



PRESERVING OUR LEGACY **100 YEARS OF CDF** PROTECTING OUR FUTURE

## **CDF CONSERVATION CAMP PROGRAM**

CDF is currently authorized to operate 39 Conservation Camps statewide that house nearly 4,000 inmates and wards. These camps are operated in conjunction with the California Department of Corrections (CDC) and the California Youth Authority (CYA). Through these cooperative efforts CDF is authorized to operate 196 fire crews year round. These crews, also referred to as hand crews, are available to respond to all types of emergencies including wildfires, floods, search and rescue. Fire crews perform several million hours of emergency response each year and more on work projects.

The crews are completely mobile throughout the state and are strategically located in areas that are most likely to need their assistance. They are carefully screened by custodial agencies for their suitability for the program, including physical, emotional, and intellectual aptitudes, as well as a lack of arson in their records. Potential crew members are evaluated again during physical fitness training by the custodial agency and yet again during their basic training by CDF. Fire Crew Firefighter Basic Training consists of a week of classroom training and a week of field training and covers wildland fire safety and attack, hand tool use, teamwork, and crew expectations. Once assigned to a fire crew, a minimum of four hours-per-week of advanced training is provided to each fire crew firefighter, with some members progressing to more responsible positions on the crew. All CDF fire crews are tested each spring during rigorous Fire Crew Preparedness Exercises.

On fires, building “freeways” with chain saws and hand tools through whatever vegetation happens to be in the line of fire is normal crew routine. However, direct attack, where the crew’s efforts are applied directly to the flaming front of the fire, is the tactic of choice when the distance between the wildfire, and life and property grows smaller. You will also see these crews ahead of the fire setting up to protect structures.

CDF fire crews are available year-round; consequently, they have become California’s storm troopers, logging some 426,090 hours of flood fighting in January of 1997 alone. All of California’s major disasters over the last few years have seen the assistance of the fire crews in either a labor intensive effort to contain and mitigate the situation, such as the fires, heavy snows, search and rescue operations, earthquakes and floods, or in more of a support role, such as staffing a mobile kitchen unit during the Los Angeles riots.

A typical conservation camp will be located within a few miles of a small population center. It will have a civil service staff of at least 24 employees, between CDF and the cooperating agency, and will field five fire crews. The budget for a typical camp, including both agencies’ payroll and operating costs, is about \$2.35 million. Many of the goods and services required for operation of the conservation camp will be purchased from local vendors, and it is common for staff to be active, involved members of the local community.

