

WASHINGTON RIDGE:
A WELL-RUN FACILITY WITH
GREAT COMMUNITY BENEFIT

2022-2023 Nevada County Grand Jury

Report Date: May 2, 2023

Release Date: May 18, 2023

Summary

The 2022/2023 Nevada County Civil Grand Jury inspected the Washington Ridge Camp on October 26, 2022, to “inquire into the conditions and management of public prisons in the county” as Penal Code § 919(b) requires. California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation operates Washington Ridge Conservation Camp in collaboration with Cal Fire.

The Grand Jury commends The Washington Ridge Conservation Camp. It is well run. Its services cost significantly less than other available options. A facility official reported that Washington Ridge Conservation Camp saves our taxpayers almost \$3M each year in firefighting and fuel-reduction costs.

Washington Ridge Conservation Camp manages the facility well, and it is in good condition except for an issue related to the facility’s age.

This California State facility provides numerous services such as:

1. California Department of Water Resources (clearing the local waterways of debris)
2. Placer County Roads (Fuel Reduction)
3. Placer County Parks (Fuel Reduction)
4. Auburn Parks and Recreation Areas (Fuel Reduction)
5. Tahoe National Parks (Fuel Reduction and Habitat improvement)
6. Yuba County Public Works (Clean up levels and waterways of debris)
7. Firefighting

Glossary

CCF – Cal Fire

Jury – 2022-2023 Nevada County Civil Grand Jury

WRCC – Washington Ridge Conservation Camp

Background

On June 1, 2005, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation took possession of the WRCC from the California Youth Authority.

Approach

The Jury conducted a site visit and an interview with the officials at the WRCC in October 2022.

Discussion

When we visited, the camp had 60 inmates. Camp capacity is 100 inmates. The Camp generally assigns two crews per day to duty, but, if conditions demand and other inmates are available, may assign additional crews. Inmates on fire crews must meet stringent standards of physical fitness and competence. Inmates must be non-violent offenders. Being at WRCC is a privilege.

Inmates receive educational opportunities to acquire skills for future employment, including repairing and maintaining chain and hand saws inmates use daily. There is a wood shop where inmates can learn carpentry skills. The inmates benefit by being able to see a future with the vocational training given to them. They also get excellent medical services. The average stay is approximately one year.

The WRCC has a \$6M annual operating budget and is a valuable community resource. Inmates receive \$2.90 per day for general labor, \$4.90 for skilled labor. Firefighters receive \$1.00 per day. Last year, two fire crews worked 56,060 hours fighting fires and 37,308 hours in non-firefighting work. The firefighting saved an estimated \$1.1M; the non-firefighting work saved an additional \$1.8M. Government agencies

and non-profits that use crews pay WRCC approximately \$230/day. In addition, state pays \$4 per day for each inmate at the facility.

Fourteen Cal Fire (CF) employees manage the inmates when they are away from the facility. Each crew has one CF employee who drives the bus and supervises inmates. Often there is another CF employee at the work site to assist. There are five buses, with two buses available to the National Guard. These vehicles average 60,000 to 80,000 miles before the engines need rebuilding.

The Forest Service owns WRCC land. Cal Fire owns the buildings, and California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is responsible for board and care.

Finding

The Jury did observe one area where there is a possible health and safety hazard for the inmates. The showers need attention. There are cracked and missing tiles, and the shower facility suffers from age. There is a remodel project that has funding, but the remodel remains on the Camp Infrastructure Repair Plan. California Department of General Services received the repair assignment in October 2021. WRCC continues to wait for the work to begin.

California Department of General Services' delay has allowed the showers to continue to deteriorate October 2021; the project now requires additional work and money.

Conclusion

The showers need immediate attention. The Jury has no authority over state agencies, so it concludes its only choice is to publish this report. The Jury hopes this will remind and inform California Department of General Services of the importance of this project.

Recommendation

None.