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## Program Trains Unemployed Vets To Fight Fires

### *U.S. Forest Service, California Conservation Corps Sponsoring Training Program*

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**SAN DIEGO** -- About two dozen veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are now being trained as firefighters.

"I've always wanted to be a smoke jumper," said Alex Guerra, who used to be a combat engineer in the Army. "I used to blow stuff up in Iraq but that doesn't translate well into civilian life."



The training program is sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service through the California Conservation Corps and aims to help veterans make the transition from military to civilian life.

Before joining the program, Branden Gray was a Special Operations Capable Marine, which is the Marine Corps version of special forces. Gray was deployed all over the world. When he left the service in 2010, he had a rough time afterward.

"It wasn't just not finding a job, but PTSD and dealing with all that was difficult," said Gray. "This has helped to balance things out."

The U.S. Forest Service is using \$1 million out of its budget to train veterans in the art of firefighting.

Though the training program is not a pipeline into a permanent job but it is a head start and veterans do get paid while they train.

"I love being out in the wilderness and at the end of the day I know I've done some good," said Amie Stokes, who used to work on CH-53 helicopters in the Marine Corps.

Across the nation, unemployment among 19 to 26-year-olds is 9 percent. For veterans among the same age, the rate is 13 percent.