



News Release

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

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Department of Corrections crews in the thick of the firefight this summer

During the severe 2015 wildfire season, the State of Oregon and its federal and local partners put everything they had into the fight. Included in the mix was a resource not well-known to most Oregonians: prison inmates. Formed into 10-person crews, these nationally certified firefighters helped fill the gap when conventional forces became scarce at the season's peak.

All told, 330 inmates from ten Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) institutions logged 1,187 crew days at 40 fires around the state. Unified by the Oregon Department of Forestry's (ODF) mission to put out fires at the smallest size possible, the inmate firefighters worked side-by-side with agency and contract firefighters.

"The corrections crews have always been a great asset to ODF," said Karen Swearingen, ODF's fire operations manager. "They perform year-round forestry-related activities as well as fire suppression duties during fire season. They are a valued partner in the complete and coordinated system."

Preparation for the firefight began last spring. ODF fire personnel joined with DOC staff to conduct week-long training courses for inmates selected through a careful screening process. Those selected for the crews are low-risk offenders. Inmates that successfully completed the combined classroom and field exercises attained "Firefighter II" certification, identical to that of agency and private firefighters. In addition to those working the fire lines, other inmates specially trained in food service operations by DOC were formed into camp crews, who prepared and served meals to thousands of firefighters in fire camps set up at large incidents.

The DOC crews saw plenty of action, as extreme weather conditions spawned fires from spring into mid-October. Crews were out on fires lasting from 1 day to 36 days. Overall in 2015, an estimated \$2,158,000 was saved because of this collaboration.

Here are highlights of the inmate fire crews' accomplishments from around the state.

Deer Ridge Correctional Facility (Madras)

Crews responded to seven different fires – four times as fire suppression crews and three times as kitchen/camp support crews.



An inmate fire crew at the Stout Creek fire in Douglas County.



A fire crew member digs out a hotspot at the Stout Creek fire.

Mill Creek Correctional Facility (Salem)

Fire suppression crews responded to 11 fires, including one as camp support. Additionally, they responded to numerous in-district day fires.

Powder River Correctional Facility (Baker City)

Crews responded to seven different fires, sending out a total of 10 different crews of both fire suppression and kitchen/camp support crews.

Santiam Correctional Institution (Salem)

Crews responded to three different fires as kitchen/camp support.

Shutter Creek Correctional Facility (North Bend)

Adults in custody responded to nine fires, mostly as fire suppression crews, but also sent out kitchen/camp support crews to several fires. SCCI also sent crews out on numerous days to conduct severity fire watches in areas that were expecting fire-causing conditions.

Snake River Correctional Institution (Ontario)

Crews responded to nine different fires – several times as fire suppression crews and the rest as kitchen/camp support.

South Fork Forest Camp (Tillamook)

Fire suppression crews responded to 18 fires, while kitchen/camp support crews were sent out to several fires.

Two Rivers Correctional Institution (Umatilla)

Seven crews responded to fires as kitchen/camp support.

Warner Creek Correctional Facility (Lakeview)

Camp support crews responded to two fires.

In addition to providing fire crews and support crews, DOC also supports ODF through its sack lunch program. This year, inmates at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (Wilsonville), Powder River Correctional Facility (Baker City), and Deer Ridge Correctional Institution (Madras) prepared, packaged, and delivered 33,610 lunches for both inmate and civilian firefighters throughout the state.

“We are extremely proud of our long-standing, mutually beneficial partnership with Forestry,” said DOC Director Colette S. Peters. “The adults in DOC’s custody who participate in fire season gain essential skills and experience, which are vital to successful reintegration from prison to home. ODF gains talented, qualified workers who enhance their workforce while reducing overall costs to taxpayers. Together we accomplish great things and are proud to serve the citizens of Oregon.”

As this year’s fire season comes to a close, DOC and ODF would like to recognize the staff members and firefighting crews who participated throughout the year. Not only does the fire program save the state millions of dollars, it provides DOC’s low-risk offenders with the tools they need for future work opportunities, which helps prepare them for re-entry into the community.

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The mission of the Oregon Department of Corrections is to promote public safety by holding offenders accountable for their actions and reducing the risk of future criminal behavior.