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## Agency News

# TDCJ depopulates Dawson and Mineral Wells facilities

*Legislative initiatives impact offender population growth*

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) recently removed the offender population from two privately-operated facilities, and changed the mission of several other facilities in order to house displaced female offenders, a logistical challenge met through a large-scale, coordinated effort by agency staff.

With the contracts for Dawson State Jail in Dallas and the Mineral Wells Pre-Parole Transfer Facility expiring on August 31, three TDCJ correctional facilities have been closed since the implementation of Legislative reforms aimed at decreasing the number of nonviolent offenders incarcerated in TDCJ. In 2012, for the first time in history, the state of Texas closed a correctional facility, the Central Unit in Ft. Bend County near Houston. Central's age and encroaching residential and commercial development made it the initial candidate for closure. Offenders housed at Central, along with much of the unit staff, were transferred to other TDCJ facilities.

As with all offender transfers, security, public safety, staff and offender safety, and contin-



ued delivery of essential daily services were among the issues which had to be resolved before the movement of offenders from Dawson and Mineral Wells could begin.

Dawson State Jail was a co-gender facility located in downtown Dallas housing around 2,200 offenders, 1,400 of those being female. The Mineral Wells Pre-Parole Transfer Facility, located about 80 miles west of Dallas, could house 2,100 male offenders. As Dawson housed both male and female offenders, gender issues had to be anticipated and dealt with, including such mundane but critical items such as alteration of bathroom facilities. To move these offenders to other

CID units, the Marlin Transfer Facility, near Waco, and the San Saba unit were first converted from male to female populations.

In preparation for the depopulation, State Classification Committee (SCC) members screened more than 11,000 offenders for trusty consideration and Pre-Release assignments and choreographed the overall depopulation plan while monitoring to avoid potential capacity problems. Agency staff documented SCC decisions, coordinated the trusty project, maintained daily statistics and keyed in more than 10,000 transfers to allow reassignment of offenders.

The agency's Manufacturing and Logistics staff were heavily involved in the move. Staff at the Luther Stainless Steel factory built and refurbished toilet and sink fixtures, and staff at the Coffield Metal Fabrication shop manufactured toilet partitions, walls, panels and bunk ladders. Manufacturing and Logistics staff also transported the materials and goods to Marlin and San Saba.

Facilities Division staff, to include Region II, V and VI maintenance staff, as well as San

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Saba and Marlin maintenance employees, were instrumental in the alteration of offender housing areas to accommodate female offenders.

Offender Transportation of course played a large role in both the depopulation of Dawson and Mineral Wells and the conversion of the Marlin and San Saba units to female housing. Warden Kyle Coston and his staff were responsible for relocating more than 10,000 offenders during the transition.

Region VI Director Eric Guerrero, along with Wardens Linda Gonzales and Debbie Erwin, acknowledged unit staff for their hard work during the conversions of both the Marlin Unit and San Saba Unit, noting that it required a strong, unified effort to successfully transition these units from male to female. Gatesville area facilitator staff helped with officer and staff gender-specific training at Marlin and San Saba.

Staff from numerous other divisions and departments, to include Human Resources, Classification and Records, the Safe Prisons Program, the Security Threat Group Management Office, Business and Finance, Risk Management, and Private Facility Contract Monitoring and Oversight also played important roles in the successful depopulation.

While transferring offenders and closing a prison may seem a simple and straightforward process, the logistical challenges presented by this action were daunting. CID's Deputy Director for Support Operations Michael Upshaw praised the effort, saying, "The success of this project shows how staffs from different TDCJ divisions come together as a unified team to accomplish a common goal. In this case, the goal was to depopulate two facilities and convert two additional facilities from male to female. This was no easy task, but because of the teamwork and professionalism of our employees, it was completed in a flawless manner. It is truly an honor and privilege to be a part of such a loyal, professional, dedicated and hard working team." ●