

DEADWOOD CONSERVATION CAMP

SUMMARY

It is easy to forget about Deadwood Conservation Camp sitting quietly in a narrow offshoot of Scott Valley, but its value to Siskiyou County is great. Since 1962, when it opened, we have depended on its inmate firefighters to help protect our forests during fire season. Outside of fire season, inmates provide vital maintenance and construction services throughout Siskiyou County. In general, the Grand Jury finds that the impact of Deadwood Conservation Camp is extremely valuable to residents of Siskiyou County.

GLOSSARY

CDCR	California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
CAL FIRE	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
Deadwood	Deadwood Conservation Camp
AB109/Realignment	Assembly Bill 109 Public Safety Realignment Act

BACKGROUND

The Deadwood Conservation Camp is a part of a long-standing tradition in California. Beginning in 1850, inmates were called upon to help build roads. The first state prison road camp was established in 1915 and the last closed in 1974. In 1946, inmates were asked to help fight forest fires. This was the beginning of the conservation camps we know today. Now, conservation camps house approximately 4,500 inmates statewide. There are 43 camps located in 29 counties in California. The camps provide approximately 219 firefighting crews. Deadwood Conservation Camp houses four 17-man crews and inmate support staff.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) jointly operate conservation camps. CDCR is responsible for the selection, supervision, care and discipline of the inmates. CAL FIRE is responsible for maintenance of the camp, training and supervision of the work of inmate fire crews, as well as custody of inmates on its CAL FIRE projects. CDCR employees must provide security and care of the inmates while they are away from Deadwood assigned to fires, floods or other assignments.

Inmates chosen for the firefighter program are carefully screened by CDCR before a transfer to the camp is offered. Firefighter training is offered at the state prison in Susanville, CA. The inmate must pass the training regimen and prove to be physically fit. If qualified, it is the inmate's choice to transfer to the conservation camp or remain in the traditional prison setting. A few select inmates choose the hard work of the firefighter.

METHODOLOGY

Penal Code Section 919(b) requires the Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury to "... inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county." Pursuant to 919(b), members of the grand jury toured Deadwood Conservation Camp in November 2016. CDCR and CAL-FIRE staff led the tour. Staff and inmates were interviewed.

DISCUSSION

California State Prisons were considered to be overcrowded and the passage of Assembly Bill (AB) 109, the 2011 Public Safety Realignment Act, was an attempt to address the problem. AB109 required newly convicted low-level offenders with no current or prior serious offenses to serve their term in county jail. The result has been the reduction of admissions to state prisons by twenty to thirty thousand inmates per year. Subsequent legislation California Proposition 47, and the recently passed Proposition 57, further reduced the number of newly convicted offenders entering state prisons. Unfortunately, these low-level offenders were the very inmates who had previously qualified for assignment to the conservation camps. The selection criteria for the camps had to be modified, while still ensuring public and prisoner safety. State prison personnel have been able to find enough inmates to staff the camps and continue the firefighting and community programs, but it is becoming more difficult.

Deadwood Conservation Camp houses a maximum of 88 men who are minimum-custody convicted felons. They make up four fire crews of 17 members each and other inmate support staff. CDCR provides one Correctional Lieutenant, one Correctional Sergeant and six Correctional Officers. CAL FIRE provides an Assistant Chief, eight Fire Crew Captains, one Heavy Fire Equipment Operator and one Stationary Engineer.

The site is comprised of a chainsaw & small engine repair shop, a wood shop, a mill, a diesel engine and fire truck repair shop, two dormitories for the inmates, a mess hall, craft and hobby areas, a weight room, a garden area and offices with meeting rooms. The grounds were well maintained and shops were neat and orderly. The support staff inmate cooks provided a well-prepared and nutritious lunch for the grand jury, demonstrating learned skills.

The CDCR and CAL FIRE representatives provided the following information:

- The Deadwood Inmate Crews through project and conservation work provided the State, Federal and Local Government agencies with approximately 129,370 work hours at a value of \$10.00 per hour, or \$1,293,700 in 2016.
- The Deadwood Inmate Fire Crews, provided 53,986 work hours in firefighting at a value of \$18.00 per hour, or \$974,748 in 2016.
- CDCR and CAL FIRE at Deadwood have supported local vendors through the purchase of goods and services in excess of \$320,000.
- The mechanic shop services and refurbishes the CAL FIRE units and all Siskiyou County volunteer fire department vehicles.
- The wood shop produces various woodworking and cabinetry items that are available for the offices of federal, state, county and non-profit agencies.

The Deadwood crews were instrumental in building, and offer ongoing maintenance support for, the College of the Siskiyou's Fire Training Center.

▪ Other ongoing projects and partnerships include:

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| Klamath National Forest | Castle Crags State Park |
| Shasta Valley Fish and Wildlife | Siskiyou Golden Fairgrounds |
| Local Public Schools | Cemetery Districts |
| Siskiyou County Fire Safe Council | Lake Siskiyou Recreation Area |
| Iron Gate and Mount Shasta Fish Hatcheries | |
| The cities of Weed, Etna, Fort Jones, Mt. Shasta, Yreka | |

Grand Jury members also had informal conversations with Deadwood inmates. The inmates appeared confident about the skills they were using in the various programs.

FINDINGS

- F1. Camp residents and CDCR and CAL FIRE staff demonstrated Pride in the Deadwood Conversation Camp environment.
- F2. Additional sources of revenue would be required by county, state, special districts and local governments to provide current community services without the efforts of Deadwood inmates.
- F3. In the absence of the Deadwood inmate firefighters, government agencies would have to hire professional firefighters at a significant additional cost to replace their services.
- F4. Those state prison and Deadwood CAL FIRE employees, who live in Siskiyou County, contribute to the local economy.
- F5. Deadwood Camp operation purchases contribute to the local economy.
- F6. Deadwood Conservation Camp remains an asset to Siskiyou County.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. To the staff and inmates of Deadwood Conservation Camp: keep up the good work!

DISCLAIMER

Reports issued by the 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.
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