

## **New lockdown caters to state parole violators**

The Montana Standard, 12/13/05

A dozen state prison inmates filed into a revocation and sanction center at Warm Springs Monday, Dec. 12, where they'll get one last chance to turn their lives around.

Another dozen are expected to be bused from Deer Lodge on Tuesday, with more to follow.

The Sanction, Treatment, Assessment, Revocation and Transition Center opened this week in an unused building on the Montana State Hospital campus at Warm Springs.

The 80-bed facility, operated through a contract with Butte-based Community Counseling and Correctional Service, has a two-fold purpose for parole violators, according to Bob Anez, spokesman for the Department of Corrections.

Some will spend up to 120 days at the center to see if they are suitable candidates for community placement, Anez said. Others will spend 30 or 60 days there, as a punishment for their violations.

All will go through a screening process before entering the newly organized, minimum-security facility, and felony violators will not be accepted.

The goal is to help probation violators stay out of prison and keep them in communities as workers and taxpayers, Anez added.

It's also geared to save money and reduce prison overcrowding.

Warden Mike Mahoney says 48 percent of the population at Montana State Prison is made up of inmates whose sentences have been revoked.

Many of those will now qualify for short-term housing at the revocation center.

Although the costs per day are about the same — \$66 at the new facility and \$68 at the state prison — the big savings will come about in the long run, according to Department of Corrections Director Bill Slaughter.

That's because a typical stay at the revocation center will last from 30 to 60 days, costing around \$2,000. Revocations that land offenders back in the prison are usually 24 months, or \$50,000.

"It's a huge savings for the people of Montana," Slaughter said of the alternative that was endorsed by the 2005 Legislature .

He's hoping that half of the inmates will be deemed ready for a community placement after their "wake up call" in the austere surroundings at the center.

There, compact, no-frills cells contain only a metal bunk and mattress, plus a steel toilet that doubles as a sink with a small basin over the tank.

The "day room" amounts to the hallway that separates the cells, with no furniture and no comforts, save a television set mounted at the far end.

The inmates won't be leaving their minimum security surroundings for work details or other day trips, Slaughter said.

"They're locked in 24-7," he said. Center security staff will be backed up by a SWAT Team from the prison, if necessary.

During their stay, inmates must participate in relapse programs, drug and alcohol counseling and anger management classes, plus other intense efforts aimed at changing criminal thinking, attitudes and motivations, Slaughter said.

He estimates about half of the inmates placed there will be "salvaged," and returned to society rather than the prison system.

The building, previously used to house prisoners from Butte-Silver Bow while a new jail was built there, was renovated by CCCS.

Around 34 new jobs were created in the effort that's set up on a three-year test basis.

"This is a pilot project," Slaughter said. "This has never been done in Montana, so we have a lot to learn."