

Inmates cutting cords of wood for low-income families

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SPOKANE, Wash. -Inmates from the Airway Heights Corrections Center are wishing for cooler weather right now as they work on a project to reduce fire danger and generate free firewood for the community.

Last month, a section of Riverside State Park posed a fire danger, crowded with trees that had all started growing at the same time, competing for sunlight and water and creating a fire danger.

So the Department of Natural Resources started thinning them out and with the inmates' help is now turning those trees into firewood. It's back breaking work that you wouldn't wish on anyone unless they were convicted felons.

The inmates working on the project are all volunteers, spending their days splitting firewood in 90+ degree weather.

"They have been working extremely hard," Sergeant Mick Jackson with the Airway Heights Corrections Center said. "You know we encourage a lot of water and that type of thing throughout the day. These guys have all stepped up and they all seem to look forward giving back to the community."

The firewood has to be seasoned by October, so prison officials don't have time to run the wood through a log splitter, so almost of the wet Bull Pine has to be chopped by hand.

"I think the most benefits you're going to get out of this is a work ethic. It's hard work, not just anybody can hack it out here ya know," inmate Shane Venziano said.

Inmates like being outside and the self respect they get from doing an honest days work.

"It helps you not take things for granted, you know what I'm saying? I mean in here you're making 40 cents an hour and you're working hard, really hard. Out there when you're making minimum wage 10, 11, 12 bucks an hour it makes you appreciate it more," Venziano added.

By August the inmates will have split 600 cords of wood, which will eventually be delivered to low income families for heating this coming winter.

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