



Not Your Ordinary Job – Season Two, Episode Three Transcript

- Ashley:** Welcome to a brand new season of Not Your Ordinary Job. We are so excited for you to join us. I am Ashley Muriel, public affairs specialist for Eastern States. And with me is...
- Jasmine:** Jasmine Brown public affairs specialist with BLM Eastern States. Without further ado, we would like to welcome Jackson Hotshot's Forestry Technician Karel Williams to the show. Karel, how are you?
- Karel:** I'm doing great. Thank you so much for having me today.
- Jasmine:** That's great. So, tell us a little bit about yourself, Karel.
- Karel:** Yeah, so this will be my third... or starting my fourth season with the Jackson Hotshots. It'll be my seventh...eighth season, full fire, working for all BLM. And then, previous to that I did four seasons, working for a timber sale prep crew, for the Forest Service in Colorado. I'm originally from Colorado, moved down here four years ago. Been loving the crew loving the energy that it brings, and kind of the path that we're moving in, growing future firefighters. And yeah, just excited for the season to start up here. Seasonals [seasonal employees] come on in a little over a week. And we'll do our critical AD. And then hopefully we'll get out on some fires early in the season.
- Jasmine:** What are you most looking forward to when it comes to this season?
- Karel:** Every year comes with a new group of firefighters to join the Jackson Hotshot crew. And it's really fun to see how all those interactions and those personalities kind of meld together as we all go through the same hardships, either in base and trainings, and doing our physical, PTs, and any matter of that. Or when we're on the line and we're all sharing and carrying a log for 50 feet or 100 feet and handing heavy random objects to each other to get them out of the fires way or to create that fuel brick that we're doing. Just going through that struggle, it really creates a family kind of bond between the 20-21 of us. Other than the personnel side, just going and seeing the country. I think that's one of the really great things about being on a hotshot crew, especially here in the south is we get to travel all over the country, most of the places that we're traveling to aren't areas that you wouldn't necessarily go on a vacation to. They're just off the beaten path. The other and last probably top thing is just all the work, we get to do all sorts of different work. Some of the work is pretty physically taxing. Some of it's really fun. Obviously, we learn as hotshot crews, all the hard work usually pays off to easier work or more fun jobs. So, when we're prepping a road all day or putting a line up a long ridge, usually that turns into possibly being able to burn off that ridge, which then is kind of one of those fun activities that we get to do as wildland firefighters as we actually get to use fire to try to stop the naturally occurring fire in a better suited area for us to manage that.

- Jasmine:** That's great. So, I know that you mentioned earlier that you're looking forward to meeting the new crew members. Is there any advice that you would like to give them as well as anyone looking to join the Jackson Hotshots?
- Karel:** Yeah, I would say, being, on my seventh year on a hotshot crew, when I was going into hotshotting, I was lucky enough to do a detail, which is basically you're coming from a different crew. And you're, you're able to sit in a slot for a fire roll and see how that functions, and it gives you kind of an insight. But for new people coming into the Jackson Hotshots, or folks out there that are looking to possibly join our crew or any other hotshot crew out there, really just getting yourself physically fit is a huge thing. I don't say that just because our job is very physical, but what I've seen as I've progressed in my career up to a squad leader on the hotshot crew, is that those folks that show up in really good shape, or at least in good shape enough that they're not struggling constantly, that allows you to focus your mind on other tasks that you can learn. Other than that, I would just reach out, make phone calls, talk to people. We're all here for the next six to eight months, phones on, emails on, we'll try to get back to you or in touch with you or answer any questions, ask questions, but then have an understanding that coming into the crew, we might be doing things differently than the last crew that you were on, or things that you've been taught previously, and just have that open mind of, 'Hey, they obviously know what they're doing. They've all been here for three, four plus years. So maybe this is how they do it and it must work.' So having that open-mindedness, and then just coming in with the idea that you're going to be critiqued as a first-year or as a new person on the crew. You're constantly going to be critiqued to try to make you better.
- Ashley:** Going back to your point about getting critiqued to enhance work abilities during long work hours, what is the physical training requirements to provide top results?
- Karel:** Yeah, so our workout routine, which kind of helps with our physical fitness is we usually work in some long runs, we'll work in some sprints of 800 meters or less. And then it goes really into that kind of like circuit training, where you're doing a 45-minute workout with five different moves of maybe it's pushups, sit ups, air squats, lunges, and you're just doing a certain rep count of each of those, and you're only and you're doing the same thing for 45 minutes. Again, that's to kind of tax all those muscles like you would be in the field. And then it's also a mental mind game, where if you are in the field, and you're doing the same task for 16 hours, you need to be able to kind of be able to put your mind in a place where you're able to continue to produce, knowing that the next time you get to that next round, hey guess what, it's the same thing or the next time you look at the clock, oh yeah I still have time left to do work.
- Jasmine:** That seems like a great way for all of the crew members to get to know each other. It seems like
- Karel:** Yeah, yeah, the best time to learn about each other is when you're down, unfortunately. So when you're having a bad day, or you have been worked, and you can't, and you don't mentally think you can work anymore. That's really when you get to... that's when those connections and that family kind of orientation comes into play. Like we're all in it together. We're all grinding. If you're having a bad day, and I'm feeling great, maybe I'll bump up and take a little bit more. So you don't have to and then guess what, the next time I'm down, maybe you're feeling great. So then maybe you work a little harder. It's it really ties into that, that really team orientated, everybody's helping everybody. We are as fast as our slowest link. So if we can keep everybody at the same pace, or have some stronger folks carry a little bit more in certain capacities. Maybe that brings up the production rate or the efficiency of the crew. Those are things that we love to see.

Jasmine: Absolutely, that's what I definitely love about the fire crew is that you all are very family-oriented. And also, the crew is very diverse, too, I noticed. What's the best part about having a diverse group of people to work with?

Karel: Yeah, I think the diversity goes a long way. Because I think it would be kind of boring if there was a hotshot crew of 21 Karels you know? We all we all have different experiences. We all have different life stories. We all come from different areas of the country, different cultures, different religions. We all have all these different experiences. And when we all get together or we're driving across the country and you get nine people in the back of our crew carriers, those stories come out and guess what, that's like, a huge learning point for a lot of people where it's like, Oh, I've never experienced that. Tell me about that.' Or 'Hey, guess what, I've had this.' 'Oh you've had that? That's crazy.' Just working through those, it's really, it's really fun to interact with people that haven't necessarily done the same things, or are from the same areas.

Jasmine: Awesome. Well, we would like to thank you for allowing us to interview you, Karel, and we're looking forward to hearing about the great work that you and your team members will be doing this fire season.

Karel: Yeah, thank you so much. I really appreciate you having me on. Super excited for the year and this was a really cool thing to do. I've never been on a crew or worked for anybody that was able to have this kind of opportunity. So this was a really great thing to add to my list of things that I've done.

Jasmine: Listen to our podcast every other Friday to learn more about our Jackson Hotshots.