



Not Your Ordinary Job – Season Two, Episode Four Transcript

- Jasmine:** Welcome everybody to Not Your Ordinary Job, Season Two. I am Jasmine Brown public affairs specialist with BLM Eastern States. And with me is...
- Ashley:** Ashley Muriel, public affairs specialist for Eastern States.
- Jasmine:** And without further ado, we would like to welcome Mike Morgan on our show, Jackson Hotshot forestry technician. Mike, how are you?
- Mike:** I'm doing well. How's everybody doing?
- Jasmine:** We're doing well. Thank you. So, tell us a little bit about yourself, Mike. What made you want to get into the career of fire.
- Mike:** So, I started on a structure department in Nebraska worked there for two years doing structure fire and EMS. Decided fire was a career path I wanted to pursue further. So, I moved on up to South Dakota and started going to college for fire science and was introduced to wildland fire there. And in my first summer away from college, I started working for a Type Two IA (Initial Attack) handcrew in South Dakota. I was there for four years and got quite a bit of wildland experience in that respect and decided wildland was more or less the fire path I wanted to stick with. Moved on to the federal side of things worked for the Fish and Wildlife Service on a burning crew in joint operation with the U.S. Air Force. And then from there, I decided I wanted to get back into the handcrew life got signed on to the Jackson Hotshots here in Mississippi. And this is my third season with the crew and 10th overall and fire.
- Jasmine:** What makes you excited about this year's fire season?
- Mike:** This season, I'm just starting on as a lead for Alpha Squad on Jackson. So I'm pretty excited about working on my leadership skills, sharpening those skills and applying a lot of previous knowledge to new experiences. As well as you know, helping newer crew members gain more knowledge in different facets of the job. Really looking forward to being more of an asset for the crew in a leadership position. And just trying to carry that forward to maintain the quality of the crew's work overall,
- Ashley:** What is your favorite part of the job?
- Mike:** I like that you can't really plan on anything in this job. I like a lot of the infrequencies. I like a lot of the unknowns. You know, one day you're sitting in your shop PTing and out of nowhere, you get a call and you're heading to Arizona, or Florida or wherever the case may be. And not knowing that kind of keeps you on edge. And it's kind of exciting to sit back and wait for those calls to come in and not know where you're going. And then when you find out you've got an assignment and where you're headed. It's kind of... it's kind of fun to try and look back at past fires and maybe try and think about what the environment was like when you were there last.

And is there any way that you can use those experiences to build on this next roll that you may be doing there.

Jasmine: Wow. So, is there any way that you have to get prepared beforehand when you get those calls or is that just something that you have to always look out for?

Mike: Yes, so once we finish our critical AD portion, you're just kind of hanging on. And then when you get the call, it doesn't matter where you're going you a lot of times you don't have a whole lot of time to react. You know, you're basically told you're loading up, and we're going this way. We practice a lot for the crew and myself to have everything that we need for a 14-day roll loaded on the vehicles at all times. We're trained to be fluid in those situations so that we can react appropriately and respond as necessary to those situations, you know.

Ashley: What are some goals you have accomplished or would like to accomplish?

Mike: I would say one of the primary goals was definitely getting into a higher leadership position. When I started in wildland fire, I hadn't really overall no knowledge of wildland, for the most part, coming from a structural background. I knew how to fight fire in a house but had no idea how to fight it in forest. And so moving forward throughout the crew, my initial goal was to get on a saw team. And when I was awarded that I was on a saw for a number of years and all the way up until last season actually. So I guess that's, you know, eight years or seven years on a saw. And my next goal after that was to get into a leadership role where I'm at now as far as being lead on the squad, you know, kind of providing a liaison between the squad leaders and the squad members themselves. And being a support system for both of those groups so that we can all kind of cohesively work to attain the goal that we've set out to achieve.

Jasmine: What is the best part of working with your team members?

Mike: This crew is incredible. diverse, there's a lot of folks from a lot of different backgrounds, you know, we hail from all over the country, you know, me being from Nebraska, coming down here to Mississippi, it's a whole different world, you know. And then, for other folks on the crew, we got a couple from the Northeast. And for folks from New York, or Pennsylvania, you know, coming to Mississippi, again, is a whole new world. So you get to experience a new location in the United States that's unlike any, with a whole lot of people that you wouldn't typically find yourself around on a traditional day to day basis. It's a lot of fun in the aspect and it's interesting to build those relationships with people you wouldn't typically be around.

Jasmine: So for anybody that is looking to get into the career fire or join the Jackson Hotshots, what kind of advice would you give somebody who's just getting in?

Mike: You know, I would say physical fitness is king in this world. If you're going to come out to do a wildland job. You want to be in shape and you want to know how to take care of yourself.

Jasmine: Thank you for allowing us to interview you, Mike. And we're looking forward to hearing about all of the great work you and your team members will be doing this fire season. Listen to our podcast every other Friday to learn more about our Jackson Hotshots.