

DOING COMMUNITY SERVICE!

A REPORT ON CHAMBERLAIN CREEK AND PARLIN FORK CONSERVATION CAMPS

MAY 14, 2010

Summary

Conservation Camps, operated by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, (CDCR), are an alternative to incarceration in State Prisons. The inmates work in conjunction with CAL FIRE. Inmate fire crews work under extreme conditions and must pack 30 pounds of equipment, food, and water. Fire fighting is often done in steep terrain, high-heat, and heavy smoke. Physical training is encouraged and equipment is available at the camps to aid in the maintenance of the individual's physical fitness.

When the crews are not out on fires, their assignments include road clearing, weed abatement, removal of overgrown brush on public lands and other government run properties. Other projects include stream restoration for salmon, trash clean-up on highways, coastal beach clean-up, school site cleanup, and repair of Little League baseball fields. Inmates mill lumber for government agencies, made shelving for the Fort Bragg library, and have painted and repaired government properties. Woodworking and cabinetry projects are manufactured at the camps for State and local government agencies, including furniture; such as desks, chairs, cabinets, signs, and name plaques.

Inmates cut firewood for the senior centers. They cook Thanksgiving Day dinner for the Willits Senior Center and for the Coastal Schools Fire Prevention Days. They perform maintenance and restoration for Willits Frontier Days and assist in the set-up and clean-up for the County Fair. They are in the process of constructing a community garden in Willits in conjunction with the Howard Foundation.

Inmates do hobby work in their free time using their own tools and materials. They are allowed to donate their projects to non-profits such as the Victims of Crime. Inmates also participate in the *Scared Straight Program* at local high schools.

Background

Parlin Fork Conservation Camp, (PFCC), was established in 1949 and administered by Conservation Camp Corps, (CCC). The camp is located on Highway 20 in Jackson State Demonstration Forest, between Willits and Fort Bragg. It is the oldest camp in Northern California and the second oldest in the State. It was first operated by San Quentin State Prison and in the late 1960's, became a Federal facility for illegal immigrants. The camp returned to its original

use in 1972. Next, it became the Sierra Conservation Center and was used for administrative purposes. In 1982, it was again administered by the CCC, and operates in conjunction with Cal-Fire.

Chamberlain Creek Conservation Camp, (CCCC), was established in June 1959. The camp is a joint agency facility operated by CAL FIRE and the CDCR. CCCC is also located on Hwy. 20 in the Jackson Demonstration Forest.

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 Mendocino County Grand Jury, (GJ), made its mandated visit to PFCC on August 13th, and CCCC on August 20th, 2009. At the time of visits to both camps, the fire crews were deployed fighting fires throughout California. The GJ interviewed CAL FIRE, (formerly California Department of Forestry), employees and Correctional Officers from the CDCR, reviewed documents, and inspected the camps.

Findings

Findings - Both Camps

1. Camps are staffed by CAL FIRE and the CDCR. One office technician is shared.
2. The maximum capacity of each camp is 110 inmates. They are housed in barrack style buildings.
3. The State budget shows that it cost \$46,000/year to maintain an inmate in a California prison. The CDCR pays just over \$14,000/year to maintain an inmate in a conservation camp.
4. Camps must abide by all government rules and regulations and receive inspections from various agencies. Material safety data sheets and other mandated posters are posted in general areas.
5. Camp inmates are low security risks. Those who commit crimes that are violent, sexual, or arson in nature are ineligible for the conservation camp program.
6. Fire crew inmates receive fire training at the Susanville Prison and training continues at camp.
7. Both camps have five fire crews that are maintained for emergency deployment. Each fire crew has 13-17 inmates and one qualified CAL FIRE Captain. One additional crew with 3-5 inmates staff the fire brigade and assist with local emergencies within nine miles of the camp.
8. When not fighting fires, fire crews provide labor for floods, rescues, and conservation projects.
9. Inmates, who are not on fire crews, are assigned duties in camp. Duties include: mechanics, tool maintenance, cooking, laundry, carpentry, welding,

- and sewing. Most maintenance and upgrades to the camp are performed by inmates.
10. Inmates are paid \$1.45 to \$3.90 per day for working. While out on fires, the inmates are paid \$1 per hour, portal to portal, by CAL FIRE. Inmates earned income is placed in a savings account and paid upon release.
 11. Staff reads ingoing and outgoing mail and all telephone calls are recorded.
 12. All tobacco products are prohibited within camp perimeters and no tobacco use is allowed by any inmate at any time.
 13. There are no fences at the camps, but "Out of Bounds" signs are clearly posted.
 14. The CDCR budgets \$2.85 per day for food for each inmate. The amount has remained unchanged since the mid 1980s. When inmates are fighting fires, CAL FIRE furnishes their meals.
 15. The kitchens were observed to be clean and orderly. Both camps bake their own bread.
 16. There is a physical fitness training room. Recreational equipment is available to all inmates.
 17. Educational opportunities include G.E.D., college courses, and certification courses.
 18. A library is available and the County Bookmobile visits every two weeks.
 19. Non-denominational church services are offered. Drug and alcohol programs are available and are conducted by local volunteer organizations. Providers must have background clearance.
 20. Visitation is on Saturday and Sunday. All visitors must be pre-approved by the Susanville Prison staff.
 21. The crews are available at nominal rates to any tax-supported entity.

Findings - Parlin Forks

22. CAL FIRE staff consists of a Division Chief, an Administrative Captain, an Operation Captain, seven Fire Captains, a Water/Sewer Plant Operator, a Heavy Equipment Operator/Mechanic, and an Office Technician who divides time between both camps.
23. The Correctional staff consists of a Lieutenant, who is the Camp Commander, a Sergeant, and nine Correctional Officers.
24. There is a garden that provides vegetables and fruit to supplement the inmates' meals.
25. PFCC treats its own water which is drawn from the Noyo River.
26. Week-end family visits can be up to three days in the fully furnished cottage on the grounds.
27. PFCC operates a saw mill, they cut, mill, and dry the lumber. The inmates construct furniture and cabinetry for governmental agencies.
28. State and local government agencies place orders for office furniture and other wood products.

Findings - Chamberlain Creek

28. The CAL FIRE staff consists of one Division Chief, one Administrative Captain, one Operation Captain, and seven Fire Captains, and a water treatment plant operator.
29. Correctional staff consists of one Lieutenant, who is the Camp Commander, two Supervisors, one Sergeant, and eight Correctional Officers.
30. Chamberlain Creek's kitchen crew cooks and serves a community Thanksgiving dinner at the Harrah Senior Center in Willits every year.
31. Water and sewer systems require a licensed treatment operator.
32. Water is provided by a well and surface water from Chamberlain Creek.
33. The camp has recently replaced the leach field used for their liquid waste.
34. CCCC has poor soil for gardening. Recently, they brought in some soil and now have a small garden.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury Recommends that:

1. CAL FIRE and CCC continue to operate the camp in the same efficient manner, and perform services within the community. (All Findings)
2. the State seeks locations to establish more conservation camps, rather than building more maximum security prisons. (Finding 3)
3. the crews be utilized as often as possible, by any City, County department, agency, school district, or tax-supported entity in the County. (Finding 21)

Discussion

Inmates leave the facility with new skills, confidence, and their savings. Education, work skills, and lessons in community service prepare the inmates to be responsible citizens and consequently this reduces the recidivism rate. Correctional Officers encourage inmates to take advantage of the excellent programs promoting education and community service.

Recently, a member of the California State Legislature suggested that all the Conservation Camps should be closed in the interest of reducing the State budget deficit. The monetary cost for each inmate at the camps is just over \$14,000/year, far less than the \$46,000/year cost per inmate at maximum

security prisons. Even if the costs were the same, camp inmates make a valuable contribution to society, for which there is no price.

Required Responses

Parlin CCC Camp Commander (All Findings; Recommendations 1, 3)

Chamberlain CCC Camp Commander (All Findings; Recommendations 1, 3)

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (All Findings; Recommendation 3)

Mendocino County Department Heads (Finding 21; Recommendation 3)

Ukiah, Willits, Fort Bragg, and Point Arena City Councils (Finding 21;
Recommendation 3)

Mendocino County Superintendent of Public Education (Finding 21;
Recommendation 3)

All Mendocino County School District Superintendents (Finding 21;
Recommendation 3)

Requested Responses

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (All Findings; All
Recommendations)