

**PARLIN FORK CONSERVATION CAMP**  
**Serving our Community**

June 25, 2020

**SUMMARY**

Mendocino County 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury (GJ) conducted a site visit to Parlin Fork Conservation Camp on February 19, 2020. The camp is a California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) facility and is overseen by correctional officers and operated in conjunction with CAL FIRE.

The primary goal of the camp is rehabilitation; the secondary goal is to serve the community. Inmates contribute to several community events, including the Fort Bragg Salmon Barbeque and the Willits Thanksgiving dinner at the Senior Center.

The inmates are trained for firefighting at the CDCR in Susanville, California for two months before being sent to the camp. Inmates eligible to volunteer for the camp are low risk and their remaining sentence cannot exceed five years. Inmates must be physically fit to be sent to the camp. Working in the camp can reduce their remaining sentence.

The capacity of Parlin Fork Conservation Camp is 100 inmates. On the day of the GJ visit there were 85 inmates. There are seven crews, with up to 15 inmates. They clear brush and maintain the Jackson State Demonstration Forest. One crew always remains in camp. The inmates respond to disasters including fires, near-by accidents, floods, and earthquakes.

Inmates can earn \$2.90 to \$5.12 per day, depending on their skill level. Some inmates have valuable skills, such as mechanics, cooking, and sewing; enabling them to maintain their own equipment.

When fighting fires, which can be in any California county, inmates earn \$2 an hour, portal to portal. Monies earned while in camp can be saved until the inmate is released. If the inmate's sentence includes restitution and court costs to the California Victims' Restitution Fund, Susanville will allow a deduction from their earnings.

All CAL FIRE Captains are EMTs and accompany crews to fires, brush clearing, and other community services. CAL FIRE oversees crews when they are away from camp. On the day of the GJ visit, crews were clearing brush, assisting in making fire trails and trimming trees in the western hills in the City of Ukiah.

**BACKGROUND**

The State California Penal Code §919(b) states that, "...the Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county."

Parlin Fork Conservation Camp was established August 8, 1949. It is the oldest conservation camp in northern California and is the second oldest in the State. The camp is located on Highway 20 in the Jackson State Demonstration Forest. In 1959, Chamberlain Creek Conservation Camp, also located in the Jackson State Demonstration Forest, was opened a few miles east of the Parlin Fork Conservation camp.

There are 47 camps within 27 counties. The northern California camps work in conjunction with CAL FIRE, while the camps located in southern California work in conjunction with Sierra Conservation Center.

In addition to four million hours of community service, the CDCR estimated 2100 qualified inmates contribute three million manpower hours to firefighting, flood control, and rescue operations. Approximately 1000 inmates do not engage in firefighting activity due to physical limitation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The GJ visited Parlin Fork Conservation Camp on February 19, 2020, and interviewed staff from CDCR and CAL FIRE and toured the camp.

## **DISCUSSION**

The administration reported there has been a reduction of inmates with trade skills, such as, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, and mechanics. Currently, some inmates do not possess basic life skills upon arrival at the camp.

The inmates have opportunities to improve their skills while performing valuable services to Mendocino County and the community. In addition, inmate training and educational programs may assist in reducing recidivism. The GJ learned through interviewing CDCR that 80% of inmates released from camp do not re-offend.

Available to the inmates are Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, and religious services. There is also the opportunity to obtain a GED diploma, or an AA diploma from Lassen Junior College. College instructors visit once a month. The County Bookmobile visits weekly.

There is a hobby craft program available to the inmates. The program allows them to make, for example, handmade clocks of redwood burl, picture frames, jewelry boxes, beaded jewelry, drawings, and paintings. The products are created on inmates' free time. These hobby crafts are then donated to non-profits, where they are sold.

There is no cell phone reception in camp. Visiting is permitted on weekends and holidays for six hours. The CDCR informed the GJ, that inmates are receiving more visitors now than in the past. This is partly due to many prison reform laws, and the easing of parole conditions. The camp uses "Out of Bounds" signs instead of boundary fencing.

There is an operational sawmill, with up to 17 inmates working, producing tables and other wood products for the State of California and the State Parks system . The water supply at the camp comes from a permitted diversion of the South Fork of the Noyo River. Diverted water is purified in a filtration tank system using coarse sand, and is tested onsite for potability. The water plant provides an opportunity to become a California Certified Water and Sewer Plant Operator, through training provided at the camp. There is a gun range located beyond the sawmill, where local law enforcement perform mandatory firearms training.

The CDCR staff assists inmates in acquiring California driver's licenses, preparing them for rejoining society. A new problem has arisen for the out-going inmates; it is the new Federal law that will require a REAL ID driver's license or a passport to board an airplane. The required documents are difficult to obtain while incarcerated. When this law goes into effect, released inmates will not be able to fly home.

The camp appears to be well managed with dedicated staff. The CDCR and CAL FIRE are to be commended for maintenance of the facility and for providing a positive model for inmates.

## **FINDINGS**

- F1. Inmates can find a sense of pride and accomplishment carrying out basic camp functions whether it be involvement in the design, construction, and finishing of redwood cabinets, doors, tables, and signage for the State of California and the State Parks system, or performing maintenance on buildings and grounds for contracting agencies.
- F2. The camp is jointly managed by CDCR and CAL FIRE, and efficiently provides valuable services to Cities, Special Districts, nonprofits, and County Departments within Mendocino County, at a cost savings. These services may not otherwise be available to districts and agencies in Mendocino County.
- F3. The inmates' community service experience, along with the educational opportunities offered through Lassen college and the Mendocino County bookmobile, help to reduce recidivism in the CDCR.

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.
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## **REQUESTED RESPONSES**

CDCR Commander, Parlin Fork Conservation Camp (All Findings)

CAL FIRE Division Chief, Parlin Fork Conservation Camp (All Findings)