

## **INSPECTION OF THE DEADWOOD CONSERVATION CAMP**

### **SUMMARY**

In accordance with State of California Penal Code 919(b), all correctional facilities in California are required to be visited and inspected. The Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury is charged to conduct the annual inspection and inquire into the condition, management, and operation of the Deadwood Conservation Camp (Deadwood) which is located in this county near Fort Jones. The officer in charge was contacted and arrangements were made to conduct the visit on Tuesday, January 22, 2019 at 9:00 a.m.

The operational control of Deadwood is a joint effort between the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDC) and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE). The CALFIRE component manages the camp and uses inmate to assist in wildfire operations, conservation, and community programs primarily in Siskiyou County. In addition, CALFIRE uses the Deadwood facility as a staging area for their traditional fire crews and operations within the county. The CDC selects inmate candidates, provides training, manages, and controls the inmates.

The facility is well managed, organized, safe, and cost effective. The majority of funding utilized to maintain Deadwood is provided by CALFIRE which is a savings to the CDC. It is evident that the camp is a valuable asset to the community, county, and the State of California.

### **BACKGROUND**

Deadwood was opened on June 1, 1962 with the primary mission to provide CDC inmate crews for fire suppression in support of CALFIRE operations primarily for Siskiyou County but available statewide as necessary. In addition, the camp is dedicated to assist in flood control, conservation projects, and support community services as needed.

The camp was designed and built to maintain a capacity of 88 inmates. Currently there are 73 inmates placed at the camp with a working capacity of 80. There are no females assigned to the camp. Inmates are organized into 17- man fire crews. A support crew consists of cooks, ground keepers, porters, mechanics, maintenance workers, and skilled shop technicians.

Camp operations are under the control of the CDC which includes selection, accountability, supervision, care, and discipline of the inmates at Deadwood. CALFIRE maintains the camp, supervises work performed by inmate fire crews and is responsible, along with the CDC, for inmate control while conducting wild fire operations and other projects. The CDC staff accompanies the fire crews to provide security, accountability, and inmate care while they are away from Deadwood. This combined program maintains 24/7 supervision and works well.

Deadwood is part of a system of 43 conservation camps scattered throughout the state dating back to the 1920's. Inmate fire crews are an integral and important component of the state's wildfire control program. With limited resources, CALFIRE is always faced with the demanding task of providing forest management. Inmate participation provides a significant asset for this task.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Members of the Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury inspected the physical layout of the camp and were shown procedures for the handling of inmates from arrival to release. In addition, facility operations, maintenance, security, and handling daily medical procedures were covered. Officers from CALFIRE and senior representatives from the CDC answered questions concerning policy and procedures.

## **DISCUSSION**

The facility's camp like appearance with its beautiful landscaped grounds could easily be mistaken for an RV or city park rather than a correctional facility. There are no walls, fences, or guard towers at Deadwood; only a limit line designation identifying "go and no-go" areas within the camp. Violation of these off-limit areas is treated as an escape attempt with severe consequences. It has been

several years since an occurrence or escape has taken place. The primary goal, with this and other rules, is to maintain a safe and secure facility for low level felons serving out their sentences.

The staff operating the facility consists of 11 CALFIRE and 8 CDC personnel maintaining a 24/7 security program with three shifts daily. This is an amazing staff to inmate ratio for fire crews providing over 130,000 work hours supporting wildfire operations, conservation efforts, and other projects. These programs save the state over \$3,000,000 annually.

The camp has an area where regular CALFIRE crews are housed that include showers, restrooms, tents, and kitchen facilities. There are 5 designated sites available which can accommodate up to 10 additional CALFIRE crews in time of need. This is in addition to the existing inmate fire crew facilities normally housed at Deadwood, with more space available on the grounds should the need arise.

The CDC selection process for inmates consists of a detailed program based on a point system; the fewer the better. Points are added depending on the seriousness and types of offenses along with the inmate history while under the control of the CDC. Candidates, once selected, are trained at the California Correctional Center near Susanville before being assigned to Deadwood or one of the other conservation camps. Inmates are normally serving the final two to three years of their sentences prior to release from custody. Inmates selected are carefully screened to eliminate any sex, murder, arson, or violence related offenses. Most inmates are serving time for alcohol, drug, or property related crimes. There are distinct advantages to inmates who are qualified and transfer to Deadwood. The inmates know this and appreciate their placement. While there are restrictions and high standards at Deadwood, the living environment is far better than remaining in conventional prison.

Control and discipline for inmates is conducted in a very organized and consistent manner. Violations do occur for issues such as drug possession and use. Points are added or reduced based on conduct and performance. Inmates can be returned to prison depending upon the seriousness of their actions and accumulation of points. Violations are broken down into "warnings,

administrative actions, and serious events” where corrective action is promptly taken.

The opportunity to continue or further an inmate’s education is encouraged at Deadwood. Inmates can complete their general education diploma (GED), take college level courses, or receive vocational training. This can include industrial sewing, tool repair, automotive repair, cabinet making, woodworking, and metal fabrication. Deadwood has a working lumber mill, state of the art laser wood engraving equipment, heavy equipment used in fire suppression, tool repair shop, a complete automotive shop for trucks, tractors, and even a tire shop. All of this is in addition to wild fire experience that is in great demand and can be used for employment after release.

Inmates can have visitation privileges by telephone, on site, and in a separate area suitable for family use. The honor code is used to enforce acceptable conduct but visitation is available for those who qualify.

Inmates have access to recreation facilities such as a physical training building complete with weights to keep them in shape for the fire season. There are craft and game rooms along with hobby areas which may be used during free time. A fenced garden area is maintained and food is produced for use within the camp or donated. The housing blocks are neat, organized by fire crews, and well-designed furthering the team concept within the crews. Inmates supporting the fire crews are placed separately so as not to interfere with normal operations.

During our visit, most of the inmates were outside the facility preparing for the upcoming fire season. This involves intensive physical training under the supervision of CALFIRE and CDC staff. Inmates are organized into groups or teams under the command of a fire captain who prepares them depending on their skill level to perform the necessary functions within the team. In that way, they become mutually supportive and able to accomplish their mission. Individual and group safety is a key factor to ensure dependable, quick action is taken to avoid injuries and reduce property damage.

The camp maintains a dining facility that is clean, well run, and produces excellent quality food. The only reason you would know it was not a restaurant was the serving line, the metal tray, and tables.

In last year's Civil Grand Jury Report, it was noted that there is no medical facility on site. Deadwood staff feels that they have sufficient medically trained staff on hand to meet the first responder needs of the camp. Treatment requiring additional care would require evacuation to another medical facility either by vehicle or air.

The implementation of the Public Safety Realignment Act of 2011 (AB109) resulted in a substantial number of low level felony inmates, previously held in state prison, now housed in county jails. This has placed a serious burden on the county jails resulting in overcrowding. Available space at Deadwood and other conservation camps can be made available to local counties if the inmate qualifies and a contract is established. The cost for the county to transfer an inmate to Deadwood can be reduced to as little as \$10 per day, as opposed to the mounting costs of over \$139 per day in the Siskiyou County Jail. Every county experiencing overcrowding as a result of AB109 should investigate this financial advantage.

## **FINDINGS**

**F1:** The average cost of housing an inmate placed in a county jail has been reported to average over \$70 per day. In Siskiyou County, the cost per inmate is approaching \$139 per day in a facility that is filled to capacity. The cost charged to a county under contract with Deadwood Conservation Camp is \$10 per day. The reason for this difference is the result of CALFIRE involvement for wildfire operations which offset the cost. Currently there are 7 vacancies at the Deadwood Camp.

**F2:** Deadwood is well run and provides outstanding service to Siskiyou County and the State of California. The camp is in an excellent location to meet emergency wildfire responses along with conservation and other community

support. The team concept between the CDC and CALFIRE is evident and the seamless operation of staff and the inmate fire crews is excellent.

**F3:** The park-like setting at Deadwood is in reality a ready-to-go CALFIRE staging area for regular fire crews, well placed to provide rapid support as needed. There is plenty of space for heavy equipment to be pre-positioned as needed and there is sufficient area for expansion. Everything is there for command and control, fuel, maintenance, recreation, housing, etc.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R1:** AB109 has placed an enormous burden on local county jails throughout California and especially in Siskiyou County. The CDC should take the lead to encourage contract participation with counties for eligible inmates into conservation programs such as Deadwood. A contract with Deadwood would create additional flexibility for county jail placement even though it may be rarely utilized.

### **REQUEST FOR RESPONSES**

Pursuant to Penal Code Section 933.05, the Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury requests responses from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDC), the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE) to the findings and recommendations in this report.

Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires the report of the Civil Grand Jury not contain the name of any person, or facts leading to the identity of any person, who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury.