



# FOREST FIREFIGHTER

**Patricia Burley, 26**  
**Kenora, Ontario**

Burley's typical day in the field begins with a commute to work via chopper. Then she and her crew have to scout out water, set their pumps, cut a safety trail with chainsaws, lay hose—up to a kilometre's worth—and prepare to play the ultimate elemental challenge with Mother Nature: Water vs. Fire. It's definitely not a life for the weak, or the weak of heart. And that's just the way the five-foot-one-inch Burley likes it.

### WHAT SHE LOVES ABOUT HER JOB

Being outside in the forests and by the lakes. She also gets to travel. Burley has been shipped out to every province in her seven-year career and was sent south to lend a hand when states of emergency were declared in Montana, Oregon and Idaho.

### WHAT SHE DOESN'T LOVE ABOUT HER JOB

The bugs. Specifically, the ticks, although biting critters of all types plague the crews from the end of April until mid-July. The Kenora area is particularly rife with the eight-legged nasties that Burley despises. "Sometimes you pull 13 off in a day." Ick.

### BEST MOMENT

Battling the Thunder Bay 37 Fire. It blew up from Minnesota this spring and



was burning through virgin red and white pine forest in an area peppered with lakes and cabins. Burley and her team set up sprinklers around the properties—"values" in forest-firefighter-speak. "We saved the majority."

### RIGHT STUFF REQUIRED

Mental preparedness is key. You have to be cool in a crisis and quick on your feet. "You don't want any stress cases working around you." Enough said. Oh, and you need to be pretty buff too to schlep around pumps, hose packs and the ubiquitous chainsaw.

### SHOW ME THE MONEY

This seasonal, by-the-hour, contract position with the Ministry of Natural Resources pays, on a slow-to-average season, between \$15,000 and \$25,000. In a busy season, crew leaders like Burley can make \$25,000 to \$35,000.

—Kate Barker

## HOW IT RATES

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|                   |      |
|-------------------|------|
| ADVENTURE THRILLS | 9/10 |
| LONGEVITY         | 8/10 |
| PAY               | 3/10 |
| OUTDOOR TIME      | 8/10 |
| FREEDOM           | 6/10 |