



SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY

2014 - 2015

DELTA CONSERVATION CAMP-8

Delta Conservation Camp – 8

I. Summary

Pursuant to Penal Code §919, on October 16, 2014 the 2014-2015 Solano County Grand Jury toured the Delta Conservation Camp – 8 (also known as the Delta Fire Camp and/or Delta Camp). Surprisingly there are no fences, gates, or other restraining measures to maintain the security of the facility, and the retention of inmates. Delta Fire Camp is an open, minimum detention facility run by a smoothly operating collaboration between California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire).

II. Introduction/Background

The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation puts an exemplary effort into the treatment of the inmates, and the inmates' eventual re-entry into society. The results are easily seen in the recidivism rate of Delta Camp releases which a member of the Department of Corrections states is 20 to 25% lower than any other facility in California.

Delta Fire Camp is a much sought after alternative by inmates throughout California. Inmates with local connections and knowledge of the area are not allowed at Delta Fire Camp. The goal is to prevent placement of inmates at a facility where they are familiar with people or the area to avoid potential problems.

The pathway to Delta Fire Camp for an inmate is simple, yet rigorous. When sentenced to prison in Northern California the inmate's intake processors examine several factors. Among the criteria are: the nature of the crime; the past criminal record; work related background and tendency toward violent behavior. If the inmate meets the criteria set by the Department of Corrections, he is then transferred to the California Corrections Center in Susanville, CA.

During the inmates' indoctrination at Susanville, they are told about the option of serving up to four years of their sentence at one of many fire camps. If they want to be transferred to a fire camp they must request a transfer. They must display model prisoner behavior for a period of about six months. Then they are given a more thorough background check, a rigorous physical exam, and tested for skills that can be utilized at a fire camp. Physical limitations and disabling diseases are factors for denial for a transfer.

Since Delta Fire Camp is primarily a fire fighting unit, it requires the inmate be trained as a fire fighter. He is sent to a class environment to learn about firefighting methods, tools and procedures. After successful completion of the 40 hours of classroom training, the inmate is sent to a training unit for 40 hours of physical conditioning. About 50% of all applicants are not accepted after these two weeks of training. Finally, the inmate is sent to a class on saw handling. Since chain saws are a primary tool in firefighting, every person going to Delta Fire Camp must be familiar with and capable of using a chain saw, as well as other tools used when fighting fires. After transfer to Delta Fire Camp, the inmate attends firefighting skills and saw training of 16 to 20 hours per quarter.

III. Methodology

Reviewed:

- Correctional News (05-14-2014)
- AB 109 – 2011 Prison Realignment Act
- California Code of Regulations, Title 15, Division 3
- Reviewed Cal Fire publication
- Vallejo Times Herald Newspaper
- Reduced Penalties for Some Crimes Initiative (Proposition 47)

Toured:

- Delta Conservation Camp – 8

Interviewed:

- Department of Corrections Staff
- Cal Fire staff
- Inmates

IV. Statement of Facts

Delta Conservation Camp – 8 was opened in June 1988. The maximum number of inmates housed at Delta Camp is 127 (on the date of our tour there were 122 inmates). The Prison Realignment Act (AB109) and Reduced Penalties for Some Crimes Initiative (Proposition 47) have had a negative impact on the fire camp's population limiting the number of potential candidates.

The operating budget for the facility is approximately \$250,000 for Cal Fire and \$1.85 million for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). The approximate cost is \$46 per day per inmate. The inmate's average stay at Delta Camp is 20 months.

The inmates are responsible for maintaining their personal fitness level that allows them to be in sufficient physical condition to fight fires. Failure to be in proper condition can result in expulsion from Delta Camp. Inmates have access to running trails, exercise areas, basketball courts and free weights. They also have enough personal time to utilize the above.

On request, inmates are escorted to the DMV prior to their release for California Personal ID or Driver's License. Delta Camp provides this service to aid in a smooth transition into society.

A zero tolerance policy provides that any inmate will be returned to Susanville Prison if he breaks any of the rules of Delta Camp.

Examples:

- Cell phones

- Drugs
- Violent behavior
- Unauthorized straying outside the understood/established boundaries

There was one incident of fighting among inmates in 2014. All inmates involved were immediately returned to Susanville: evidence of the swift enforcement of policy violations. Cameras have been installed in several locations within Delta Fire Camp which were previously not operable but are now.

Each inmate is paid a daily rate depending on their respective jobs and their assigned tasks while at Delta Camp, with a bonus rate of \$1.00 an hour from portal to portal when involved in firefighting.

Several shops/programs are manned by inmates with specialized skills, such as:

- Auto mechanics
- Kitchen management and cooking
- Tools management
- Chainsaw repair and maintenance
- Laundry management
- Landscape maintenance
- Wastewater treatment
- Facilities maintenance

There are inmates who assist in the management of fire crews and are called “swampers”.

Delta Camp provides inmates opportunities to expand educational and trade knowledge with access to continuing education programs towards GED Certificates and AA Degrees as well as on the job training. The inmates can get college credit for fire training and wastewater treatment. The current continuing college programs are provided by Cuesta College and the Susanville Facility. California State Prison Solano has initiated an education program through Solano Community College. At the time of the Grand Jury’s visit this was not currently available at Delta Camp.

Recently a specialized program rehabilitating dogs with behavior problems (Pups on Parole) in cooperation with the SPCA is receiving accolades. There are currently 4 dogs partnered with inmates. Additional new kennels are being built to expand the program.

Delta Fire Camp also provides various community services such as:

- Vegetation removal (fire load reduction) requested by various county agencies
- General clean up at the Yountville Veterans Administration home
- Various types of work for CAL-FIRE

V. Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1

The camaraderie between Department of Correction's personnel and Cal Fire personnel is exemplary.

Recommendation 1

Continue to foster the spirit and collaboration between these two departments.

Finding 2

The apparent attitudes and focus of the staff at Delta Camp to make the rehabilitation and reentry of inmates into society is also exemplary.

Recommendation 2

Continue the treatment of the inmates as witnessed.

Finding 3

Delta Camp provides valuable community service work when not fighting fires.

Recommendation 3

Continue this valuable community support service.

Finding 4

Delta Camp provides inmates opportunities to enhance their education towards both certification and degrees.

Recommendation 4

Explore the feasibility of collaborating with Solano Community College to offer courses towards advancing the inmates' education.

Comments

The Grand Jury believes that Delta Camp is a successful and well-run facility and applauds their efforts toward continuing success.

Required responses

None

Courtesy copies:

California Dept. of Forestry, Delta Conservation Camp
Clerk of the Solano County Board of Supervisors
Delta Conservation Camp Battalion Chief
Facility Commander, California Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation
Solano Community College, President
Warden, California Correctional Center, Susanville, California