



Parlin Fork and Chamberlain Creek Conservation Camps

Summary

In accordance with California Penal Code § 919 (b), the Grand Jury is mandated to inquire into the conditions and management of the prisons within the county.

Background

Parlin Fork and Chamberlain Creek Conservation Camps are located on Highway 20 in Jackson State Forest, between Fort Bragg and Willits. There are 38 Conservation Camps in the State of California that function under the direction of the California Department of Corrections (CDC) and in partnership with the California Department of Forestry (CDF). Each camp has a CDF division chief and ten fire crew captains. The camps in Mendocino County, combined, have a maximum population of 220 inmates, who are minimum custody offenders with an average placement stay of one to two years.

There is a strong emphasis on physical fitness. After careful screening each inmate must pass a one-week physical fitness training class followed by two weeks of training in fire safety, fire suppression and ongoing physical fitness. Each fire crew has 17 inmates supervised by a CDF officer. Fire crews work 12 hour shifts or longer during fire season, under extreme conditions, often in steep terrain, wearing heavy, insulated clothing and carrying 30 pound packs of equipment in high heat and under difficult breathing conditions. As one officer said, "We go where equipment can't."

When they are not fighting fires, the crews work eight hours a day doing community service projects under the supervision of the CDF, or they may work within the camps. While in the camps they are under the supervision of CDC Officers.

Methodology

Members of the Grand Jury toured both camps. The Grand Jury was able to interview members of the staff (CDF & CDC) as well as inmates. The Grand Jury observed the operations of the camps such as the running of the sawmill, the water treatment plant, the cabinet shop and the living quarters.



Findings

1. The approximate cost to incarcerate an inmate in a Conservation Camp is \$10,000 annually compared to \$50,000 annually at a higher security State prison.
2. Inmate contributions to the community more than offset the cost of their incarceration. When inmates are not fighting fires they are available to do community work projects.
3. Inmates at Parlin Fork help support the Make a Wish Foundation by making and donating craft items, sold to the public over the past five years for over \$100,000.
4. The seventeen-man crews are available at nominal rates to any tax-supported entity.
5. Chamberlain Creek has a complete wood working shop and makes many types of cabinets and signs for city, county and State government.
6. Parlin Fork operates their own sawmill and provides lumber for various projects.
7. The Mendocino County Bookmobile serves both camps and is highly valued by the inmates.
8. Inmates do most of the jobs required to run the camps.
9. No tobacco products will be allowed in the camps after July 1, 2005. This will apply to staff as well as inmates.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that schools, special districts, city and county departments fully utilize the services of both conservation camps. (Findings 2, 4)

Comments

The Grand Jury believes that we are indeed fortunate to have these camps in our county. The fire crews may be the first on a fire scene and may be the last to leave. The fire crews are to be applauded for their efforts, which contribute to the safety and fire protection of our communities.

Parlin Fork and Chamberlain Creek Conservation Camps are well maintained, well organized and are an important and valuable asset to Mendocino County.

Response Required

Board of Supervisors

Response Requested

Director, Parlin Fork Conservation Camp, California Division of Forestry
Director, Chamberlain Creek Conservation Camp, California Division of Forestry
Director, California Department of Corrections