SUGAR PINE CONSERVATION CAMP

REASON FOR INQUIRY:

California Penal Code section 919 mandates that the Grand Jury inquire into the condition and management of all public prisons located within the County.

Sugar Pine Conservation Camp
15905 Sugar Pine Road
Bella Vista, CA 96008
(530) 472-3121

BACKGROUND:

The Sugar Pine Conservation Camp opened in June of 1988. The California Department of Corrections (CDC) and the California Department of Forestry (CDF) jointly operate the camp facility. The camp is situated on 80 acres located 25 miles east of Redding in Shasta County. It is one of 41 conservation camps in the State. The inmate population consists of approximately 125 minimum-security adult male felons, all of whom are screened at the prison classification center in Susanville. The facility's primary function is to provide a labor force for statewide fire suppression and to perform a variety of local public services, such as highway cleanup, and other community projects.

METHOD OF INQUIRY:

The Grand Jury toured the Sugar Pine Conservation Camp on October 15, 2002. An interview, general discussion, and orientation took place with the CDF Division Chief, CDF Camp Battalion Chief, CDC Lieutenant and related support staff. Two inmates were available to answer questions from the Grand Jury pertaining to their stay at the facility.

The Grand Jury reviewed the following documents:

- California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Conservation Camp Program informational handout
- Map showing location of Conservation Camps and Forestry Training Centers
- Sugar Pine Conservation Camp Statistics

FINDINGS:

1. The facilities include the following: two-story dormitory, kitchen and dining area, laundry room, administration building, fire fighting equipment storage building, garage and vehicle maintenance building, and inmate hobby shop. The camp also has an engraving shop where inmates produce nameplates and signs. The inmates are responsible for grounds maintenance, vehicle repairs, food service and preparation, and all other general maintenance that is required to keep the facility in good order.
2. California Conservation Camp fire crews, also known as hand crews, provide the labor that helps CDF achieve the Department's mission. A primary objective within that mission is to "reduce loss of life, property, and natural resources through the implementation of balanced fire prevention, fire protection planning, presuppression, and suppression activities." Sugar Pine has six organized and well trained fire crews, each consisting of approximately 15 inmates.

3. Inmates are responsible for meal preparation and serving. Breakfast and evening meals are served in the dining hall. Lunch is packaged for consumption at the various crew work sites. Special meals are prepared for inmate crews when returning from fighting a fire.
4. It was reported to the Grand Jury that approximately 95% of the inmates at this camp are there because of drug related offenses. Inmates cannot have a record of any sex-related offenses, escapes from other CDC facilities, or an arson offense, and they cannot be potentially violent. The average length of stay is less than a year. It is a rare occasion for an inmate to try an escape, as he knows that he will be returned to the state prison in Susanville. There was one attempted escape in 2001.
5. The inmates have telephone and visitation privileges. An inmate who meets special requirements may spend a weekend with his family at a house that is located on the property. Inmates are searched before and after these visits and must report for inmate count every two hours. Any food brought in by the family must be prepackaged and inspected by the officer in charge.
6. The citizens of California enjoy a significant fiscal benefit by housing their low risk inmates in the conservation camps. Many of the inmates at the camp learn skills and work ethics that will serve them well after their prison stay. The taxpayers also benefit from the labor these inmates provide for conservation related projects. The inmates provide labor, with Fire Crew Captain supervision, for work projects that would not otherwise be affordable for many government agencies. Statewide, California Conservation Camp fire crews average in excess of eight million hours of labor on work projects for CDF and other federal, state, and local agencies each year. CDF is careful not to compete with private enterprise. Sugar Pine Conservation Camp statistics provided to the Grand Jury indicate that in 2002, a total of 13,350 man-hours were dedicated to providing public service and 94,500 man-hours were utilized for emergency service. Each year the inmates at Sugar Pine, in conjunction with the local Lions Clubs in the Redding area, provide senior citizens and needy families with a supply of firewood.
7. There are ten correctional officers and twelve fire captains at this facility. All employees live off the camp property. There is one supervisor and two officers on duty each day; at night there is one supervisor and one officer on duty. There is a count of inmates every two hours day and night, with other unscheduled counts at random.
8. There are no medical facilities on site; only basic first aid is available. Inmates are transported to Redding for emergency medical care. Non-emergency medical care is provided at the state prison in Susanville.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
None

RESPONSE REQUIRED:
None

COMMENDATIONS:

The California Department of Corrections and the California Department of Forestry are to be commended for their cooperative efforts and team approach resulting in a successful joint agency program.