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NEWS

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CSU Students Finish Busy First Season as Wildland Firefighters

FORT COLLINS, Colo. – Three CSU students and another from West Virginia University can finally take a breather after wrapping up their first wildland firefighting season, which turned out to be an unusually active one. Warner College of Natural Resources students Steve Cox, Morgan Derr and Ben Spatola and WVU student Evan Hoffman served as wildland firefighters this summer through internships offered by the Colorado State Forest Service.

From May until late August, the interns staffed two engines based in the CSFS Fort Collins District. Over the summer, they gained invaluable hands-on experience fighting and learning about wildland fire, spending time on wildfires around the state and as far away as Georgia. The interns responded to incidents including:

- Hellsgate (Saguache County)
- Shell Complex (three fires in Las Animas County)
- Maxwell (Boulder County)
- Coffintop (Boulder County)
- Track (Las Animas County)
- Overlook (Larimer County)
- Middle Bald (Larimer County)
- Racepond (Georgia)

“We were fortunate that we were able to work everything from smaller fires all the way up to very large fires managed by national teams,” said Dan Beveridge, the Fort Collins-based CSFS engine boss who led the intern crew over the summer. He says the interns got to experience a variety of tasks, from digging nighttime fireline around active fires to performing mop-up operations on contained fires.

In addition to fighting wildland fires, the CSFS interns went through wildfire training courses and helped with several tree-thinning projects on state and university-owned lands near Fort Collins, including Trail Creek, Pingree Park and the Borden Memorial Forest.

“Even when we weren’t fighting fire, we were able to gain great experience using chainsaws, water pumps and other equipment, along with learning many firefighting techniques. We also received classroom instruction that helped drive home lessons learned out in the field,” Spatola said.

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The CSFS created the internship program in 2009 specifically for CSU and Front Range Community College students with little to no wildland firefighting experience. Matt Branch, engine boss for the CSFS Fort Collins District and co-founder of the CSFS Fire Internship Program, says the program was designed to give students training they can't get in a classroom setting.

"I would definitely recommend this program to any students interested in gaining wildland firefighting experience," Spatola said.

Students interested in the CSFS Fire Internship Program can apply for the 2012 season when announcements go out this fall, or they can email Wilson.Branch@colostate.edu for more information.

The CSFS is a service and outreach agency of the Warner College of Natural Resources at CSU.

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