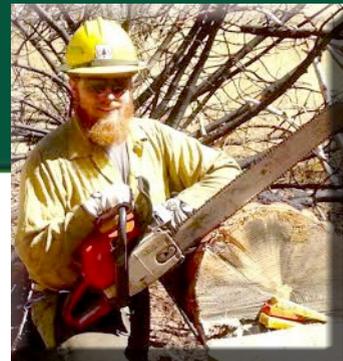




FOREST BOOTS

In a series of articles, the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is recognizing employees for the important work they do and highlighting a variety of U.S. Forest Service careers.



Calvin Harris, Wildland Firefighter Bridgeport Ranger District

When a call comes in about a new fire, the wildland firefighters of the Bridgeport Ranger District jump into action. The captain is on the radio, coordinating with dispatchers. Some team members use maps and a global positioning system (GPS) to plan the best route to the fire's location.

Others gather information about the weather, terrain, and vegetation, which influence the fire's behavior.



Calvin Harris has been part of this team for the last three years. He is a seasonal wildland firefighter, stationed on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest's Bridgeport Ranger District in Bridgeport, California.

"Every fire I go out on is a memorable experience," said Calvin. "I feel hyped up, but my training helps me focus and direct my adrenaline."

When Calvin and his teammates arrive on site, they get to work. Unlike municipal firefighters, who often rely on water to extinguish flames in buildings, wildland firefighters use fire breaks.

"There are not any hydrants in the middle of the forest, so we cut a line in the vegetation down to the bare soil," he explains. "When the fire reaches it, it runs out of new fuels to burn and goes out. We use fire engines and hoses

too, but those cannot always reach fires in rugged terrain."

Calvin and his team work with a variety of different tools to combat wildfires. "We use chainsaws a lot to cut through vegetation and create fire breaks," said Calvin. "We also have hand tools like the Pulaski, which has an axe blade on one side and a wedge-shaped hoe on the other. I use it a lot because I can cut and scrape without changing tools."

For large fires, crews call in aircraft and helicopters, which can drop water or fire retardants onto the flames from above. "My crew was working on the Cedar Fire in Arizona earlier this summer, and there was a huge DC-10 assigned to the operation," Calvin says excitedly. "The pilot gave us a tour during some down time. It was a really memorable experience for me because I'm interested in building my career with firefighting aircraft."

Calvin says that he likes wildland firefighting because there is always something interesting to do, even when his crew is not assigned to an active fire. "We do a lot of field training and try to practice as many practical things as we can. We train in safety strategies, medevac, maps, GPS, chainsaws, hose lay, topography, wind patterns, all kind of things. There

is a lot to learn. I only spend about 25 percent of my time in the office," he explained.

For people interested in becoming wildland firefighters, Calvin's advice is to be proactive. There are basic online courses (S-130 and S-190) offered for free through the National Wildfire Coordinating Group.

"Anyone who takes those courses will have a big advantage in getting a job," said Calvin. "And do not be afraid to make phone calls to network for jobs, or even stop by a ranger district."



From the office to the field, boots symbolize the work the U.S. Forest Service employees do caring for the land...

When working, Calvin wears White's Boots, a very popular line among wildland firefighter crews. "Take good care of your boots, and they'll take care of you and your feet," he said. "You can't work if your feet hurt. We preach that a lot in fire crews, and it is very important to us. Even the emblem for the Wildland Firefighter Foundation shows a pair of worn boots with flames behind them.

Calvin also stresses that it is important for wildland firefighters to keep their boots oiled. "People laugh when we shine our boots because we work in such a dirty environment. They ask us why we bother when they are just going to get dirty again, but that is part of taking care of them, so it is part of the job."