

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS AND
REHABILITATION
DELTA CONSERVATION CAMP
2007-2008 Solano County Grand Jury**

Reason for Inspection

California Penal Code section 919, subdivision (b), provides that the grand jury shall inquire into the condition and management of public prisons within the county.

Grand Jury Actions

- Inspected and toured Delta Conservation Camp in September 2007
- Interviewed Delta Conservation Camp management and staff
- Observed and talked with inmates

Background/Inspection

The Delta Conservation Camp (the Camp), 6246 Lambie Road, Suisun City, is located off Highway 12 on 23 acres in rural Solano County. The Camp, jointly operated by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) was opened in June 1988. It is the largest of 42 camps in the State of California providing fire suppression assistance throughout the state. When visiting the Camp, the Grand Jury noted that there are no turn lanes from Highway 12 onto Lambie Road.

The main mission of the Camp is to provide inmate fire crews for fire suppression in the Sonoma, Lake, Napa and Solano County areas, although crews can and are dispatched throughout the state. In addition to fire suppression, inmate crews provide a work force for conservation projects and are responsible for maintenance of the Camp. Utilizing the inmate work force, Cal Fire also operates a Digital Decal Sign Shop, which produces letters, numbers and striping of vehicles for fire and law enforcement agencies throughout the state.

CDCR is responsible for the security, supervision, care and discipline of the inmates. Cal Fire maintains the Camp, supervises work of the inmate fire crews and is responsible for the custody of the inmates on their daily projects. CDCR staff may accompany inmate crews while assigned to emergencies to assist in the care and security of the inmates. Inmates must have 24 hour a day direct supervision while on work projects and while assigned to emergency incidents. Neither CDCR nor Cal Fire staff carries firearms.

The staff budget of CDCR includes: eight correctional officers, two correctional sergeants and one correctional lieutenant, who is also known as the Camp Commander. Correctional officers work in eight-hour shifts and leave the facility upon completion of their shift.

The staff budget of Cal Fire includes: 12 fire crew captains, one battalion chief, one division chief, one heavy equipment mechanic, one office technician and one water and sewage plant operator. At the time of our visit, two of the fire crew captain positions were vacant. Fire crew captains work 24-hour shifts. There is a small barracks-type living quarters that is used by Cal Fire staff who choose not to leave the Camp on their days off.

Up to 132 adult male inmates are assigned to the Camp. Most of the inmates are incarcerated for drug and alcohol related offenses. Under CDCR and Cal Fire rules, inmates that have been incarcerated for sex related offenses, murder, escapes, arson or high violence crimes are not considered for this program, nor will an inmate be assigned to a camp within the county in which the inmate committed the crime for which he is incarcerated. Inmates assigned to the Camp generally have one to three years left on their sentence. The average stay at the Camp is one year.

To be accepted for this program and eligible to work on a fire and conservation crew, an inmate must complete approximately 70 hours of fire fighting and readiness training and be physically and mentally fit. The Camp operates with six inmate crews averaging 12 to 17 inmates per crew. Staff ensures that there is ethnic diversity on each crew in an effort to promote a “working and supportive team” and to discourage gang activities. Once an inmate is assigned to a crew, the inmate eats, sleeps and continues to work with the same crew for the duration of his incarceration.

In addition to the six fire and conservation crews, other inmates serve as cooks, porters, landscapers, clerks and provide maintenance and other support services for the Camp. The management philosophy of Cal Fire is to select inmates with specialized skills to allow the Camp to be self-sufficient. At the time of our inspection the Camp grounds, interior of the buildings and equipment were clean and well maintained.

Inmates are paid \$1.45 a day for their work plus \$1 per hour when performing fire fighting duties. Skilled inmates, such as mechanics, clerks, plumbers, welders, carpenters and electricians can earn up to \$2.56 per day. The lead cook can earn up to \$3.90 per day. Inmates may purchase personal items, correspondence materials and snacks from the Camp Canteen. Inmates also receive two days off of their sentence for each day served in this program.

Inmates work eight hours per day, five days a week, with weekends off when working on conservation projects or at the Camp. Fire crews, out on fire suppression calls, work in 24-hour shifts. Depending on the location of the fire, a crew may not be able to return to the Camp for several days or weeks.

When in Camp, all inmates are required to attend breakfast and dinner meals unless sick. There are two sick calls each day. Inmates requiring medical assistance are seen at the California Medical Prison-Susanville or any other facility as the illness or injury dictates. The most frequent work related injuries are from poison oak, heat exhaustion and injuries related to use of tools and cutting equipment. Within the past year, no inmate has been seriously injured, died or escaped during his incarceration.

Inmates receive standard prison meals in the cafeteria. Boxed lunches are prepared in the cafeteria and sent out with the conservation crews that will be away from the Camp during the work day. Inmates working at or returning from a fire assignment receive a higher calorie and protein meal than they would receive on conservation crews or working in Camp. The Camp garden, maintained by the inmates, provides many of the fruits and vegetables consumed by the inmates.

The inmates live in an open dormitory setting and are assigned living quarters with their crew members. They have access to a craft and hobby shop, library and a recreation room. Television and music privileges are limited and monitored. A small outdoor track and basketball court are adjacent to the dormitory. Inmates have access to the recreational areas on their days off and

during a portion of the evening hours. Pay phones are available for making calls out of the Camp. Spiritual services are provided by community volunteers on weekends.

Pictures and awards related to crew projects and fire suppression activities are on display in the cafeteria. Both staff and inmates recognize the efforts of individuals and crews that have performed well.

Inmates may obtain their general education diploma (GED) and take college extension courses. Inmates interested in a career in the fire services are provided counseling and the opportunity for seasonal or full time employment with Cal Fire once they are paroled. Cal Fire management told this Grand Jury that they have hired several seasonal and some full-time employees from this program.

Inmates may receive pre-approved visitors on weekends. The visitor area includes picnic and barbecue facilities. Visitors may bring food for the inmates to consume during their visit. Inmates may sign up for use of one on-site family cottage for weekend conjugal visits. The conjugal visitation program is not funded by CDCR, but rather by concerned individuals and groups.

Before accepting a local work project, Cal Fire meets with local agencies to define the project and determine whether and how the Camp crews can be utilized. The local community is billed \$200 a day for use of a crew and equipment.

During the 2006 calendar year, Delta Conservation Camp, through conservation and work projects, provided 93,696 work hours to local communities, 58,752 hours of work for state agencies, 3,955 hours of work for federal agencies and 117,376 hours of work on emergency incidents (fire fighting and flood fighting). Cal Fire estimates that through their emergency responses to fires, floods and project work, this program saved the taxpayers of California \$1,238,400.

Some of the agencies and ground maintenance projects that inmates have worked on in Solano County during the past year are: the California State Prison – Solano, the City of Dixon, the Dixon Fairgrounds, the City of Fairfield, Vallejo Water in Green Valley, the City of Vallejo at Hanns Park, River Delta Unified School District, the City of Rio Vista, Solano Community College, Solano Resource District and Travis Air Force Base.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1 – The Delta Conservation Camp fire suppression and conservation program provides a desirable alternative to prison incarceration. Inmates accepted to the program receive time off their sentences and work in vocational or skilled trades. They are not required to live in confined cells and are treated with respect for the work they perform. This program is also beneficial to local communities, state and federal agencies.

Recommendation 1 – The Grand Jury encourages the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and Cal Fire to continue to fund and support Delta Conservation Camp and other similar camps.

Finding 2 - Inmates are provided training and an opportunity for rehabilitation. Upon successful completion of this program and once paroled, they may be considered for seasonal or full-time employment with Cal Fire.

Recommendation 2 – The Grand Jury encourages Cal Fire to continue to select, mentor and counsel inmates that show a desire and willingness to learn a trade and benefit from this program.

Finding 3 – There are no turn lanes from Highway 12 onto Lambie Road. This is a major safety issue for Highway 12 traffic and Delta Conservation Camp staff, inmates and visitors.

Recommendation 3 – The Solano County Transportation Authority and the California Department of Transportation should make safety at this location a high priority when planning the future of Highway 12.

Comments

In October and November 2007, four of the six of the Delta Conservation Camp fire crews were sent to southern California to assist with fire fighting efforts in the region.

The Delta Conservation Camp is a positive alternative placement program for minimum risk adult male inmates. This program provides an opportunity for rehabilitation, training and future employment. The program develops camaraderie and teamwork among the inmates regardless of ethnicity. The program teaches discipline and work ethics, as well as vocational skills and promotes individual and team pride in a job well done while providing a valuable service to the community. The Grand Jury commends both the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and Cal Fire for their support for this program.

The Grand Jury noted when inspecting the Camp, that some directional signs in the area incorrectly identify Lambie Road as “Lambrie Road.”

Affected Agencies

- Delta Conservation Camp
- California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
- California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
- Solano Transportation Authority

Courtesy Copies

- California State Assemblywoman Lois Wolk
- Solano County Supervisor Michael Reagan
- California Department of Transportation