

# Army units learn wildland firefighting on JBLM

By Bruce McDonald, JBLM Directorate of Public Works, Environmental Division July 28, 2020



HIDE CAPTION –

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Bruce McDonald, DPW Forester, guides PFC Mena from HHC 14 BEB RUGGED, 2-2 SBCT on the correct stance when holding a chainsaw. (Photo Credit: Cathy Hamilton-Wissmer)  
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JOINT BASE LEWIS-MCCHORD, Wash. -- Every summer wildfires break out across the United States. The Army works with the National Interagency Wildfire Center in Boise, Idaho to aid civilian units combating wildfires nationwide. This is an emergency response that the active-duty Army, Army Reserve and Army National Guard units take on.

Joint Base Lewis-McChord deploys the 14th and 23rd Brigade Engineer Battalions on a rotating basis to wildfires. Most recently the 14th BEB was deployed to California and the 23rd BEB to Oregon. The work is hard, dangerous and in arduous terrain but the training is essential for safety and success.

"Soldiers are trained to a sufficient level that they could clear brush on the fire line," said 2nd Lt. Bradley Krupp, 14th BEB battalion adjutant. "All Soldiers involved in the training reported improved confidence and understanding of the role of chainsaws in the fire line."

The chainsaw training included saw maintenance, common mechanical problems, assembly of the chainsaw, blade sharpening, safety practices, saw parts to keep spares of on hand, bucking logs, cutting through brush and how to carry a chainsaw during a fire."

The JBLM Environmental Division conducts prescribed burns and responds to wildfires at various locations around the

base. They are highly trained in prescribed and wildland fire operations. Last week the forestry staff provided their expertise and experience to Army units as they work toward their wildland firefighting certificates. The certification ensures they're ready to fight wildland fires wherever duty may call.

"This training expanded the capabilities of both 2-17FA and 14th BEB with respect to wildland firefighting and also helped foster a safety focused approach to chainsaw implementation," Krupp said.

The military has a long history of wildfire response and training dating back as far as the great fires of 1910 when Buffalo soldiers were deployed to keep order in Idaho as towns were evacuated. Firefighters that deploy by parachute, often called "smokejumpers", were originally a military unit that responded to Japanese efforts in WWII to float incendiary devices across the west to start wildfires. Basic firefighting safety concepts were developed from the military's ten standard fighting orders.

Proud to continue the Army's wildland fire tradition, JBLM makes units available when conditions are dire.

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