

Washington Ridge Conservation Camp

Shower at your own risk!

2025-2026 Nevada County Grand Jury Report
Date: June XX, 2026

Summary

The 2025/2026 Nevada County Civil Grand Jury inspected the Washington Ridge Camp (WRCC) on April 16, 2026, 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 CALFIRE.

The Grand Jury commends the WRCC. 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 over \$3 million each year in firefighting and fuel reduction costs.

WRCC 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 including brushing roads and trails, fuel breaks, clearing ditches, tree removal, weed abatement to mention a few. Some of its projects include:

- Nevada County Public Schools

- Nevada County Public Works

- California Department of Water Resources (clearing the local waterways)

- Placer County Roads (fuel reduction)

- Placer County Parks (fuel reduction)

- Auburn Parks and Recreation Areas (fuel reduction)

- Tahoe National Parks (fuel reduction and habitat improvement)

- Yuba County Public Works (clearing the local waterways)

- Firefighting

Glossary

CDCR	California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
CALFIRE	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
IPs	Incarcerated Persons—
Jury	2025-2026 Nevada County Civil Grand Jury
WRCC	Washington Ridge Conservation Camp

Background

On June 1, 2005, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) took possession of the WRCC from the California Youth Authority. Currently, it is jointly operated by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE) and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

The primary mission of the camp is to provide IP fire crews for fire suppression, principally in the Nevada, Yuba, and Placer County areas. In addition to fire suppression, IP hand crews provide a work force for floods, conservation projects, and community services for local, state, and federal government agencies.

The CDCR is responsible for the supervision, care, and discipline of the IPs. CALFIRE is responsible for the custody of the IPs during project activities.

Approach

The Jury conducted a site visit and an interview with the officials at the WRCC in April 2026.

Discussion

When we visited, the camp had 62 IPs. Camp capacity is 100 Ips. The Camp generally assigns three crews per day to duty; but, if conditions demand and other IPs are available, may assign additional crews. IPs on fire crews must meet stringent standards of physical fitness and competence. IPs must be non-violent offenders. Being at WRCC is a privilege.

IPs receive educational opportunities to acquire skills for future employment, including repairing and maintaining the chain and hand saws IPs use daily. There is a wood shop where IPs can learn carpentry skills. Upon release, they are certified in wildland fire suppression and are qualified to attend academies to become residential firefighters.

The IPs 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 \$6 million annual operating budget and is a valuable community resource. In 2025, WRCC crews worked 72,768 man hours on community service projects, saving the state approximately \$1.5 million. They worked 47,470 hours on fire assignments, saving the state approximately \$1.75 million.

IPs receive \$2.90 per day for general labor, \$4.90 for skilled labor. In 2025, firefighters received \$1.00 per hour on firefighting assignments. Recent legislation has passed raising the hourly rate to \$7.25 per hour on firefighting assignments. These increases are not reflected in the 2025 data.

The camp receives \$394 per day for a crew from the government agencies and non-profits that utilize the crews. In addition, state pays \$4 per day for each IP at the facility. These monies are returned to the camp budget for repair and/or replacement of tools and equipment.

Fourteen CALFIRE employees manage the IPs when they are away from the facility. Each crew has one CALFIRE employee who drives the bus and supervises IPs. Often there is another CALFIRE 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. CALFIRE owns the buildings and is responsible for the facility upkeep. CDCR is responsible for board and care of IPs.

Finding

The Jury observed one area where there is a possible health and safety issue for the IPs. The showers need attention as was noted in the 2022-2023 Nevada County Grand Jury report. There are cracked and missing tiles, and the shower facility suffers from age. The plumbing is antiquated with several shower heads appear inoperable. Paint is peeling in multiple areas and mold is visible throughout.

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. According to the WRCC and CALFIRE administrators, funds are now available. Due to the current building and architectural code updates over the past few years, the cost of repair/replacement has significantly increased. WRCC now awaits final approval from various state agencies before the work can begin. The fact remains that in the last three years nothing has been done. As a result, the IPs are being exposed on a daily basis to potentially hazardous conditions.

Conclusion

The showers need immediate attention. The repairs have been delayed by the multiple state bureaucracies responsible for ensuring they are corrected, allowing the problem to worsen and increasing costs to the taxpayers. The state has been aware of the condition of the facility and had approved funds for the repairs. Despite this, the state is being irresponsible in removing the hazard. The Jury has no authority over state agencies, so it concludes its only choice is to publish this report. The Jury expects this second report on this issue will remind and inform California Department of General Services of the importance of this project.

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CALFIRE

Dept of Corrections

California Department of General Services