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NEWS

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Firefighting Internship Provides CSU Students Hands-on Experience

FORT COLLINS, Colo. – With a busy fire season already underway, a group of Colorado State University students are joining the collective effort to fight Colorado’s wildland fires.

Four students – three from CSU, another from West Virginia University – are starting their first seasonal wildland firefighting jobs this week as interns for the Colorado State Forest Service. Over the summer, they will have the opportunity to gain valuable hands-on experience fighting and learning about wildfire.

Matt Branch, engine boss for the CSFS Fort Collins District and co-founder of the CSFS Fire Internship Program, says the internship was started to provide forestry and natural resources students with practical wildland firefighting experience to complement what they learn from books and lectures.

“This program is designed to give students training they can’t get in a classroom setting,” Branch said.

The CSFS created the internship program in 2009 specifically for CSU and Front Range Community College students with little to no wildland firefighting experience. Branch says the program is open to college students across the country, which has attracted crew members from other schools who later transferred to CSU.

“Another benefit of the program is that it allows us to staff an additional fire engine during peak fire season,” Branch said.

CSFS wildland firefighting interns who participated in the program in 2009 and 2010 have gone on to join hot shot crews, helicopter units and fire crews with the National Park Service and The Nature Conservancy. Collin Brozka, a 2010 intern and CSU forestry graduate, now works as a firefighter for Prescott Helitack, an eight-person wildland firefighting helicopter crew based on the Prescott National Forest in Arizona.

“CSU has a top-notch wildland fire science program, but it’s difficult to obtain the practical experience and national certifications needed to secure a firefighting job with the federal government,” said Brozka. “The CSFS internship program provides excellent on-the-ground firefighting experience and the training necessary to supplement classroom education.”

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In addition to fighting wildland fires, the CSFS interns learn about various aspects of wildland fire management, from fuels reduction to planning and budgeting to running chainsaws. This year's interns will work until school starts in late August, and may return to help fight large wildfires that occur in the fall. For example, in 2010, CSFS interns returned to assist firefighters battling the Fourmile Canyon Fire near Boulder.

Students interested in the CSFS Fire Internship Program can apply for the 2012 season when announcements go out in November or December, or visit <http://csfs.colostate.edu/pages/firefighter.html> for more information.

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