

MASTERS OF FIXING DISASTERS

A Report on Parlin Fork and Chamberlain Creek Conservation Camps

April 30, 2011

Summary

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) operate Parlin Fork and Chamberlain Creek Conservation Camps, in conjunction with CAL FIRE. Both camps are located in the Jackson State Demonstration Forest on Highway 20, between Fort Bragg and Willits. The camps are for low-risk male felons. Fire prevention and fire suppression are the two primary goals.

Inmates receive fire training at the California Correctional Center (CCC) located in Susanville. When not fighting fires, inmate crews clear brush in the forest, perform various labors for government and certain non-profit organizations. Inmate crews contribute to the community by performing charitable deeds. They also donate hobby crafts to charitable organizations for fund raising; inmates are required to use their own time, tools, and materials.

There are educational opportunities for the inmates, correspondence courses for both G.E.D. and college. Inmates are taught various skills which can be valuable to them upon their release.

Parlin Fork (PFCC) and Chamberlain Creek (CCCC) are tobacco free honor camps with no fencing. *Out of Bounds* signs are clearly posted.

Methods

California Penal Code §919(b) states that, "...the Grand Jury shall inquire into the conditions and management of public prisons within the county." The 2010-2011 Mendocino County Grand Jury (GJ) visited Parlin Fork Conservation Camp on October 29, 2010 and Chamberlain Creek Conservation Camp on December 9, 2010.

The GJ interviewed CAL FIRE personnel and CDCR Officers, reviewed documents, and inspected both facilities.

Background

Parlin Fork is the oldest conservation camp in Northern California, established on August 8, 1949, and is the second oldest in the State. Chamberlain Creek was opened on June 8, 1959. Inmate crews are over-seen by CAL FIRE when not in camp.

The Mendocino County Sheriff's Office and the Ukiah Police Department SWAT teams train at Chamberlain Creek gun range.

Findings - Both Camps

1. PFCC and CCCC are staffed by CAL FIRE and California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and are located on Highway 20 in the Jackson State Demonstration Forest. One Administrative Assistant is shared by both camps and CAL FIRE.
2. Each camp maintains five fire crews comprised of 13-17 inmates for emergency deployment year around. Each crew is overseen by one Fire Captain. One crew remains in camp at all times.
3. CDCR is responsible for the supervision, care, and discipline of inmates. CAL FIRE maintains the camp, supervises the work of inmate fire crews, and is responsible for custody of inmates under the daily CAL FIRE project activity.
4. During emergencies, such as fires or floods, CDCR staff accompanies the inmate crews to assist in the care and the security of the inmates, and provide support to the CAL FIRE staff
5. Inmates committed to CDCR are selected and trained at the California Correctional Center (CCC) located in Susanville and then assigned to conservation camps. Camp inmates are low security risks. Those who commit crimes that are violent, sexual, arson and/or escape attempts are ineligible.
6. Inmates not on fire crews serve as cooks, porters, landscapers, launders, clerks, maintenance, and support activity workers.
7. Inmates are paid for their work; the majority of inmates are laborers, who receive \$1.45 per day. The skilled inmates that can earn up to \$2.45 per day include: mechanics, clerks, cooks, plumbers, welders, carpenters, and electricians. CAL FIRE pays inmates \$1.00 per hour, portal to portal, when fighting fires.
8. Most inmates are serving time for drug and/or alcohol related offenses.
9. Fire crews respond to fires, flood, accidents, and other disasters. Crews clear brush, maintain hiking trails, provide fire wood for camp grounds and non-profit organizations, such as the Senior Center in Willits.
10. Inmates make civic contributions, such as, cooking Thanksgiving Dinner at the Willits Senior Center, and also donate hobby craft to non-profits for their fund raising sales. Hobby crafts are made by inmates using their own time, tools and funds for materials.
11. Crews perform work for government entities and non-profits. Some of the work includes campground trails, painting, parking lot repair, and brush clearing.
12. Crew work is billed at \$224 per day to offset fuel cost and equipment use, and includes an administrative fee of \$24. No profit is derived from these activities; however, the income reduces government cost for camp maintenance.

13. Both camps bake their own bread and pastries, and cook all foods from scratch. The State food budget per inmate per day is \$2.55: the same amount as in the early 1980's.
14. Both camps have a garden area where vegetables and fruit are grown, saving on their food budget.
15. When inmates are fighting fires, CAL FIRE furnishes their meals.
16. Educational opportunities are available by correspondence, including G.E.D., college and certification courses. Some inmates, who have worked with the Licensed Water Plant Operator, have obtained their State Certification; upon release, they were hired by private/civic water companies.
17. Mendocino County Transit Authority (MTA) provides transportation for released inmates
18. Books, magazines, television, an exercise room, and recreational facilities, such as a baseball diamond are available. The County Bookmobile visits every two weeks and is highly valued by the inmates.
19. Volunteers from non-denominational churches provide services. Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings are conducted by local volunteer organizations or the inmates.
20. The remoteness of the camps makes visiting difficult. Visitors must be pre-approved by CCC prison staff; visitation is on Saturdays and Sundays. Weekend family visits can be up to three days in a fully furnished cottage on the grounds at each camp.
21. There are no fences at the camps, but *Out of Bounds* signs are clearly posted. Camps are tobacco free.
22. Conservation camps abide by all government regulations, including reporting and safety.
23. Staffing for CDCR at each camp consists of: one Correctional Lieutenant (Camp Commander), one Correctional Sergeant, eight Correctional Officers, and one part-time Administrative Assistant shared between both camps.

Findings - Parlin Fork

24. Inmate capacity is 110 low-risk minimum custody male felons, who are housed in barrack style buildings.
25. Staffing for CAL FIRE consists of: one Assistant Chief (Division Chief), 10 Fire Crew Captains, one Heavy Equipment Mechanic, and one Chief Plant Operator.
26. The camp has its own water treatment plant and the waste water is pumped up the hill to a holding pond and leach field. The PFCC treats its own water, drawn from the Noyo River.
27. The day before the GJ visit, the waste water pump had failed and there was no water available for cooking or for toilet use. Infiltration from the recent storm may have contributed to the failure.

28. The camp operates a saw mill and provides rough cut lumber to government agencies. New *state of the art* saw mill equipment was acquired from excess inventory of the State. There is also a cabinet shop where cabinets and shelving are crafted. Recently, PFCC made cabinets for a library.
29. The PFCC repairs and maintains equipment for both camps and for CAL FIRE facilities.
30. The kitchen was observed to be clean, sanitary, and inmates prepare all meals.

Findings - Chamberlain Creek

31. CAL FIRE staff consists of 15 employees: one Chief, 10 Captains, one Water/Waste Water Licensed Plant Operator, and three Heavy Equipment Operators.
32. The maximum capacity of the camp is 112, low-risk minimum custody male felons. On the day of the GJ visit, there were 106 inmates.
33. Inmates design, build, and finish cabinets, doors, and signage. The products are sent to the CDCR Headquarters, other government facilities, and public agencies.
34. Recent projects include Lake Sonoma Dam clean-up, Laytonville School District building maintenance, Cow Mountain brush clearance and fire breaks.
35. Inmates perform a valuable service in conservation by harvesting Redwood tree seeds from cones; collecting seeds is arduous and tedious work. Viable seed cones are only produced when weather and water conditions are appropriate. The seeds are part of a conservation seed bank designed to preserve Redwood trees.
36. Crews remove fallen and dangerous trees in Jackson State Demonstration Forest. Removed logs are transported to Parlin Fork, where they are milled.
37. Inmates contribute to the annual Ukiah Christmas Effort at Ukiah Fairground, where food and toys are distributed for approximately 750 families. The CCCC kitchen crew cooks and serves community Thanksgiving dinner at the Harrah's Senior Center in Willits every year. Inmate crews prepare the site for the Willits Frontier Days event, and help with clean-up.
38. The CCCC water is provided by a well and surface water is drawn from Chamberlain Creek.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. the Board of Supervisors continue to fund the Bookmobile to service the camps on the current schedule, (Finding 18)
2. the crews be utilized as often as possible, by any City, County department, agency, school district, special district, or tax-supported entity within the County, (Findings 9-12, 28, 33-34, 37)

3. CAL FIRE and California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) continue to operate the camps in the same efficient manner, and perform services within the community. (All Findings)

Discussion

Parlin Fork and Chamberlain Creek are well managed and utilize their resources to maximum capacity. Staff encourages inmates to develop job skills and continue their education.

Conservation camps freely give mutual aid to other agencies, including local fire districts, as well as assistance to other safety agencies. In the 2008 lightning fires, 11 counties, the National Guard, and several states, including Nevada, Utah, and Colorado came to the aid of Mendocino County.

The Mendocino County Library's Bookmobile is a valuable resource for inmates in both camps. According to the press, the bookmobile is an item under discussion for future budget reductions.

Products produced by inmates are sold to public agencies for only the cost of the material; thereby, saving public dollars.

The success of the camps can be attributed to the good relationship between CDCR and CAL FIRE, as demonstrated by the cooperative effort of their respective commanders and staff at each camp.

Required Responses

Board of Supervisors (Finding 18; Recommendation 1)

Mendocino County Library (Finding 18; Recommendation 1)

Ukiah, Willits, Fort Bragg, and Point Arena City Councils (Findings 9-12, 28, 34, 37; Recommendation 2)

Mendocino County Superintendent of Public Education (Findings 9-12, 28, 34, 37; Recommendation 2)

Requested Responses

CAL FIRE (All Findings; Recommendation 3)

Parlin Fork Conservation Camp Commander (Findings 1-30; Recommendation 3)

Chamberlain Creek Conservation Camp Commander (Findings 1-22, 31-38; Recommendation 3)