

## HUMBOLDT COUNTY JAILS SITE VISIT REPORT

### SUMMARY

By law, the Grand Jury is required, annually, to visit and report on the conditions of all correctional facilities within Humboldt County. This report is the result of the Grand Jury's observations of these facilities. It also incorporates the responses to the findings and recommendations made in last year's report. We are not reporting any new Findings or Recommendations and thus no responses are requested.

### BACKGROUND

Penal Code 919(b) provides that the Grand Jury "shall inquire into the conditions and management of the public prisons within the County." To fulfill this responsibility, the Grand Jury annually undertakes the task of visiting and evaluating the physical conditions and management of each jail and holding facility located within Humboldt County. Two or more members of the jury visit each facility at least once. As has been done historically, the jury also visited a number of facilities operated by law enforcement agencies that are not actually "public prisons."

After completing these inspections, the Grand Jury compiles a report of its observations, findings, and recommendations.

### FACILITIES INSPECTED

- **Sheriff's Department:**
  - Humboldt County Correctional Facility (County Jail)
  - Main Evidence Room
  - Hoopa Sheriff's Station
  - McKinleyville Sheriff's Station
  - Garberville Sheriff's Station
  - County Animal Shelter
  - Sheriff's Boat Yard
  - Sheriff's Work Alternative Program (SWAP) Wood Yard
  - Sheriff's Work Alternative Program (SWAP) Farm
  
- **City Police Departments:**
  - Eureka
  - Arcata
  - Fortuna
  - Ferndale
  - Rio Dell

- **Humboldt County Probation Department**
  - Juvenile Hall
  - Northern California Regional Facility
  - Community Corrections Resource Center
  
- **State of California facilities located within Humboldt County**
  - Eel River Conservation Camp #31
  - High Rock Conservation Camp #32
  
- **Humboldt County Coroner**

## DISCUSSION

### Humboldt County Correctional Facility

In the Humboldt County Jail, inmates have substantial freedom of movement due to the way the facility is constructed. Most inmates are housed in large dormitory style compounds. Staff is encouraged to interact with the inmates in a non-threatening manner (sitting at tables with them, even playing games for a brief period). There seems to be adequate security when moving inmates for court appearances. Visitor rooms seemed in good condition. There is a sick bay area, though inmates have few diversions when they are there so that they do not feign illness in order to get more comfortable and more private accommodations. There did not seem to be evidence of overcrowding: this concern was raised in 2012-13 Grand Jury report because of prison realignment. If necessary, inmates can be double celled in the more secure wings of the facility. All movement of staff and inmates (to use elevators, to move from housing units to access court rooms, etc.) is controlled from the central command post where staff can maintain visual contact with all aspects of the facility via cameras. Inmates are provided a booklet that contains the facility's rules and regulations upon booking.

The 2012-13 Grand Jury recommended that the broken cameras in the women's cellblock should be repaired or replaced. The Sheriff's Department did submit a mid-year supplemental budget request to the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors but that request was denied. Funding for the necessary cameras is included in the department's 2014-15 budget request which is scheduled to be voted on in late May.

The 2012-13 Grand Jury recommended that a full-time maintenance worker be assigned to the jail. The Public Works Department is responsible for providing this kind of staff. The Publics Works Department also submitted a supplemental budget request that was also denied. Funding for this staff position is included in the Department's 2014-15 budget request.

### Animal Shelter

The County Animal Shelter is an impressive facility for lost animals. Every animal cage is cleaned daily. There are wings for isolating animals that may be ill or who need special medical attention. Each dog is exercised daily, either by staff or a team of dedicated volunteers. Cats have

a couple of large spaces for socializing. Staff seems very dedicated to the mission of this facility. Euthanasia is used only as a last resort.

### **Hoopa, McKinleyville**

As has been noted in previous Grand Jury reports the Hoopa Sheriff's station has not been used for many years. The Sheriff's Dept. is of the opinion that if they wanted to put the space back into use, either as a work area or as a holding area, it would require significant refurbishing to bring it into compliance with OSHA and jail accreditation requirements. It is felt that that could be prohibitively expensive; there are no plans to do so. Last year's Grand Jury recommended that the County continue with attempts to secure funding for a more modern station. The Sheriff and the County agreed that such a facility would be desirable, but it is a very low County priority. The facility does have jail cells but it is obvious that they have not been used in the recent past.

The Sheriff's Department officers assigned to the Hoopa area share the California Highway Patrols' facility in Willow Creek. There are no holding cells in this building. Similarly, the McKinleyville Sheriff's Station does not have any holding cells.

### **Garberville**

The Garberville Sheriff's Station facility is composed of a small office complex housing two support staff and the deputy assigned to the station, with space for deputies working the area to do paperwork. In addition, the facility contained four cells. Each cell contained two bunks and a toilet. We did not observe any shower facilities. We were told that the cells were very seldom used and only for short periods of time, e.g., while reports concerning arrested persons were prepared. From both the information we were given and the appearance of the cells we believe that these cells would not be used for any longer period of time than an arrestee might commonly be held in a patrol vehicle. We were also informed that the most common current use of the cells is to hold dogs that are awaiting transport to the animal shelter.

### **Evidence Room**

The person conducting our tour of the County's evidence room and all employees of this unit are not sworn deputies. We were shown a group of lockers, all with individual locks. When the sworn deputies bring in evidence it is placed in these lockers and locked. At the next regular shift the person in charge of tagging, storing and retrieving the evidence opens each of the lockers and stores that evidence in the evidence room. The evidence room is located in the old jail which no longer houses inmates. Each cell has had shelves installed to hold items of evidence. There is one person who is responsible for the storing and retrieving of evidence.

### **Boatyard**

When we visited the boat yard, we were unable to enter the evidence storage section so we cannot comment on last year's Grand Jury recommendation that a safe, controlled, and organized method of storing evidence be developed. We did observe the Sheriff's Department search and rescue vehicles and boats, as well as confiscated vehicles awaiting drug case forfeiture

determinations that are stored in this location. Volunteer rescue teams also store equipment there.

### **Sheriff's Work Alternative Program (Swap)**

Committee members visited two permanent sites operated by the Humboldt County Sheriff's Work Alternative Program. The first of these was the "wood lot". The sheriff accepts downed trees from many sources, which is delivered to the wood lot. Participants cut, split and stack wood into measured cord containers and load the wood into recipients' vehicles. The cords of wood are sold at lower than market prices to eligible seniors. Recipients, who are means tested, buy the wood on an income determined sliding scale. Participants are subjected to an employment environment: they are expected to come to work on time and to work as they are instructed by correctional officers. Those with mechanical abilities also learn some maintenance skills. The wood lot is most active on weekends. One of the avowed purposes of the program is to allow participants to retain, or obtain, employment. In the past individuals could not participate unless they were able to pay a daily fee. Funding for the AB 109 realignment plan has allowed the sheriff to cease charging for participation. The wood lot is located near St Joseph's Hospital.

We also visited the "hog farm", a small agricultural project near Fortuna where pigs are bred and raised. Pigs are sold either to 4H participants or others who want to raise them or are butchered and sold as meat or are used in the County Jail. Project participants perform the basic maintenance at the facility. There is also a smaller wood cutting operation and a field for truck farming. Produce grown there is used at the jail, as is some meat. A rancher runs a small herd of cattle on county owned land. The day of our visit the sheriff had custody of a couple of horses that had been rescued and was trying to find homes for them. There does not appear to be any custodial aspect to the program. Participants are free to walk away, or fail to arrive, and sanctions are imposed later.

Participants who have special skills that can be used within the program are encouraged to make those skills available. At the hog farm, a barn was built by a skilled contractor/builder who was participating in the program. Generally the program engages in barter and other negotiations to keep costs down. SWAP participants work in a variety of community service programs in addition to wood cutting and agriculture.

It was apparent that the correctional officers we met were motivated to make the program successful; indeed they expressed pride in it. Last year's Grand Jury recommended that the SWAP effort should be expanded to include more non-violent convicts. We were told that the number of people who could potentially participate in the program was substantially larger than the number who actually did participate, that is, the program could expand to serve more sentenced persons at little or no cost. It was suggested that one of the reasons for a relatively low participation rate was that the program did not offer credits that are granted to prisoners. If a person is sentenced to 60 days in jail and elects to spend that time in custody he or she will serve an actual total of 30 days. A person sentenced to 60 days who opts for the work alternative program must work for 60 days. Someone with a regular job who chooses to participate 2 days a week will be tied to the program for 30 weeks; a person who chooses instead to do jail time will be released in 30 days. The Sheriff's Department feels there are fairness issues at play. The

person opting for jail time will be locked up for 30 days; a person opting for the work program will spend only 8 hours each day working and goes home each evening. Staff suggested that if participation in SWAP could be tied to an educational component it might be easier to allow participants to obtain credits.

### **Fortuna, Ferndale, Rio Dell, and Arcata**

The Fortuna, Ferndale, and Rio Dell Police Department facilities do not contain holding cells. The Eureka Police Department's holding cells have been converted to evidence rooms, and there are no plans to use them as incarceration cells in the future. The Arcata Police Department facility has one holding cell. It is used only once or twice a month when staffing does not safely allow transport to the County Jail. The cell is cleaned regularly.

### **Juvenile Hall**

Juvenile Hall is a very old facility. The layout of halls with cells is awkward and creates a challenge for staff to maintain visible access of cells and inmates and thus security. It seems clean and well maintained. The cells are grim. There are large open spaces for recreation and activities, and a dedicated space for schooling. Wards have access to outdoor recreational facilities (shared with the Regional facility, though the two populations do not mix). There are special challenges related to the mix of youths who are held here. Some are incarcerated for only a few days, some for months or longer. The walls are covered with notices about programs and resources; wards earn points for good behavior, etc. Staff seemed very friendly and relaxed and relate to their charges well.

The Probation Department finally received approval to build a new facility on April 11, 2014 from the State Public Works Board. Probation has been working with architects since September 2013 on space needed and design concepts; that process will continue until the project is put out to bid to contractors in late spring or early summer. The Department hopes to occupy the new Juvenile Hall by September 2016 if everything goes as planned. The grant funding from Senate Bill 81 enacted in 2007 is in the amount of \$12,930,869. The County is contributing \$2.2 million from Certificates of Participation and another \$900,000 from the Criminal Justice Construction Fund, which comes from court fees and fines and can be used for projects such as this.

### **New Horizons Regional Facility**

This is a relatively new facility that houses the New Horizons program for youths who have a serious criminal history and/or who have mental health issues. Wards stay here for about 6 months on average. There are rooms for counseling, visiting, recreation, and schooling. There is a courtroom in the same building where the legal proceedings for these youths are held. The facility is light and airy with an appealing mural painted by the inmates on one of the walls in the main hall. Cells are less dismal than those in Juvenile Hall. As noted above, wards have access to outdoor recreational areas. Again, staff seemed friendly and related to their charges well. Other counties send youthful offenders to this program. These counties pay Humboldt for using this facility.

### **County Corrections Resource Center**

The County Corrections Resource Center is a new office just two blocks from the County Courthouse in downtown Eureka. This is a location where adult offenders under the supervision of the County Probation Department can access mental health, vocational, and other services. We were told that initially some neighbors of the new facility were wary about the clientele that this center serves. However, there have been no reports of any kinds of difficulties since it has opened. Staff likes the close location to the County Courthouse and Correctional Facility. This facility, run jointly by the Humboldt Probation Department and the Department of Health and Human Services, will likely be central to the hoped for success of Prison Realignment.

### **High Rock and Eel River Conservation Camps**

Eel River Camp is a few miles northwest of Garberville/Redway and High Rock is about 25 miles further north off of Highway 101. These camps are operated by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR).

The camps provide inmate firefighters to CalFire, the state firefighting agency. Inmates involved in firefighting are organized into crews of approximately 8-10 with each crew under the command of a CalFire Captain. CalFire trains the inmates to fight fires and also takes charge of them during non-fire "grade" work, maintaining trails, cleaning roadways, etc. CDCR does not accompany these crews but maintains close contact. Inmates also supply much of the labor for maintaining the camps: food prep and service; much of the maintenance of buildings, grounds and vehicles; limited access clerical work; laundry. We were told by staff that inmates consider the camps a better place to do time than in a conventional prison and as a result there is far less aberrant conduct than in the prisons proper. The camps are not fenced but escape is infrequent and very seldom successful. We were also told that recidivism is markedly less than in CDCR proper, although we were given no statistics. Inmates are trained for firefighting and in other forest maintenance skills. Before being sent to the camp system inmates are given a two week preliminary training program at the camps' administrative center near Susanville, California Corrections Center (CCC). Inmates sometimes, but rarely, attain public firefighting jobs after release but there are numerous forestry related private enterprises that employ ex-inmates who have successfully completed their camp sentences. Inmates doing "grade" work, in a firefighting capacity or elsewhere, are encouraged and expected to maintain good physical condition. Both camps have exercise facilities. The camps maintain visiting areas, including conjugal facilities. Visiting occurs on weekends. Because of the distance from urban areas visits are less than commonplace. Both camps appear well-maintained. We did not interview inmates. All of the northern camps are administered from CCC. Both camps have facilities to provision fire crews in the field.

Eel River has a normal complement of about 110 inmates. It is also the site of a substantial warehousing operation that supplies necessary commodities (primarily food, but also bedding, clothing, etc.) to camps in the northern part of the state. This camp has also acquired a large surplus greenhouse which, in season, supplies fresh produce. There is a library of donated books and the camps trade books periodically. There are group areas primarily for television viewing. Inmates are housed in dormitories. We saw no evidence of severe crowding. This camp is

physically larger than High Rock and can serve as a staging area for non-resident crews in the event of a fire emergency. It has a heliport. There is a hobby area and inmates also work in a cabinet shop.

High Rock has a normal complement of about 100. A description of its facilities would mirror that above. The officers at both camps sought to give us the impression that these institutions are safe, well run and afford significant advantages to inmates who are able, and choose, to participate. While we visited on a weekday and there were few inmates present, the atmosphere seemed significantly more relaxed than is typically observed in mainline prisons.

The last Jails Committee report criticized the medical provisions available to inmates, stating that inmates who were ill or injured were kept without treatment for as long as several days awaiting transport back to Susanville on CDCR buses that serve all the northern camps on a regular basis. When we first contacted High Rock, our contact relayed an anecdote that High Rock had just sent an injured inmate to a local physician. We suspected that this might be a response to that report. The report appears to have created consternation significant enough to cause CDCR to send a high ranking official of the northern camps to accompany us. CDCR is currently operating under a number of federal court orders regarding, among other concerns, its provision of medical care to inmates and is unsurprisingly sensitive to such criticism. The officials we met with at both camps told us that they felt they failed to adequately explain inmate medical care to the last Grand Jury visitors. They were careful to not openly criticize that report but emphasized that they left an inaccurate impression. This was reinforced by the northern official, who we suspect was there for that purpose.

They told us that if an inmate is seriously ill or injured, (perhaps on a level which would require an emergency room visit), that inmate is transported to the nearest hospital, either Garberville for Eel River or Fortuna for High Rock. Depending on the level of the injury that transport may be done by ambulance. We did not discuss what would happen to an inmate admitted to the hospital but presumably that person would be transported to CCC as soon as is practicable. In less serious situations the inmate would either be in camp at the time of the illness or injury or would be transported back to camp. The inmate's symptomatology would be described to a nurse or other medical provider at CCC whose advice could range from "take two aspirin and call me in the morning" to "get him to a hospital now". If the situation called for more than minor medication available at the camp but not hospitalization the inmate would be transported back to CCC on the next available bus. We did not address the situation of persons who might require medical isolation, although that could presumably be handled at a local hospital. It might be important to note that camp inmates have presumably been medically screened and are in work situations that frequently result in minor injury. The anecdotes related to us ranged from a person who hit his foot with a splitting maul and who did not complain of significant pain and whose skin was not broken to another person who reacted to poison oak in the vicinity of his eyes. In any case it was clear that they wanted us to know that they do not leave seriously ill people in the camp for extended periods of time awaiting medical transport. (While many of the CalFire personnel are certified EMTs they would not provide care except for immediate injuries, such as stopping bleeding.)

It was also of interest to us that the camps are now beginning to accept "realigned" persons sentenced to substantial periods of county jail time. This is potentially relevant to those charged with implementing AB 109. There are approximately 4000 inmates in the conservation camps statewide; proportionately that might mean that 10-15 of those slots could go to Humboldt. These camps gave us the impression that they are always interested in inmates whose criminal and experiential histories might make them suitable candidates. It may be the case that the class of Humboldt County realigned inmates contains people whose crimes are non-threatening, who are in good physical health, who are experienced in woodland life and who may even have experience as volunteer firefighters. Both Eel River and High Rock are men only (CalFire personnel include women) but we were told there are camps that do accept women. The county would have to pay the not insignificant cost of maintaining its inmates at the camps.

### **Coroner's Office**

The Coroner's office is located in the old General Hospital building at Harris and H Streets in Eureka. The space dedicated to the three deputies is cramped and leaves little opportunity for private interviews and/or conversation. When staff needs to interview privately they have to use the Coroner's personal office. Obviously that moves the Coroner away from his current work, which is inefficient.

The Deputies handle parts of their investigations by telephone. Because of the crowding there is no opportunity for private conversations. Confidentiality is a critical part of the Coroner's overall mission and duty to Humboldt County residents.

The Coroner, an elected official, told us he supports the elimination of the Coroner's Office in favor of a Sheriff-Coroner. Most California counties do combine these functions in a single elected office. In the past this change has been opposed here by some individuals who are concerned about possible lack of independence in investigation of Sheriff's Department related deaths. We also noted that much of the information technology in the office is outdated and should be modernized.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The Grand Jury is generally favorably impressed with the way in which correctional matters are handled in the County. Despite continuing uncertainties about budgetary matters and the still not fully realized ramifications of the state's realignment mandates for the County, the staffs seem genuinely committed to working with offenders so that offenders may resume healthy and productive lives. They seek ways to expand programs that are evidence based and that benefit the larger community as well as the offenders themselves. We hope all who live in Humboldt will join us in wishing them the best of luck.