Trinity River Conservation Camp #3

As noted in previous Grand Jury reports, Trinity River Conservation Camp #3 is very impressive. With the information given to us, the current Grand Jury was able to understand the purpose, role, achievements and future of Camp #3, as well as other camps throughout the state. The camp is jointly operated by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). The primary mission of the camp is to provide inmate fire crews for fire suppression, principally in Trinity, Shasta and Siskiyou County areas. This last year, however, crews from Camp #3 traveled to Napa and Sonoma Counties providing assistance with devastating fires in those areas.

In addition to fire suppression, inmate hand crews provide a work force for community service projects for BLM, USFS, Cal Trans, Adopt-A-Highway, the Resource Conservation District of Trinity and Western Shasta Counties, Trinity County Parks and Recreation, Trinity County Fairgrounds, Trinity County Public Works, Trinity County Schools and local snow removal. It is estimated that during the 2017 calendar year, the Trinity River Conservation Camp #3, through conservation and work projects, provided local communities with 110,061 work hours. The inmate fire crews provided 150,535 hours in firefighting and other emergency work. It is estimated that the camp programs at Trinity River Conservation Camp #3 provided the taxpayers of Trinity County and California a savings of $4,958,942.53.

The variety of inmate programs at the conservation camp is also impressive. In addition to preparing for careers in firefighting, inmates have the opportunity to partake in water treatment training through Sacramento State University. They may choose to participate in correspondence courses through Lassen Community College, Coastline and Feather River Colleges. Inmates have the ability through California Conservation Camps (CCC) to receive their high school diploma or to obtain a GED. The camp is self-sustaining. Pride is shown by inmates working in various departments: the mill, cabinet shop, chainsaw repair, machine and automotive shops, gardens and the kitchen. This environment provides inmates an opportunity to learn marketable trades for employment upon release.

The grand jury understands that currently Trinity County does not have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with CCC allowing it to place inmates in these camps at a lesser cost to the county. We encourage the County to explore an MOU with CCC in order to place qualifying prisoners in this program to the benefit of the county and the prisoners.

Otherwise, congratulation and kudos to all at Camp #3.

Interesting facts about the Trinity River Conservation Camp

There are 95 inmates assigned to the Trinity River Conservation Camp (TRCC), which opened in 1988. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL-FIRE) and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) operate the TRCC jointly. Inmates at TRCC have committed nonviolent crimes. The average stay is less than two years and the maximum capacity is 132 inmates.

The inmates are proud of the work they perform in our community and are eager to be at TRCC rather than in a different type of custody. Inmates strive to serve the remainder of their respective terms at the Conservation Camp and to contribute to the community. Many of them participate in educational opportunities. Inmates can take correspondence classes, receive a GED or high school diploma, take online college classes when available and gain valuable work experience. Three previous inmates completed water treatment training through online classes provided by California State University, Sacramento and are now employed in various municipalities.

Currently, seventy-two inmates are trained firefighters. They perform preventative work, including clearing brush and cutting trees in the county, as well as fighting forest fires when needed. The inmates undergo the same training as top level United States Forest Service certified hot shot firefighters and must be in top physical condition. TRCC also has a Mobile Kitchen Unit, which provides feeding for thousands of firefighters during emergency assignments on fires, flood control and natural disasters. Inmates are supervised 24 hours a day while on work projects and on emergency incidents.

While the Trinity River Conservation Camp specializes in cabinetry and woodworking, it is one of 18 other north state Conservation Camps with specific specialties. Other Trinity River Conservation Camp work assignments include: Kitchen cook, Diesel mechanics, Chainsaw mechanic, Log Milling Laundry service, Tailor, Metal shop/welding.

The skills the inmates learn can assist them in obtaining employment upon their release. Utilization of a Conservation Camp represents a cost savings to the California tax payer compared to incarceration at other state or county facilities.

The daily cost of a single inmate incarcerated Trinity River Conservation Camp is approximately $10.00 per day per inmate, totaling $3,650 a year, with an $80 per day cost for four-week fire training. This cost savings is represented in the nearly 60% self-sufficiency of the program due to services it provides to the state and county. One of the objectives of the CDCR Conservation Camp Program is to provide minimum custody facilities for inmates who may perform meaningful work in a structured program.

TRCC inmates have built wooden rocking horses and toys, which are donated to charities. In the past, the Trinity River Conservation Camp has refurbished bicycles, which are given away by local organizations to needy children. The inmates have also built tables and shelving for agencies and local non-profits.

During the 2016 calendar year, it is estimated that the TRCC provided the local communities with 109,061 work hours to local, state and federal government agencies. In addition to project and conservation work, the inmate fire crews provided 114,628 hours in firefighting and other emergency work.

While the Trinity River Conservation Camp faces many challenges, we are fortunate to have the Trinity River Conservation Camp in Trinity County.