



SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY
2013-14

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY
AND FIRE PROTECTION
DELTA CONSERVATION CAMP**

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I. INTRODUCTION

California has 39 fire camps staffed with inmates trained for wild land firefighting, public community conservation and community service work. Eighteen (18) of the fire camps are situated in Northern California, with one in Solano County. Delta Conservation Camp (Delta Camp) is located in Solano County on Lambie Road, off Highway 12 between the City of Suisun City and Rio Vista.

The 2013-2014 Solano County Grand Jury has identified concerns with the implementation of AB109, Public Safety Realignment Act, which may result in the closing of Delta Camp.

Pursuant to California Penal Code, § 919(B), the 2013-2014 Solano County Grand Jury is mandated to inquire regarding Delta Camp.

II. METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury interviewed Delta Camp management personnel representing both California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and CAL-FIRE:

Interviewed:

- CAL-FIRE Headquarters Staff
- CAL-FIRE Camp Staff
- CDCR Camp Staff
- Delta Camp inmates
- Solano County Sheriff's Staff

Reviewed:

- California Code of Regulations, Title 15, Division 3
- 2011 Public Safety Realignment Fact Sheet
- CAL-FIRE AB 109 Response and Plan Overview
- Pamphlets, forms and handouts provided by CDCR and CAL-FIRE
- Security system
- Previous Grand Jury reports
- CAL-FIRE website

The Grand Jury inspected the following Camp facilities:

- Main Office
- Laundry Room
- Inmate recreational areas
- Inmate Dormitories
- Hobby Shop
- Storage areas
- Vehicle Maintenance Facility
- Equipment Repair Shop
- Sign Shop
- Kitchen and Mess Hall
- Security system
- Grounds and camp perimeter
- CAL-FIRE Dormitory
- Conjugal Housing

III. STATEMENT OF FACTS

Delta Camp located in Solano County is one of the 39 facilities statewide to house inmates that have been specially trained for wild land firefighting and public community conservation work. Inmates who volunteer for the program are carefully screened by the CDCR and CAL-FIRE. Suitability is based on strict requirements of physical, emotional and intellectual aptitudes. Inmates with serious felony convictions e.g. arson are not eligible for this program. The length of stay is usually six months to three years. These are inmates with minor felonies without violent convictions.

When not actively training for fighting fires, crews of 13-17 inmates are utilized for cleanup of public and camp projects led by a CAL-FIRE Captain. Non-profit organizations and/or governmental projects can utilize a full crew of up to 17 inmates for \$200 per day, plus administrative costs, for an eight hour project. They also provide other agencies with a labor force to perform public works service on projects pursuant to Public Resources Code section 4951.

Education is highly encouraged through study for General Education Development (GED), correspondence courses towards a college degree and on-the-job training for fire technician and waste water treatment certification. Inmates may earn a Fire Fighter I certificate that is recognized by CAL-FIRE for possible future employment. Additional personal development programs include voluntary participation in alcoholics and narcotics anonymous and religious programs.

CDCR is responsible for the security, supervision, care, and discipline of the inmates at Delta Camp. CAL-FIRE personnel supervise inmate in-camp assignments, public service details and fire-line assignments in the field. Delta Camp also provides skills training for inmates such as welding, sign making, woodworking, sewing, silk screening, vehicle repair, cooking, yard maintenance and landscaping.

While inspecting the maintenance shop, the Grand Jury observed the maintenance and re-building of chainsaws and other equipment to extend their useful life. One inmate is responsible for sewing and tailoring needs. His duty is to mend and sew all firefighting uniforms that have become tattered through daily wear and tear. The inmate created a product of an ax blade cover from a worn out fire boot that he recycled. Other equipment covers had been made to help preserve the integrity of the tools, and prevent the tools from rusting and decay due to nature's elements.

Delta Camp acts to instill values in fire and conservation crew members such as responsibility, accountability, self-discipline, teamwork and job skills. These traits are essential to a successful re-entry into society. The cost to house a Delta Camp inmate is \$46 per day versus \$129 per day in a conventional prison, excluding medical needs.

The Grand Jury observed the morning transfer of responsibility of inmate custody from CDCR to CAL-FIRE. Inmate work crews boarded six Emergency Crew Transports called, "buses" to be deployed for work details outside of Delta Camp. Each crew consisted of 17 inmates and a Fire Captain.

At the time of the Grand Jury investigation there were 120 inmates in the program designed for a capacity of 132. Inmates are assigned to fire crews which range from six to eight crews depending on the population at Delta Camp. Staff at Delta Camp consists of the following:

CAL-FIRE:

- Division Chief
- Battalion Chief
- Twelve Fire Captains
- Heavy Equipment Mechanic
- Waste Treatment Operator
- Office Technician

CDCR:

- Lieutenant
- Two Sergeants
- Eight Correctional Officers

The 2011 Public Safety Realignment Act, Assembly Bill 109 (AB 109) is the California attempted solution to a panel of three U.S. Federal Judge's order to reduce the number of inmates

in California's 33 state prisons. The State of California appealed the case to the United States Supreme Court which upheld the order in a four to five decision, finding overcrowding violates the inmates' eight amendment rights to be free of cruel and unusual punishment.

The realignment process will result in many lower level offenders being sentenced to county jails instead of state prisons. This will have an impact on the number of inmates available for prison firefighting crews. Fewer inmate crews could result in the possible closing of fire camps. Upon review of California Fire Response Plan Overview & Answers to Some Commonly Asked Questions, full implementation of AB 109 could result in closing as many 12 to 13 camps.

The staff at Delta Camp has informed the 2013-2014 Grand Jury that there are no plans to close Delta Camp.

CAL-FIRE and CDCR are working with county sheriffs, throughout the state, to develop a pilot program to identify a county inmate fire training center. This would result in transitioning state fire camp crews into county fire camp crews. The Solano County Sheriff's Office is not involved in this program.

The 2011-2012 and the 2012-2013 Grand Jury's reports identified the concern and need to install a video surveillance system for security purposes. Delta Camp staff informed the 2013-2014 Grand Jury that the video surveillance system installation is still in progress. The Grand Jury has visually verified the placement of the video surveillance system cameras which were non-operational at the time of our inspection.

IV. SUMMARY

The 2013-2014 Solano County Grand Jury collected data and information concerning the impact of AB 109, the realignment act, on fire camps in California. On March 13, 2014, the Grand Jury toured and inspected the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Delta Conservation Camp. Areas covered on our tour were the administration facility, inmate housing, custody and security, inmate training and the mess hall food services. During the tour, we interviewed CDCR staff, Cal-Fire staff and inmates at Delta Camp.

V. FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1

Delta Camp provides inmate fire crews for fire suppression in Solano, Sonoma, Lake and Napa counties.

Recommendation 1

Continue to operate and maintain at an efficient level for effective fire suppression.

Finding 2

Delta Camp provides support service for conservation projects for non-profit organizations, governmental projects and public communities throughout Solano, Sonoma, Lake and Napa counties when not fighting fires.

Recommendation 2

Continue this valuable support service for conservation projects for non-profit organizations, governmental projects and public communities throughout Solano, Sonoma, Lake and Napa counties.

Finding 3

Full implementation of AB 109 could result in the closing of state fire camps.

Recommendation 3

CAL-FIRE and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation identify a workable solution to keep fire camps open and continue to provide these essential services.

Finding 4

The installation of the video surveillance system has not been completed and fully implemented since the recommendation by the 2011-2012 Solano County Grand Jury.

Recommendation 4

Complete the installation and implementation of the video surveillance system.

COMMENTS

Delta Camp is a cost effective way to house inmates compared to other prisons in the State. This program is beneficial to the community as well as the inmates. Due to the current drought being experienced in California, it is expected that there will be an exponential

increase in the number of forest fires resulting in the need for more Delta Camp style training facilities to train additional firefighters.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

None

COURTESY COPIES

Clerk, Solano County Board of Supervisors

Solano County Sheriff

Warden, California Correctional Center, Susanville, California

Facility Commander, California Department of Corrections

Delta Conservation Camp Battalion Chief

California Department of Forestry, Delta Conservation Camp

State Senator Lois Wolk, 5th District

Assembly Member, Mariko Yamada, 8th District