



Deadwood Conservation Camp

Summary

In the State of California, inquiries of all correctional facilities are required. The Civil Grand Jury is charged to perform this function in Siskiyou County. The inquiry of one of the Siskiyou County correctional facilities, the Deadwood Conservation Camp in Scott Valley, was conducted by six jurors in October 2021.

The Camp presented well and was maintained with much care. All the structures and grounds were in great shape for their age. You could see the care and pride put forth by the agencies that operate there. This Camp is a jewel in Siskiyou County and has provided many services from the early sixties to today.

Unfortunately, as a result of Proposition 47, (titled Criminal Sentences Misdemeanor Penalties) California has changed how it manages inmates. This new law has affected the incarceration, retention, and classification of inmates at California prisons. This "Early Release" program has reduced the number of qualified inmates available for staffing at the conservation camp to such a level that Deadwood cannot provide fire crews needed for Siskiyou County fires.

With a 50% reduction of inmate fire crews at Deadwood, the Camp can no longer support local wildfire and fuel reduction projects as they have in the past. Furthermore, local Fire Department and Districts, along with non-profits, have used Deadwood crews for many things, i.e., ground maintenance, equipment repair, construction, snow removal, trail maintenance, fairgrounds maintenance, set-up & cleanup and unsafe fuel reduction work.

It is unclear how all this needed work will be done at a reasonable cost. Costs for services provided outside of Deadwood will be fifteen times higher and that will increase. Our local fire departments have used the Deadwood equipment shop for maintenance repairs. An oil change was completed for only the cost of parts, approximately \$100.00. Now an oil and filter change with compliance inspection costs around \$900.00. Some of our local fire departments will struggle to meet this need for their equipment. Fuel reduction projects will take the same cost increase. In the past it cost \$225.00 a day to use a Deadwood crew for fuel reduction work and a paid crew is about \$3,500.00 a day. Deadwood Camp is of significant importance to Siskiyou County. The loss of their services that have been provided for many years negatively impacts all of Siskiyou County.

Background

The Deadwood Conservation Camp is a joint effort operated by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). Costs for administrative and maintenance operations is split fifty/fifty. The camp has been in operation since June 1, 1962 with the primary mission to provide inmate crews for fire suppression in Siskiyou County. Deadwood Camp is an 80-man camp that can staff four fire crews. It has provided Siskiyou County and the State of California with four Type 1 fire/emergency crews for the last 59 years until now. At the time of the inspection there were forty-five inmates residing at the facility, significantly less than its desired maximum capacity for eighty inmates. These minimum-security male inmates are Type 1 firefighting crews when at full capacity. They also do flood control, conservation, and other projects. The camp is virtually self-sustaining as the inmates provide area maintenance, cooks, porters, clerks, and skilled shop workers to keep the overhead as low as possible and provide support for CAL FIRE operations.

Methodology

The Grand Jury inspected the physical layout of the Camp's buildings, shops, grounds, and offices. They were also shown procedures for handling of prisoners from arrival to release. All processes for handling inmate security are well established. Also covered

were the daily medical procedures. Trained personnel oversee all minor medical treatment in house; all other injuries are handled by calling 911.

Discussion

Upon arrival, members of the Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury were greeted by camp staff and given a comprehensive and professional briefing concerning operations and procedures. Questions were openly addressed, and responses appreciated by those in attendance. A tour of the facilities and grounds was conducted and found to be a parklike environment. It would be difficult to identify the camp as a detention facility. There were no walls or observation towers normally associated with a jail or prison facility. The grounds are beautifully landscaped, and the buildings and facilities are clean, neat, and well maintained. All employees were very professional and friendly. All inmates were busy with their daily jobs.

The camp is organized into two distinct operations under the control of CDCR and CAL FIRE. The CDCR officers, under the control of the Camp Commander, manage inmates while they stay within the camp and the CAL FIRE staff is comprised of Fire Crew Captains, Equipment Operators, and a Stationary Engineer under the operational control of the Division Chief.

Inmate selection for assignment to Deadwood is a critical component for maintaining a safe and productive detention environment. Serving at the camp is a highly desired assignment. Opportunities for inmates to improve their educational or technical skills are encouraged and provided. Instruction is an on-line based system where inmates can work toward obtaining their GED and beyond. Instruction of vocational skills is offered in such areas as industrial sewing, tool repair, automotive servicing, cabinet making, woodworking, and metal fabrication. The facility has a working lumber mill, along with an automotive garage for servicing trucks and equipment. Much of the carpentry and craft work is of commercial quality and highly prized by non-profit groups and organizations.

Inmates have access to recreation and physical training facilities to keep them in shape for the fire season. There are hobby areas, craft, and game rooms to be used during free time. There is a fenced-in garden area within the camp, which provides fresh produce.

Security is unique for this correctional facility. Since there are no walls to keep prisoners in, an honor code is used. Areas are clearly defined, and inmates are informed as to where they can and cannot go.

There are no onsite medical facilities at the camp. Fire staff is well trained in emergency medical treatment and normally take care of minor injuries. Inmates requiring additional care are transported to advanced medical facilities as needed. The camp staff feel they have adequate medical support and have an excellent record within the camp.

The Deadwood Camp dining facility is clean, well run, and produces a quality meal. The serving line, trays, and tables are the only indication it is not a traditional, sit-down restaurant.

What makes this Camp different from a jail or prison is the services the inmates provide to the State and the communities of Siskiyou County. In 2021 the Deadwood crews provided thousands of hours supporting wildfire operations and conservation efforts. These efforts go beyond emergencies alone. They also include recovery operations such as cleanup and restoration services for the communities they serve.

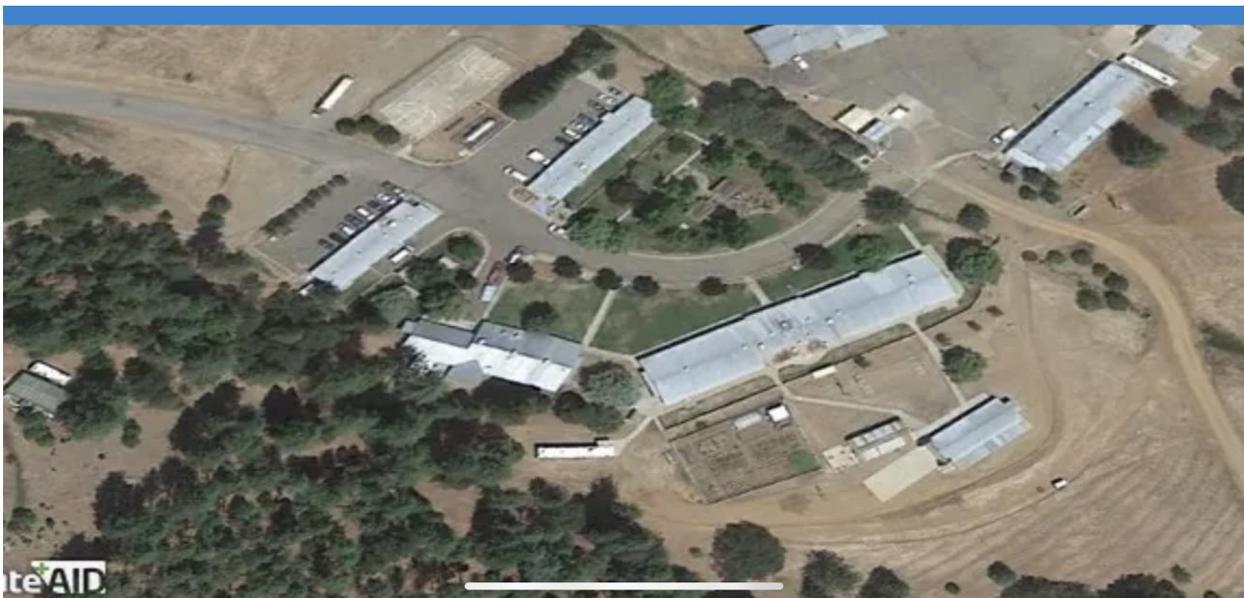
For example, at the time of the Jury inspection in October 2021, the inmate crews had already served 43,353 hours of project work in Siskiyou County, and 42,252 fire line hours for the year. Many of those fire line hours were outside of Siskiyou County. The crews travel throughout the State to wherever they are needed. These crews are not only necessary for summer fires but year-round during winter floods, snow removal, training, and fuel reduction work.

CAL FIRE trains the inmates to a Type 1 level crew (highest efficiency level) so they can serve on all fire line assignments. All inmates are provided state-of-the-art gear to ensure safety. The cost for a standard firefighter 1 crew is \$13,813.00 per 24-hour shift. The cost for a Type 1 inmate fire crew is approximately \$4,313.00 for a 24-hour shift, a daily savings of over \$9,000.00. As a result, the inmate fire crews save the California taxpayers significant money annually.

In addition, the crews perform ground maintenance, and equipment repair for local fire departments, districts, and non-profits in Siskiyou County. The cost for a local fire district to use the Deadwood equipment shop for repairs is significantly lower than that of an outside vendor. Deadwood Camp charge for repairs were for only the cost of parts. An oil and filter change with compliance inspection was \$100.00 instead of the \$900.00 using outside vendors.

Fuel reduction projects share similar cost savings. A Deadwood crew performing fuel reduction work costs \$225.00 a day, while a paid crew costs \$3,500.00 a day. Deadwood Camp services are of significant importance and value to Siskiyou County.

In addition to the reduced County costs associated with the work produced by the Deadwood crews, the surrounding communities also receive economic benefits having the camp located and operating in Siskiyou County. More than \$582,000.00 is spent with local vendors for such purchases as food, supplies and materials. Further, a recycling program removing disposable items has resulted in diverting over twelve tons of refuse away from local landfills annually.



Aerial photo of the Deadwood Conservation Camp

As noted earlier the current population of Deadwood Camp (45 inmates) is 56% of capacity. The shortage of inmates is a direct result of changes in California laws regarding incarceration. Deadwood's future with inmates is in question because Proposition 47 releases most inmates on early parole. Most of the inmates that meet the criteria to be released early are the same inmates that meet the criteria to be selected for camps such as Deadwood. The change in the law has reduced the camp inmate numbers to a low that the system has never seen. This "early release" program has resulted in a severe and substantial shortage of qualified inmates for Deadwood Camp.

The current law will leave CAL FIRE with very limited fire crews. The California inmate fire crew system is beneficial to inmates and saves the California taxpayer money. It is a concern that the program is downsizing when the fire problem in California is growing. Helping curb the fire problem in Siskiyou County requires significant fuel reduction, and the Inmate fire crews have filled that need.

There are many projects currently being worked on, which will not be done without inmate crews. The need for low-cost crews is at an all-time high now. Deadwood Camp only has four fire crews covering Siskiyou County, the fifth largest county in California. In comparison Shasta/Trinity County had ten crews and Tehama/Glenn has fifteen available crews. Considering Siskiyou's size and only having four inmate crews puts our county at a higher risk.

The Deadwood Camp also provides many services that most people do not see, such as the wood shop which has built office furniture for the state Capital, local Siskiyou County offices and CAL FIRE stations at great savings. The auto shop has repaired the equipment for many Siskiyou County volunteer fire departments for the cost of parts. Many of our local schools, cemeteries and volunteer fire departments rely on the crews for the daily maintenance of equipment.

The value of an inmate camp operating at capacity can be seen by the value of the work being done in fire suppression for CAL FIRE. The Deadwood Conservation Camp has continued to help protect our community and save the state millions of dollars each year in wildfire operations alone.

The efforts of the correctional staff and the CAL FIRE staff at the Deadwood Conservation Camp have produced an excellent example to follow. The facility is managed well, organized, safe, maintained, and cost effective. It is an invaluable asset for Siskiyou County and the State of California.

The current Deadwood inmate level is 56% of capacity, which has dropped significantly since Proposition 47 passed. Meeting its mission will be severely impacted. One alternative plan being considered is to eliminate the use of inmates for fire suppression and develop the camp into an exclusive CAL FIRE facility housing paid Firefighter 1 crews.

Findings

F-1: Our County is at much greater risk of catastrophic fire due to the shortage of qualified inmates assigned to Deadwood Conservation Camp.

F-2: Deadwood Conservation Camp is no longer able to provide regular maintenance, service, and repairs for emergency fire vehicles and equipment in Siskiyou County.

F-3: Deadwood Conservation Camp will no longer provide services for non-fire projects such as fuel reduction, Fire Safe projects, local trail work, cemetery and school maintenance, fairground maintenance, setup and take down, snow removal, and flood response.

Recommendations

R-1: The Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors (BOS) should take steps to assure that an adequate number of Type 1 fire crews are available for fire assignments in Siskiyou County by June 30, 2022.

R-1b: The Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors should request that CAL FIRE submit a plan to the BOS by June 30, 2022, to increase the number of available fire crews in Siskiyou County for fire line assignments.

R-1c: The Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors should explore ways to communicate the importance of a fully staffed fire camp in Siskiyou County with the appropriate state agencies responsible for staffing and managing of CDCR no later than June 30, 2022.

R-2: The Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors should contact the local fire departments to determine their needs for, and cost, to replace services that will no longer be offered by Deadwood Fire Camp by June 30, 2022.

