

Conservation Camp Is Pondered For Santa Cruz Mountain Area

By Wally Trabing

The Division of Forestry is making preparations for the establishment of a conservation camp in Santa Cruz county to help combat its growing enemy—fire. As the population of the county increases, so does the hazard of forest fires.

Les Gum, veteran chief ranger here, said that during the past five years an average of 110 forest fires have destroyed thousands upon thousands of lush trees and scenic forest each year in the county.

This January, 2250 acres were blackened in the Big Basin area. Last July 8500 acres were burned around Loma Prieta and Mt. Umunhum.

Year by year this type of fire is destroying the beauty that has long been the selling point of this area.

Gum said that on 50 per cent of the yearly fires, calls go for outside help. Most of those who go into the face of the fire and work eight to 12 hours a day "eating smoke" are specially trained fire fighters from conservation crews.

He said that the closest camp is Slack Canyon near King City. "After our call for help goes out, it takes an average of four hours for crews to reach our fire," he said.

"The main objective in fighting a forest fire, is to contain it during the first 12 hours while the perimeter is still small.

"As the fire spreads the thinner you have to spread your fighters around it.

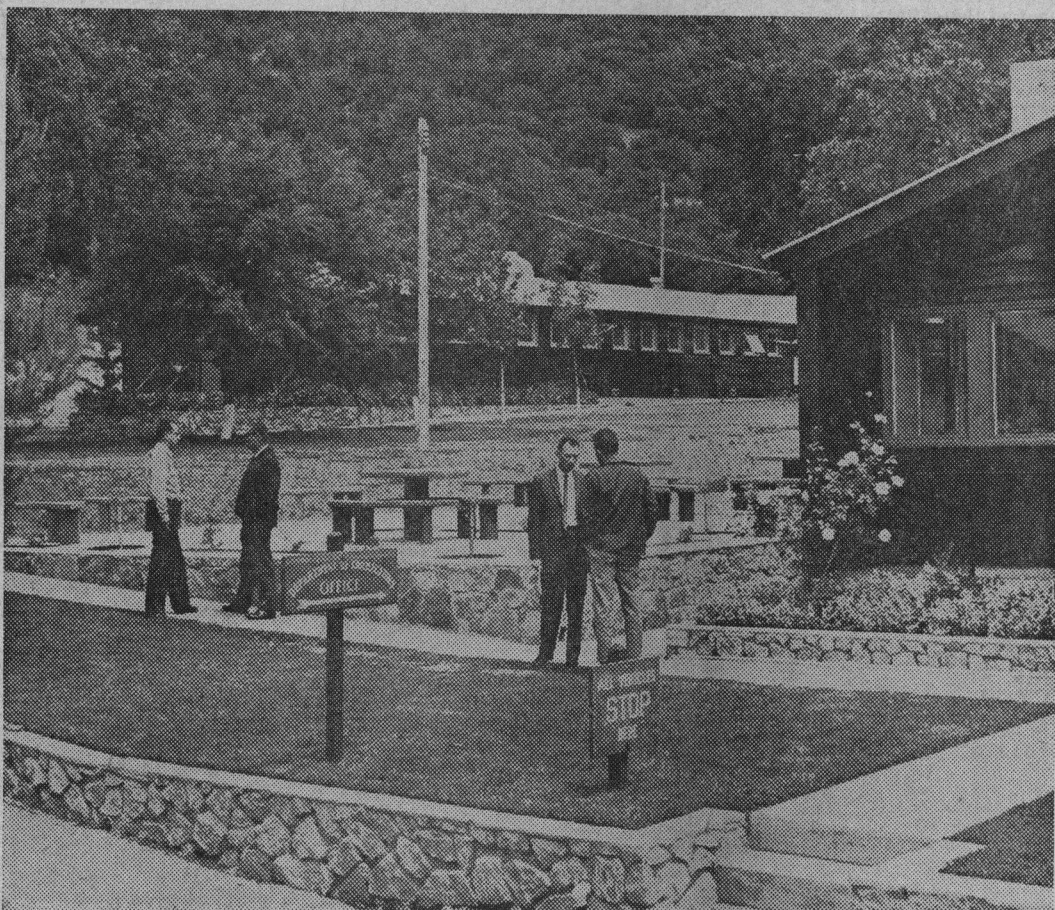
"Our plan is to establish a camp in some remote section of the Santa Cruz mountains. The camp would contain 80 men. With these men, plus CYA fighters and our own Division of Forestry crews, we could have about 130 men ready to attack a fire at a moment's notice."

But just as important, believes Gum, is the year around work the men could do building fire trails, preparing fire-fighting equipment, constructing heli-ports and developing water supplies in the forests for future fires.

What is a conservation camp? The program was started in 1915 by the State Department of correction and the Division of Forestry. There are now 32 in the state.

Clem Rice, special representative for the correction department, said, "The cream of the crop among state prisoners — those who have from six to 14 months to serve, is carefully screened and then specially trained in the art of forest fire

Fire-Fighting Prisoners' Camp



This pleasant scene is in the heart of the Iron Mountain conservation camp near Auburn where 80 specially trained fire-fighting prisoners live and

work for the Division of Forestry. The camp is kept as neat as a park. There are no fences or armed guards. The men, carefully screened, spend their

last six months to a year here before parole. If they walk away it means two more years and it's rare that one leaves camp. In the foreground are the administrators.

fighting and placed in the camps." The men live in barracks type buildings. There are no fences or guards. The department of correction feeds and houses them. During the day they are under the jurisdiction of the Division of Forestry.

"We have an average of two walk-aways a year," said Rice, "and during the history of this program we have had no violence or molestation.

"These men are ready to re-enter society and if they leave camp it means at least another two years of prison."

Gum said there were nearly 900 conservation men on the Umunhum fire.

"These men are mountain hardened. You couldn't pull civilians off the street and put them on a fire. They couldn't take the strain and wouldn't know what to do," he said.

Two weeks ago I toured the Iron Mountain conservation camp near Auburn. It is located on 65 acres of land and resembles a fire-fighting headquarters.

The men sleep in one long barracks, kept neater than any army barracks I have ever seen.

William Merle, forestry superintendent, said the camp has brought about \$90,000 a month budget to the local economy since 1951.

He brought out the camp records for 1961.

It was filled with the fires they had fought. But in between fire-fighting there were entries for reforestation work, stringing phone lines, work on hiking and riding trails, a mosquito abatement project, several rescues and fire trail building.

Another record listed the furniture built and delivered to fire stations; another, equipment made in the upholstery shop; and another, the forestry vehicles repaired.

Merle said the inmates have given 30 pints of blood during the year and donated about \$200 to a local orphanage.

How does the community take to the camp?

I talked to Placer County Sheriff Bull Scott. He said there was skepticism at first, but that changed when the men saved a residential area from burning.

"Now you couldn't take that camp away," he said.

Probably the best testimonial comes from Subdivision Promoter Frank Brown. We visited his new home which overlooks the camp.

A million-dollar plus subdivision is being built around the camp. He built his home here first to feel out the area. Now, he

said, they can't build homes (\$20,000 to \$20,000 structures) fast enough to keep up with demand.

He brought out another plan which seems to prove people are not too worried about the camp. It was a proposed Girl Scout summer camp to be located within a half-mile of the conservation camp.

Gum said that he has 20 years of work all mapped out for a proposed camp here.

His goal is to build enough fire

roads and trails throughout the Santa Cruz mountains so that fire units can drive within a half mile of any fire.

"We have hoses that reach that far and it will certainly save our forests," Gum said.

Now, some parts of the mountains take an hour to reach on foot, said Gum. He said he has looked over several properties in the mountain as possible sites. Gum is planning on about 35 acres.

Fatal Accident; Rockslide Close 2 Main Highways

Sacramento (AP). — Both U. S. Highways 40 and 50 were partially closed at their highest points in the Sierra Thursday — U.S. 50 by a rockslide, and U.S. 40 by a fatal accident.

Highway 50 was opened to one-way traffic Thursday afternoon after being closed nearly 14 hours by a landslide near Echo Summit.

And Highway 40 was partially blocked when a produce-laden truck trailer lost its brakes near Donner Grade and overturned, killing Canadian co-driver, Dward Schubert of Red Deer, Alberta, and seriously injuring driver Konrad E. Strombeg, also of Red Deer.

The overturned truck blocked the eastbound lane for nearly eight hours.

Out-Of-State Firm Low Bidder For Aptos Post Office

An out-of-state construction company submitted the low bid to build the new Aptos post office, it was reported here Friday.

An announcement from the office of Postmaster General J. Edward Day, said the Phillips Construction company from Post Falls, Ida., received the contract to build and lease the new building to be located behind the Aptos club.

Aptos Postmaster Charles Spencer said he had no idea why a company so far away would bid on such a small building.

However, he said he understood that 28 persons took out bid papers on the job, but only four were returned.

"I heard that all four of them were out-of-state firms," he said. Construction should start in the near future.

Prisoners Give Blood For Cuban Refugee Infant

Miami, Fla. (AP). — Sixteen-month-old Consuelo Caballol, a Cuban refugee, suffers from malignant reticuloendotheliosis, a deadly blood disease.

But her parents, Dr. and Mrs. Felix Caballol, have much to be thankful for.

Hundreds of prisoners at Raiford state prison in north Florida Thursday rolled up their sleeves to donate blood for the stricken child. During the day 336 offers were qualified and an equal number of pints of blood taken.

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