

'It's an exciting time to be a forester'

Wildfire mitigation is her specialty.

Brenda Wasielewski (B.S. 1998) is Assistant District Forester with the Golden District of the Colorado State Forest Service in Golden, Colorado. Her responsibilities include assessing wildfire hazards for individual homes, overseeing National Fire Plan grants that assist private landowners in abating wildfire hazards, assisting local county government with wildfire policy, and managing hazard fuel reduction projects (clear cutting, thinning, and prescribed fire) on State Park land. The hazard fuel reduction projects require a lot of coordination.

Notes Brenda, "Not only do I decide the project's location, I must lay out the project, mark trees, oversee contractors, and conduct public presentations.

A favorite part of Brenda's job is her involvement with wildland and prescribed fire. "We have an active prescribed fire program on my district, burning hundreds of acres a year. I also must be available for wildland fire assignments anywhere in Colorado," says Brenda. And if her workload allows, she also has the opportunity to take on national wildland fire assignments.

Brenda explains that the Colorado State Forest Service has become a major player in managing and administering federal funds earmarked for forest management. She adds that her agency has earned a high level of trust from the people of Colorado. "This respect allows us to perform forest management easier than some of our federal or state partners. It's an exciting time to be a forester here in Colorado!" she contends.

Brenda estimates that she spends about 60% of her time in the field and the remainder in the office. "A



Brenda Wasielewski participates in a broadcast burn in the foothill mountains of Golden, CO. She confesses, "I love forestry as much as I love fire."

forester today has to know more than silvicultural prescriptions," says Brenda. She says today's forester needs to be proficient in writing, educating, computer skills (generating maps, GIS, presentations), and public speaking. "A forester has to know how to talk to the public and landowners about forest management. Sometimes I feel more like a salesman than a forester," says Brenda.

Brenda is currently in graduate school working towards her Masters degree in Forest Fire Science. Although initially concerned about the academ-

ic demands, she says that few forestry concepts and principles were new to her. She credits her undergraduate education at the UW-Madison for providing a good foundation of knowledge and the additional benefit of her field experience.

To those currently working on their undergraduate degrees, Brenda says field experience is critical for a career in forestry. "Foresters must simply spend time in the forest to comprehend the complexity of forest management. You must either witness or perform a task before you can advise on it," she feels. As an example, she says the job of wildland firefighter is 90% drudgery and 10% fun. She also says, "There is so much to be learned by witnessing fire behavior and government policy in action." In addition to field experience, Brenda recommends students focus on their writing skills. Says Brenda, "It is extremely important that you are able to express yourself clearly and professionally. Not only do you represent yourself, you represent your employer, agency, and industry."