

SWOSU Department Involved in Wildland Fire Programs

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Southwestern Oklahoma State University Parks and Recreation Management Department graduates and students recently participated in a prescribed fire near Concho, Okla., as part of a Bureau of Indian Affairs wildland project. SWOSU is the only Oklahoma university providing federal wildland fire certifications. Among the participants are (kneeling) Chance Paris, Fritch, Texas. Front row from left-Reid Gossen, Corn; Dustin Wall, Owasso; Whit Pyron, Arapaho; Mark Bingham, Geary; Derek Wall, Owasso; Wade Hair, Chickasha; Eric Pritchard, Mountain View; Tammy Swickey, Canute; Aaron Gray, Hydro; and Robby Penner, Weatherford. Back row from left-Brandon Munro, Manitou; Travis Vernon, Sayre; SWOSU Wildland Fire Management Instructor Josh Williams; Micah Booze, Thomas; and Chafen Petit, Carnegie.

The Southwestern Oklahoma State University Parks and Recreation Management Department in Weatherford has become increasingly involved in wildland fire management education, and SWOSU is the only Oklahoma university providing federal wildland fire certifications.

Chad Kinder, chair of the SWOSU Parks and Recreation Management Department, said the university offers seven wildland fire management courses totaling 11 college credit hours. Successful students gain certification in 12 National Wildfire Coordinating Group areas including:

- Firefighter Training
- Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior
- Introduction to Incident Command System
- Human Factors on the Fireline
- Firefighter Type I
- Portable Pumps and Water Use
- Look Up, Look Down, Look Around
- Basic Incident Command System
- Wildland Fire Chainsaws
- Ignition Operations
- Followership to Leadership
- Wildland Fire Observations and Origin Scene Protection for First Responders

SWOSU students can take the wildland fire management courses as part of one of two programs of study. The first option is an eight credit hour wildland fire management specialization area within the Parks and Recreation Management major. The second option is an 18 credit hour wildland fire management minor. Weatherford native Josh Williams, fire prevention technician with the Bureau of Indian Affairs Concho Agency Fire Management Office, serves as the adjunct instructor for the SWOSU wildland fire courses.

Williams said the SWOSU wildland fire management program is beneficial for both SWOSU students and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Williams said students get hands-on, real life wildland firefighting experience close to home. The BIA benefits by having a pool of trained and motivated firefighters available for employment.

The Weatherford Concho Agency Unit currently employs around 20 SWOSU Parks and Recreation Management students and graduates. They are primarily utilized in the conduct of prescribed burns on tribal and adjacent privately owned lands. Williams said the goal of the prescribed burn program is to restore fire to its historic role in the ecosystem. Prescribed fire removes excessive amounts of unburned fuel from the ecosystem. It also assists in the control of invasive species such as the Eastern Red Cedar. Prescribed fire also enhances wildlife habitat and serves to reduce populations of parasitic species such as ticks.

The SWOSU students also assist BIA personnel in the suppression of wildland fires in western Oklahoma. Many students have fought large national wildfires in locations throughout the United States.

Kinder said many of the wildland fire management program students work as wildland firefighters in national parks and forests during the summer season. Successful program graduates are finding wildland fire related employment with a variety of federal natural resource management agencies including the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.