

# INSPECTION OF THE DEADWOOD CONSERVATION CAMP

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## SUMMARY

In accordance with State of California Penal Code 919(b), “the Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county.” The California Department of Corrections (CDC) officer in charge at Deadwood Conservation Camp was contacted and arrangements were made to conduct a site visit on Thursday, April 5, 2018

The efforts of the CDC correctional staff and the CALFIRE team at the Deadwood Conservation Camp have produced an excellent example for others to copy. The facility is well managed, organized, safe, maintained, and cost effective. It is a valuable asset to the community, Siskiyou County, and the State of California.

## BACKGROUND

The Deadwood Conservation Camp is a joint effort of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE). On the date of the site inspection, there were 69 inmates residing at the facility with a maximum capacity for 88. Deadwood’s goal is to provide minimum security male felons the opportunity to provide firefighting services, 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 cost as low as possible and provide support for CALFIRE operations.

Deadwood Conservation Camp is part of a system of 43 conservation camps scattered throughout the state. The first camps were started in the 1920’s – Deadwood was built in the early 60’s and hosted its first crews in 1962. Today Deadwood provides many hours of firefighting and fire prevention to the community. Deadwood not only provides fire crews that can assist firefighters anywhere in California; it also does extensive fire prevention work and provides wood crafts to state agencies and non-profit organizations.

## 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. In addition, facility operations, maintenance, security, and the handling of daily medical procedures were covered. In attendance were staff from the Deadwood Conservation Camp, officers from CALFIRE, and senior representatives from the California Department of Corrections who answered questions concerning policy and procedures.

## DISCUSSION

Upon arrival, it would be difficult to identify the camp as a prison. The beautiful park like appearance does not have the walls or observation towers normally associated with a prison. The grounds are beautifully landscaped, buildings and facilities are clean, neat, and well maintained. It is in fact a prison managed by professionals with a clear-cut mission to maintain order and provide a safe facility for low level felons who are serving their sentences. It is run by a Department of Corrections lieutenant and overseen by the warden of High Desert State Prison in Susanville, California. It provides the same educational opportunities as provided in regular prisons. The lieutenant works closely with a CALFIRE chief. This chief oversees the firefighting aspects of the camp and together they form the command and control team. The staff consists of 6 correctional officers and 11 CALFIRE officers.

What makes this camp different from a traditional state prison are the services provided to the state and community. In this respect, Deadwood resembles the Siskiyou County Day Reporting Center, which provides some of the same services. Last year, Deadwood crews provided approximately 130,000 work hours supporting wildfire operations and conservation efforts, saving the state over three million dollars. These efforts go beyond emergencies alone. They include recovery activities after the immediate need is over and cleanup and restoration to help recovery efforts for the communities. During our visit, most of the inmates were offsite preparing for the upcoming fire season. This involves intensive physical training under the supervision of CALFIRE staff.

Inmates are organized into groups or teams under the command of a CALFIRE captain who prepares them, depending on skill level, to perform the necessary team functions. The team becomes mutually supportive, able to accomplish their mission, and individual and group safety training becomes the key to insure dependable and quick action is taken to avoid injuries and reduce property damage.

Custody of inmates belongs to the Department of Corrections. Custody is transferred to CALFIRE when inmates report to work at the beginning of each workday. Custody is transferred back to the Department of Corrections at the end of the day. There is a formal procedure for doing this, which includes a count of the inmates utilizing picture ID. The agency with inmate custody has a wallet containing a picture ID of each inmate.

Inmates are drawn from the state prison system. Selection for admission to Deadwood is an important if not a critical element to insure a safe and productive camp operation. Felons serving the last two to four years of their sentences are carefully screened using a point system to eliminate those with convictions for crimes such as murder, history of escape, sexual offences, or other violent offenses.

Deadwood, as a full-service fire camp, handles maintenance, repair and even construction of firefighting equipment as well as kitchen services. There are positions available for mechanics, tailors, welders, cooks and handymen. Inmates also handle camp maintenance, so there is an opportunity for learning building repair. The most urgent need at the camp right now is for clerks to handle complex data input and processing for the many reports the commanders need to provide to the state.

Most inmates are serving sentences for non-violent alcohol, drug, or property related crimes. Admission to a camp such as Deadwood is highly desired within the inmate community and usually results in a safe and easily controlled environment. Staff noted that in some cases additional charges are added when an inmate is sentenced so they can be sentenced to prison and become eligible for Deadwood. Recent changes in California law have resulted in many inmates eligible for Deadwood being housed in county jails instead of state prison. This has resulted in significant reductions in the number of available inmates for the Deadwood program. Deadwood addresses this problem by contracting with counties to house inmates for \$10/day. This is considerably less than what it costs most counties to house inmates. In Siskiyou County, the cost to house an inmate in the County Jail facility is approaching \$135 per day in a facility that is filled to capacity. Siskiyou County does not currently have a contract with Deadwood, so there are no inmates from Siskiyou County Jail currently at Deadwood.

Opportunities for inmates to improve their educational or technical skills are encouraged and provided. Inmates can obtain a GED and have the opportunity to learn vocational skills in such areas as industrial sewing, tool repair, automotive servicing, cabinet making, woodworking, and metal fabrication. They can earn up to 6 weeks a year in reductions to their sentences. Deadwood has a working lumber mill, a complete automotive garage for tractors, trucks, and even a tire shop. The wood shop has all the equipment necessary to convert raw logs into desks, chairs, or other wood products. The most common product of the shop is Adirondack chairs given to state retirees; however, other wood products are also made there. The day the Grand Jury visited, the shop was working on an order of birdhouses for the Boy Scouts. In 2017 Deadwood acquired a computer-controlled laser etching system that permits fairly sophisticated graphics, such as the California State Seal, to be carved into a piece of wood. Some of these products are available to non-profit groups and organizations and much of the carpentry and craft work viewed was of commercial quality.

Some inmates finish their sentences at Deadwood and go on to get jobs as firefighters. However, some inmates do well under the strict controls of prison life, have difficulty transitioning to independence and responsibility of life on the outside; as a result, some of these re-offend and return to prison.

Inmates have access to recreation facilities, such as a physical training facility, complete with weights, to keep them in shape for the fire season; craft and game rooms along with hobby areas to be used during free time; and a fenced in garden area that produces food for use within the camp. Deadwood camp maintains a dining facility that is clean, well run, and produces quality food.

Security at Deadwood is unique for a prison. No walls are used to confine inmates; an honor code is implemented. Boundary areas are clearly identified, and inmates are informed as to where they can and cannot go. Inmates who travel out of bounds can be prosecuted as escapees.

Inmates can visit with their families in a separate area from the main facility. Again, the honor code is enforced to prevent drugs and other items not allowed in the camp. Contraband is sometimes found; however, the screening process and the desire for inmates to be there and not in a regular prison goes a long way to limit the occurrence. Inmates are allowed to attend church services, groups such as Narcotics and Alcoholics Anonymous, and other outreach programs.

## **FINDINGS**

F1: Deadwood is well run and provides an important service to the state at reasonable cost. The respect shown between Department of Corrections officers and CALFIRE officers was evident. The inmates do a beautiful job maintaining the grounds and the facility and the food provided in the dining area is outstanding.

F2: The cost of housing an inmate placed in a county jail facility has been reported to average \$70 per day. The cost per inmate in Siskiyou County is approaching \$135 per day in a facility that is filled to capacity. The cost charged to a county jail by contract to the Deadwood Conservation Camp is \$10 per day. The reason for this difference is the result of CALFIRE involvement for wildfire operations which offsets the cost. Currently there are 19 vacancies at the Deadwood Camp. Siskiyou County does not currently utilize Deadwood as an extension to the County Jail. Very few jail inmates would likely be eligible for incarceration at Deadwood, due to the nature of their sentences; however, each inmate that could be sent to Deadwood means another jail bed available for another inmate.

F3: There are no onsite medical facilities at the camp. Fire teams are well trained in emergency medical treatment and normally take care of minor injuries. Those requiring additional care are transported to advanced medical facilities as needed.

F4: Deadwood could place more emphasis on training inmates to handle the responsibilities of life outside of prison.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

R1: Keep up the good work.

R2: Steps should be taken to fill vacancies whenever they occur. The fact that Deadwood resides in Siskiyou County should encourage coordination between county and state law enforcement agencies to reduce costs and provide services to the community.

R3: Deadwood staff should look into ways to better equip inmates to handle life on the outside. The Siskiyou County Day Reporting Center in nearby Yreka makes this type of training a priority.

R4: The size of the staff and inmate population should require a dedicated onsite medical facility or station to deal with injuries that do not require evacuation to an advanced care center.

## **REQUEST FOR RESPONSES**

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury requests responses from the California Department of Corrections, CALFIRE, Siskiyou County Sheriff's Department, and Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors.

Reports issued by the Civil 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.