings to all taxpayers. Due to resources needed to suppress wildland fires in the western portions of the state it would be more feasible to expand the program westward. Expansion should not be limited by geography; these crews can be used for any type disaster, state project, or local agency request.

- The standard vehicle used for the program is the suburban type vehicle; as it has capacity to carry personnel and required equipment. This vehicle can be purchased on state contract and is regularly done by DOT and other state agencies. Because NC Division of Forest Resources is not included on the DOA exempt list we are not allowed to purchase these vehicles. Due to mileage and maintenance issues it is cost prohibitive to acquire these vehicles through DOA. Attempts have been made to amend General statute 143-341 under the Department of Administration the amendment has never acted upon to alleviate this issue. Numerous hours have been dedicated to reviewing, presenting documentation, and justifying the purchase of these vehicles year after year.

- Establish a staff position to assist program participants with job placement when released from the BRIDGE Program. Numerous government agencies and contract companies across the country hire hundreds of fire suppression personnel each year and having someone dedicated to job placement for participants would assist them in becoming tax-paying citizens.

- Region 3 mechanic and Forest Fire Equipment Operator positions assigned to BRIDGE are receipted positions through DFR’s Forestation Program. Conversion to appropriated positions would reduce requirement on receipted funds and make these positions more secure.

**EFFECTIVENESS**

Effectiveness is one of the cornerstones on which this program operates. Effectiveness in cost containment, project completion, and customer satisfaction are goals set by program administrators and staff alike. Through the services provided by BRIDGE, agencies are able to reduce cost of programs, complete projects in a timely and professional manor, and reduce cost to taxpayers.

Many things accomplished by the program can be measured in number of man hours worked, number of projects completed, or miles of fireline constructed, but the self esteem and work ethic these young men acquire while assigned to this program cannot be measured or captured in a graph. These fundamentals are the basis on which this program operates.
CONSEQUENCES OF DISCONTINUED FUNDING

NC Division of Forest Resources Impacts

- “North Carolina ranks first in the nation in number of wildland urban interface acres and fifth in the number of wildland urban interface homes.” With the continued growth of urban interface, the state of North Carolina is at a critical juncture with resources to combat wildland fire in these areas. The number of tools in the toolbox to combat wildland fires across North Carolina is becoming more limited due to budget restrictions and aged equipment. The water scooping aircraft the CL215 is grounded, the helicopter fleet is primarily composed of 1960’s era helicopters, VFD resources are limited, and contract resources are cost prohibitive, if available at all. Elimination of the BRIDGE Program would be one more blow to an agency which is tasked with one of the most daunting missions in the state, protection of homes and lives in the wildland urban interface. Crews provided by the BRIDGE Program are a critical resource which can’t be replaced in a cost effective way. The days of summonsing (authority given to forest rangers to commander suppression resources) wildland firefighters is long gone due to liability and training issues and the only alternative is to maintain a trained and readily available resource such as the BRIDGE Program. Without a resource such as BRIDGE wildfires will become larger, cause more damage, and endanger more lives. Loss of the program would lead to economic and natural resource damage from which it may take years to recover.

- Due to 2009 budget cuts and reductions in force, there was a severe cut in staff positions at the Division’s Linville River Nursery. This Nursery is the Divisions only location for growing Fraser Fir and White Pine seedlings. These seedlings are used to reforest North Carolina’s forest and provide stock for Christmas tree growers throughout the southeast. BRIDGE crews are necessary and a critical resource for daily operations at the Linville River Nursery.

- Burning for reforestation, hazard reduction, wildlife habitat, and species improvement will be adversely affected with a reduction in available resources to assist with these type activities. Loss of these programs would be detrimental to forest health and could lead to an increase in acreage of wildland fires not only for Division of Forest Resources but NC State Parks and the NC Wildlife Commission.

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8 North Carolina Division of Forest Resources 2008 Annual Report
SOCIAL IMPACTS

The social impacts are as varied as the projects with which the program becomes involved. The gratitude shown from the families of an injured accident victim who was just carried from a remote hiking trail, the heart-felt appreciation of a person whose home was in the path of a raging wildfire only to find crews had saved their home. These are things which a graphs, data, nor letter can express. The response of the young men involved in this program to these situations will at times surprise and often amaze you.
Can this program save or rehabilitate all of these young men? Absolutely not, but for those who do take what they have learned and apply to their life upon release from prison will stand a better chance of becoming a productive member of society. Without this program these young men will spend their time in prison watching television instead of contributing daily to the taxpaying citizens of the state of North Carolina. Through training and education these young men can possibly be deterred from a life of hopelessness and crime and become examples of what a good state program can do.

Figure 11: Mr. Chris Davis, Haywood Community College Graduate

The young man pictured to the left served time in the program and is currently employed by the Division of Forest Resources as an Assistant County Ranger in McDowell County. He attended Haywood Community College where he received his Associate in Applied Science Degree in Forest Management in early 2009.

Figure 12: Replacement bridge for flood victim in Madison County.
Bibliography


APPENDIX

Appendix A: BRIDGE Program Organizational Chart

Appendix B: BRIDGE Criteria

Appendix C: NWCG Firefighter Type 2 Qualifications

Appendix D: Session Law

Appendix E: General Statutes and Administrative Codes

Appendix F: Letter from City of Morganton

Appendix G: Letter from New Dimensions School

Appendix H: Letter from Rudy Johnson Watauga County Ranger

Appendix I: Memorandum from Joe Stieneke

Appendix J: Agencies Assisted List
Appendix: A
BRIDGE CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

- Male 18 – 25 years old.

- Have no history of sexual assault, rape or any other crime of that nature.

- No history of Serious assaults.

- Health activity grade 1 (Grade 2 is subject to approval by the medical authority).

- Minimum Custody Level 1 or higher.

- No Escape attempt in the last twelve months.

- Have at least three months left on sentence from time of acceptance into BRIDGE.

- Acceptable to both the Division of Forest Resources and the Division of Prisons.

- Receive final approval from facility approving authority.
Appendix : C

Firefighter Type 2 (FFT2)

(Position Category: Wildland Fire)

REQUIRED TRAINING
Basic Firefighter Training:
Introduction to ICS (I-100)
Human Factors in the Wildland Fire Service (L-180)
Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior (S-190)
Firefighting Training (S-130)
Annual Fireline Safety Refresher (RT-130)*

REQUIRED EXPERIENCE
None

PHYSICAL FITNESS LEVEL
Arduous

OTHER POSITION ASSIGNMENTS THAT WILL MAINTAIN CURRENCY
Any higher position for which this position is a prerequisite

OTHER TRAINING WHICH SUPPORTS DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS
None
*Note: Annual Fireline Safety Refresher (RT-130) is not required for the first year as a Firefighter Type 2 (FFT2); however, it is required for subsequent years.
Note: For the Firefighter Type 2 (FFT2) position, satisfactory completion of the Required Training meets the position qualification requirements.
SESSION LAW

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
1985 SESSION
CHAPTER 1014
HOUSE BILL 2055

“AN ACT TO MODIFY THE CURRENT OPERATIONS AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS APPROPRIATIONS FOR NORTH CAROLINA STATE GOVERNMENT FOR THE 1986-87 FISCAL YEAR, TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS FOR LOCAL NEEDS, AND TO MAKE OTHER CHANGES IN THE BUDGET OPERATION OF THE STATE.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

PART I.—APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE MAXIMUM AMOUNT NECESSARY Section 1. The appropriations made in this act, except the appropriations in Sections 8 through 18 of this act, are for maximum amounts necessary to provide the services and accomplish the purposes described in the budget. Savings shall be affected where the total amounts appropriated are not required to perform these services and accomplish these purposes and, except as allowed by the Executive Budget Act or this act, the savings shall revert to the appropriate fund at the end of each fiscal year.

PART II.—CURRENT OPERATIONS/GENERAL FUND

Sec. 2. The items and amounts appropriated from the General Fund for the 1986-87 fiscal year in the 1986-87 column of the schedule in Section 2 of Chapter 479 of the 1985 Session Laws are repealed, and appropriations from the General Fund for the maintenance of the State departments, institutions, and agencies and for other purposes as enumerated are made for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1987, according to the following schedule:

FORESTRY CAMP

Sec. 209. Of the funds appropriated in Section 2 of this act to a Reserve for a Forestry Camp in the Office of State Budget and Management, the sum of nine hundred seventy-three thousand three hundred sixty-four dollars ($973,364) shall be allocated for the construction and operation of the Youthful Offenders Forestry Program at the camp. The Department of Correction shall contract with the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development for the operation of the Youthful Offenders Forestry Program. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, force account labor shall be used to the maximum extent possible to construct the camp.

The Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Correction shall cooperate fully and develop a joint plan for the construction of the facility and the operation of the program. The Department of Natural Resources and Community Development shall design the facility. The Departments shall report to the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental
Operations and the Fiscal Research Division their progress in designing the facility by October 1, 1986, and on their joint plan before they implement it.

The camp may not be located on property owned by or under the supervision of the Department of Agriculture without the consent of the Commissioner of Agriculture.”

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
1987 SESSION
CHAPTER 738
HOUSE BILL 1514

“AN ACT TO MAKE APPROPRIATIONS FOR CURRENT OPERATIONS OF STATE DEPARTMENTS, INSTITUTIONS, AGENCIES, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES EXCEPT FOR AID TO CERTAIN GOVERNMENTAL AND NONGOVERNMENTAL UNITS.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:


—INTRODUCTION

Section 1. The appropriations made in this act are for maximum amounts necessary to provide the services and accomplish the purposes described in the budget. Savings shall be affected where the total amounts appropriated are not required to perform these services and accomplish these purposes and, except as allowed by the Executive Budget Act, or this act, the savings shall revert to the appropriate fund at the end of each fiscal year.

Sec. 1.1. This act shall be known as "The Current Operations Appropriations Act of 1987."


REPORT ON FORESTRY CAMP

Sec. 156. (a) The Department of Natural Resources and Community Development and the Department of Correction shall cooperate fully in the development of a joint plan for the construction of a facility for the Youthful Offenders Forestry Program and in the operation of the Youthful Offenders Forestry Program. The Departments shall report to the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations and the Fiscal Research Division on their joint plan before they implement the plan.

(b) Of the funds appropriated in Section 2 of Chapter 1014, Session Laws of 1985, to a reserve for a forestry camp in the Office of State Budget and Management, the sum of nine hundred seventy-three thousand three hundred sixty-four dollars ($973,364) shall be allocated in fiscal year 1987-88 for the construction and operation of the Youthful Offenders Forestry Program at the camp. These funds shall remain available for use by the forestry camp until June 30, 1989. Any capital funds not expended by June 30, 1989, shall revert to the General Fund. The Department of Correction shall contract with the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development for the operation of the Youthful Offenders Forestry Program. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, force account labor shall be used to the maximum extent possible to construct the camp.

9 1985 General Assembly of North Carolina
The camp may not be located on property owned by or under the supervision of the Department of Agriculture without the consent of the Commissioner of Agriculture.

The Department of Natural Resources and Community Development shall submit quarterly progress reports beginning on October 1, 1987, to the Chairmen of the Appropriations-Base Budget Committee and the Appropriations Expansion Budget Committee in the House, to the Chairmen of the Appropriations Committee and the Base Budget Committee in the Senate, to the Chairmen of the Joint Appropriations Committee on Natural and Economic Resources, and to the Chairmen of the Joint Appropriations Committee on Justice and Public Safety. Copies of these reports shall also be submitted to the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations and the Fiscal Research Division. Each progress report shall show the amount of funds expended during the quarter and year-to-date expenditures, the percent of the project completed, estimated project completion date, the number of inmate participants, and any other information required to evaluate the effectiveness of this project to rehabilitate youthful offenders and to provide forest fire protection services through the Division of Forest Resources.”

10 1987 General Assembly of North Carolina
Appendix: E

§ 77-14. Obstructions in streams and drainage ditches.
In addition to any fine or imprisonment imposed, the court may, in its discretion, order the person, firm, or corporation so offending to remove the obstruction and restore the affected waterway to an undisturbed condition, or allow authorized employees of the enforcing agency to enter upon the property and accomplish the removal of the obstruction and the restoration of the waterway to an undisturbed condition, in which case the costs of the removal and restoration shall be paid to the enforcing agency by the offending party.

§ 113-52. Forest Rangers.
The Secretary may appoint one county forest ranger and one or more deputy forest rangers in each county of the State in which, after careful investigation, the amount of forestland and the risks from forest fires shall, in his judgment, warrant the establishment of a forest fire organization.

§ 113-53.1. Forest laws defined.
The forest laws consist of:
(4) Other statutes enacted for the protection of forests and woodlands from fire, insects, or disease and concerning obstruction of streams and ditches in forests and woodlands;

§ 113-55. Powers of forest rangers to prevent and extinguish fires; authority to issue citations and warning tickets.
(a) Forest rangers shall prevent and extinguish forest fires and shall have control and direction of all persons and equipment while engaged in the extinguishing of forest fires. During a season of drought, the Secretary or his designate may establish a fire patrol in any district, and in case of fire in or threatening any forest or woodland, the forest ranger shall attend forthwith and use all necessary means to confine and extinguish such fire. The forest ranger or deputy forest ranger may summon any resident between the ages of 18 and 45 years, inclusive, to assist in extinguishing fires and may require the use of crawler tractors and other property needed for such purposes; any person so summoned and who is physically able who refuses or neglects to assist or to allow the use of equipment and such other property required shall be guilty of a Class 3 misdemeanor and upon conviction shall only be subject to a fine of not less than fifty dollars ($50.00) nor more than one hundred dollars ($100.00). No action for trespass shall lie against any forest ranger, deputy forest ranger, or person summoned by him for crossing lands, backfiring, burning out or performing his duties as a forest ranger or deputy forest ranger.
Article 4A.

Protection of Forest Against Insect Infestation and Disease.

§ 113-60.4. Purpose and intent.
(a) The purpose of this Article is to place within the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the authority and responsibility for investigating insect infestations and disease infections which affect stands of forest trees, the devising of control measures for interested landowners and others, and taking measures to control, suppress, or eradicate outbreaks of forest insect pests and tree diseases.

113-60.7. Action against insects and diseases.
Whenever the Secretary, or his agent, determines that there exists an infestation of forest insect pests or an infection of forest tree diseases, injurious or potentially injurious to the timber or forest trees within the State of North Carolina, and that said infestation or infection is of such a character as to be a menace to the timber or forest growth of the State, the Secretary shall declare the existence of a zone of infestation or infection and shall declare and fix boundaries so as to definitely describe and identify said zone of infestation or infection, and the Secretary or his agent shall give notice in writing by mail or otherwise to each forest landowner within the designated control zone advising him of the nature of the infestation or infection, the recommended control measures, and offer him technical advice on methods of carrying out controls.

Article 4E.


§ 113-60.40. Legislative findings.
The General Assembly finds that prescribed burning of forestlands is a management tool that is beneficial to North Carolina's public safety, forest and wildlife resources, environment, and economy. The General Assembly finds that the following are benefits that result from prescribed burning of forestlands:

1. Prescribed burning reduces the naturally occurring buildup of vegetative fuels on forestlands, thereby reducing the risk and severity of wildfires and lessening the loss of life and property.

2. The State's ever increasing population is resulting in urban development directly adjacent to fire prone forestlands, referred to as a woodland urban interface area. The use of prescribed burning in these woodland urban interface areas substantially reduces the risk of wildfires that cause damage.

3. Many of North Carolina's natural ecosystems require periodic fire for their survival. Prescribed burning is essential to the perpetuation, restoration, and management of many plant and animal communities. Prescribed burning benefits game, nongame, and endangered wildlife species by increasing the

11 2000 Forest Protection Laws, NC Division of Forest Resources
growth and yield of plants that provide forage and an area for escape and brooding and that satisfy other habitat needs.

(4) Forestlands are economic, biological, and aesthetic resources of statewide significance. In addition to reducing the frequency and severity of wildfires, prescribed burning of forestlands helps to prepare sites for replanting and natural seeding, to control insects and diseases, and to increase productivity.

(5) Prescribed burning enhances the resources on public use lands, such as State and national forests, wildlife refuges, nature preserves, and game lands. Prescribed burning enhances private lands that are managed for wildlife refuges, nature preserves, and game lands. Prescribed burning enhances private lands that are managed for wildlife, recreation, and other purposes.

NORTH CAROLINA ADMINISTRATIVE CODE

“15A NCAC 09A .0102 GENERAL PURPOSE OF THE DIVISION

(a) Organization. The division has a line-staff organization with administrative units at the state, regional, district, county and local project levels. The forest protection and management sub-program consists of several continuous activities administered through a 97-county field organization. The forest tree nursery sub-program, centered in three nursery installations, serves the entire state. The forestation sub-program conducts projects from two field headquarters with support from the entire field organization. The state forest sub-program, concentrated in six state-owned forests, provides several functions for other units of the forest service. The technical and administrative support staff sub-program, administered from the director's office serves all of the administrative units of all sub-programs.

(b) Program Scope. The division protects all non-federal forest land in the 97 counties that cooperate with the department from forest fire, insects, and disease, provides forest management and forestation services to all nonindustrial forest landowners on request; distributes nursery grown tree seedlings to all forest owners, administers the state forest system; prevents the obstructions of streams and drainage ditches in woodland areas; coordinates other state, federal, and industrial forestry programs in the state; and provides leadership in forestry policy and in legislative affairs that affect the entire forestry community.

15A NCAC 09C .0204 SUMMONING FIRE FIGHTERS

(a) In emergencies forest rangers and forest law enforcement officers may summon any resident in good health between 18 and 45 years of age inclusive to help control a forest fire. Forest rangers and forest law enforcement officers may also require the use of crawler tractors and other property needed for fire control.

(b) The ranger or law enforcement officer making a verbal summons shall:

(1) explain the legal basis for the verbal summons;
(2) determine that the person being summoned satisfies the requirements of age, residence and physical condition; and
(3) determine that the required property can be used to assist in controlling a forest fire.  
(c) Should an individual who meets the legal requirements for summons refuse to serve or refuse the use of property, the ranger or law enforcement officer shall:
(1) explain the legal basis for the verbal summons, and
(2) warn the individual that the department will pursue law enforcement action.

15A NCAC 09C .0207 PERSONAL INJURY LIABILITY DURING FOREST FIRE CONTROL
(a) The department has statutory authority to direct fire control tactics employed by all personnel engaged in fire suppression, and to prevent others from exercising independent action that could cause conflicts. Therefore, forest rangers shall as fire boss, assume tactical direction of all forest fire suppression activities.
(1) The state normally does not assume responsibility for individuals employed by or committed to the fire suppression effort by a cooperating agency, corporation, or person having a mutual interest in the fire suppression effort:
(A) Several of the large corporate landowners in the state have voluntarily developed forest fire control organizations that supplement state forces in protecting their economic interest in forest resources. When corporate landowners voluntarily commit their employees and resources to a specific forest fire suppression effort, placing them under the tactical control of a fire boss, these employees and resources remain the responsibility of the employing corporate landowner.
(B) Forest landowners should assist in the protection of their own property, and persons responsible for the escape of fires that damage or threaten the property of others should assist with suppression efforts. The department does not assume responsibility for these individuals; however, the department may assume responsibility when these individuals work under the sole direction of a forest ranger.
(2) The department assumes responsibility for individuals committed to forest fire suppression by summons, as regular state employees, or as individuals state volunteers. However, the department does not assume responsibility for individual volunteers who begin suppression efforts on their own, without the knowledge or tactical direction of a forest ranger, until after the fire boss has accepted them as part of the fire suppression organization and has committed them to work on the fire under his tactical direction.
(3) When special cooperative fire suppression agreements between the division and individual forest landowners exist, that agreement shall define the assumption of liabilities.
(b) Final determination of responsibility in disputed compensation and liability claims is made by the Industrial Commission.
or the courts. It is the purpose of this policy to set forth the intent of the division with regard to voluntary assumption of responsibility. Nothing in this policy is construed to be in conflict with governing statutes of the state.

15A NCAC 09C .0513 AUTHORITY TO PRODUCE CHRISTMAS TREE SPECIES
(a) The division produces seedlings of Fraser fir and other species suitable as Christmas trees in its nurseries.
(b) The division will sell Fraser fir seedlings to applicants for planting in counties that are ecologically suitable. These counties are: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Surry, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey.
(c) For experimental planting, the division will sell Fraser fir seedlings to applicants in any county of the state.¹²

¹² North Carolina Administrative Codes
To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the Morganton Main Street Program I would like to acknowledge the incredible work that BRIDGE does for our community. This program allows our community to be one of the most outstanding small towns because of their support. It would be impossible to provide the level of events or annual decorating of downtown without BRIDGE. You can see from the list below the number of hours that BRIDGE gives to our program as well as other programs that enhance our overall community. It is with sincere hope that this program will be allowed to continue.

- Put up and take down of Downtown Christmas Decorations every year 8 days.
- Lights on the smaller trees year round up-keep average of 2 days a year.
- Fall Decorations: set up and removal.
- Assist with city wide clean up when extra help is needed to meet deadlines or for preparation for a special event, average of 2 days a year.
- Assists with set up of the Historic Morganton Festival.
- Festival of Lights.
- The Oyster Outing: set up (for the Burke Arts Council).
- Other (warehouse cleanup) average 3 days a year.

Respectfully,

Sharon Jablonski

Main Street Director

The City of Morganton Main Street Program

PO BOX 3448 Morganton NC 28680

downtownmorganton@compascable.net   www.downtownmorganton.net

October 4, 2009
Ladies and Gentlemen of the NC Legislative Review Committee,

I am writing this letter in support of the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources Young Offenders Program, also known as B.R.I.D.G.E.

I respect the fact that these tough economic times call for budget cuts in various areas, but cuts to the B.R.I.D.G.E. Program will cost our state more money than it would ever save it. B.R.I.D.G.E. crews provide services that save our state money every year; these services result in an increase in tourism which generates much needed revenue for our state.

Each and every day B.R.I.D.G.E. crews provide services to the citizens of this great state. These services include, but are not limited to: fighting fires, clearing roadsides of undergrowth and debris, building and maintaining walking trails, construction type projects, and they provide labor assistance to non-profit organizations. A few specific examples of these services include, but are not limited to: spending endless hours fighting the wildfires that ravaged the Linville Gorge and counties in the eastern part of the state, clearing roadways on High Peak Mountain for rescuers during ice storms, building foot bridges for residents in the mountain counties of Western North Carolina during the 2006 floods, opening the new Brown Mountain Overlook. Services provided to non-profits range from construction type projects to landscaping, and everything in between.

My personal experiences with the B.R.I.D.G.E Program have been both positive and beneficial. As president of the PTO at The New Dimensions School in Morganton, North Carolina, I too, am faced with severe budget restrictions; each day presents a new challenge in how to provide students with the tools necessary to enrich their education journey. This summer the B.R.I.D.G.E. Crew assisted our school for five days; during these five days our playground was redesigned--it was transformed from a useless eye-sore to an obstacle course that promotes physical fitness and active learning experiences such as, problem solving, communication skills, and teamwork. With the help of the B.R.I.D.G.E. Crew we were also able to build a step into the front entrance, prime and paint the lunchroom, and catch up on weeding and landscaping task. All of the tasks completed by the B.R.I.D.G.E. Crew are important to the betterment of the students we serve from Burke, McDowell, Catawba, and Caldwell Counties; but the most important task completed by B.R.I.D.G.E. was erecting a flagpole. When our school moved to its current location there wasn’t a flagpole and we have had to do without one until this year; with the help of the B.R.I.D.G.E. Crew, the students of The New Dimensions School were able to raise our Nations Flag for the first time on August 26, 2009. It was a day filled with pride that each student will carry with them as they move forward in life.

The young men that provide labor as part of the B.R.I.D.G.E. program do so for pennies a day. I realize that they are in the prison system for crimes in which they have been tried and convicted and
aren’t entitled to the luxury of salary negotiations. I feel very strongly that these young men should be held accountable for their actions, but sitting in a jail cell all day every day doesn’t provide these young men with life skills needed to move forward once released. The B.R.I.D.G.E. Program allows these young men to learn life skills and to gain valuable work experience that gives them a chance at real life once released. The North Carolina Forestry employees who work with these young men on crews also mentor the men. Most of the young offenders grew up without positive male figures in the home and statistics show that this often leads to problems for the youngsters. Standing back, I watched as the crew leader sent the youngsters one by one to the truck after a claw hammer and I watched as one by one they each came back carrying something that didn’t even resemble a hammer of any sort, much less a claw hammer; it was at this moment I realized the real value of the program: mentorship. These youngsters are receiving a gift that could potentially save their lives in the future; I have had the pleasure of speaking with two B.R.I.D.G.E. graduates, both strongly advocate for the program and credit the program for “saving their life”.

In conclusion, I want to thank you for the work you do for this state and its citizens; I know that you are often faced with tough decisions that affect the lives of the citizens whom you are elected to represent. With all of the hard decisions you face daily, I am sure that you would welcome an easy one from time to time; the B.R.I.D.G.E. Program is that easy decision. Every citizen in this state benefits from the work of the B.R.I.D.G.E. Program; just this morning Western North Carolina and the Blue Ridge Parkway were featured on the TODAY Show, a nationally syndicated program, as being one of the top three, most beautiful destinations in the United States, for fall foliage. No, the B.R.I.D.G.E. Crew does not control the changing color of the leaves, however, they do work diligently to keep our forest, hiking trails, roadsides, and overlooks beautiful.

Sincerely,

**Cindi L. Bradshaw**

Cindi L. Bradshaw-PTO President

The New Dimensions School

Morganton, North Carolina
Appendix: H

The purpose of this e-mail is to share my concern regarding recent discussions about discontinuing the BRIDGE program. As Watauga County forest ranger for the past 35 years I can safely say that my greatest challenge has always been locating hand crews for forest firefighting. Because of the mountainous terrain most of the firefighting in this area is by hand. During the past 20 years the BRIDGE crews have been a tremendous asset to the firefighting efforts in this area by providing physically fit, trained and equipped fire fighters. I don’t want to think what it would be like without the BRIDGE Program. It would be very difficult to estimate the increase in property damage and possible loss of human life without this valuable fire fighting resource.

Of course we also rely heavily on volunteer fire fighters, and these volunteers are a very valuable part of fire fighting in the mountains, as well. However, the volunteer fire fighters do have their limitation; the greatest being the amount of time they can devote to forest fire fighting. I have noticed that employers who once let their employees off work to go to fight fires are now not as willing because of their concerns about the number of hours and days away from work fighting forest fires, particularly in view of the current economic climate. Volunteer firefighters may spend a few hours on a house fire; however, forest fire control can potentially last for days. Several of the fire departments in this area are now having a difficult time attracting new volunteers because of employers' attitude regarding time off due to fire fighting responsibilities.

Another problem is the increased number of hours of training that is required for volunteers. I have noticed during recent years that many new recruits leave very soon after they find out how much training will be necessary on weekends and nights. Another limitation is there are only a limited number of volunteers who are physically able and willing to perform the hard and difficult work in the mountainous terrain conditions. Thus, another reason why it is crucial to retain the BRIDGE Program.

It is so important to remember why the BRIDGE Program was started. There was an urgent need for fire fighters who were trained, equipped and physically fit to fight forest fires in the mountains. That need has not diminished. In fact the need is now greater than ever because of the increased number of people and homes at risk.

We may have a wet spring fire season, and I hope and pray that we do. However based on recent studies fire seasons in the future will probably be more serious due to the drier conditions. The potential for loss is now greater because of so many more homes and people who now live in the wildlands. We’re talking about public safety and I hope the legislators of North Carolina fully realize what is at stake.

This e-mail addresses the issue of public safety as it relates to forest fires. BRIDGE crews have also spent many hours working in this area doing storm clean up, working on school projects, helping the Division of Parks, gathering seeds for the nursery, etc. It would be very difficult to determine just how
many young lives have been transformed from a life of crime to an individual who became a productive North Carolina citizen as a result of the BRIDGE Program.

Just last summer I met a young man who came up to me and said “I was in the BRIDGE Program.” I asked him what he was doing now, and he said that he had started his own tree service business. He had even hired some employees to work for him. He explained that when he was in the BRIDGE Program he enjoyed doing the chainsaw work and so when he was released he decided to start his own business. October 2007, I saw another young man, named Tony, who had been in the BRIDGE Program. At that time he was working for a road construction company. I recognized him because we had talked about some people he knew in the Buffalo Cove Community of Caldwell County.

These are two individuals who are now tax-paying citizens, who made a positive change in their lives, and the BRIDGE Program was instrumental in guiding these individuals in making that change. These are only two occasions where I have met former BRIDGE Program graduates. The BRIDGE program is not only a valuable asset because of the fire fighting resource, as well as, assisting other state agencies with labor projects; but, the rehabilitation success of these individuals is even more valuable. They are becoming tax-paying citizens of our state.

If the BRIDGE Program is eliminated from the state budget, fire fighting resources will be more costly, since pre-arranged fire fighters are paid $8.63 per hour, and the number of these fire fighters will certainly increase because we would no longer have the resources from BRIDGE. This in turn requires more administrative measures, which adds additional costs.

These are critical economic times; but, the idea to eliminate the BRIDGE Program is not prudent. If the BRIDGE program ceases to exist the end result will not be cost savings in the state’s budget. The end result will be the loss of a valuable resource in fighting forest fires and other important community service needs, and probably more important the loss of a viable and proven rehabilitation program for youthful offenders.

Rudy Johnson

Watauga County Forest Ranger
MEMORANDUM

TO: Joe Hamilton  
   Chief Deputy Secretary

FROM: Dan Stieneke  

RE: Additional BRIDGE Facility  
    Bladen Lakes State Forest

DATE: April 8, 1998

In response to Mr. Joe Chandler's inquiry regarding interest in an additional BRIDGE facility at Bladen Lakes State Forest, the Division is interested and will support this effort. There is a definite need according to Haynes Brigman, Superintendent of Bladen Youth Center. Forestry has toured the unit and the surrounding DOC property and have plans for a training site like the one at Blue Ridge Youth Center to serve the eastern part of North Carolina.

Thank you for your help in pursuing this worthwhile project.

DLS:ight
# Appendix: J

## AGENCIES ASSISTED BY BRIDGE PROGRAM

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Western North Carolina Arboretum
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