



# Memorandum

**TO:** NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AND  
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

**FROM:** Jon Cicirelli

**SUBJECT:** Family Camp Status Report

**DATE:** February 18, 2025

Approved

Date

3/5/2025

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Accept the status report on Family Camp in advance of the 2025 season.

## **BACKGROUND**

Family Camp at Yosemite (Family Camp) in Groveland, California is a 51.2-acre site near Yosemite National Park, situated on federal land leased from the United States Forest Service (USFS). It has been managed by the City of San José since 1968. Family Camp provides a quality, family-oriented camping experience, at a reasonable rate for family memories to be made, and to expose campers to the forest environment located within the Stanislaus National Forest. This site protects a part of California's natural and cultural history and provides job training and outdoor recreation employment opportunities for the residents of San José. Family Camp has 65 wood-framed canvas-covered platform tents scattered among the pines and oak trees along the Middle Fork of the Tuolumne River. Campers enjoy three staff-prepared meals per day and daily nature education, mindfulness, and recreation programming.

Camp amenities include an amphitheater, archery range, campfire ring, gift shop, laundry facilities, nature kiosk, patio and deck area, a large turf playfield, restrooms, showers, service buildings, a tot play area, and a designated swimming zone in the Tuolumne River. Family Camp also has critical support infrastructure, including potable water wells and a sewage evaporation pond facility. These amenities are complemented by the facility's proximity to natural recreation areas such as Rainbow Pool and other nearby hiking trails, making Family Camp a fun, family-friendly destination for visitors.

Municipally operated family camps like San José's are instrumental in exposing residents to the health benefits and stewardship of natural and cultural places, while experiencing new activities and making connections to each other in California's wilderness areas. Other cities have similar programs including San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland, Stockton, and Sacramento. With an operating history that spans over 50 years, Family Camp has an impressive following of lifelong campers who are dedicated in their support of the camp and the recreation opportunities provided. A trip to Family Camp is often the very first wilderness experience many San José families have, and for some youth, Family Camp may be their first experience outside of San José. Family Camp typically opens operations in late April and closes for the winter in October.

Family Camp occupancy can range from 75 to a maximum of 300 campers per night. The summer program operates seven days per week from mid-June through mid-August. Private groups may reserve Family Camp during the pre-and post-season. Family Camp hosts various community organizations such as faith-based groups, school groups, and other non-profit organizations.

In 2017, the City of San José entered into a 20-year use permit/land lease agreement with the USFS. The current permit expires December 31, 2036. The approval of a 20-year lease agreement, along with the approved Master Development Plan, brings a collaborative approach to managing camp with the USFS. Also in 2017, heavy rains from a storm event caused significant damage to specific areas of the San José Family Camp, including the rock retention wall within the beach, and "pool" area, and the playground. The existing play structure and a wooden "Fort" were damaged beyond repair, along with a concrete retaining wall enclosing the play area. The Department has since coordinated with FEMA and other external regulatory agencies to plan repairs.

## **ANALYSIS**

Following rigorous program planning and facility preparation, Family Camp saw notable increases in programs and results in 2024. Family Camp hired 62% more counselors, opened 33% more tents for reservation and had 15% more operating days in 2024 than in 2023, resulting in 28% more guests during the summer season.

The Department will not open Family Camp in 2025: after years of careful planning and coordinating with external regulatory agencies, the Department has identified the funding, secured the necessary federal permits, and procured contractors to update camp amenities, including renovations to the historic pool, playground, and areas damaged during past winter storms. Due to the scope of this work, especially within the river channel, Family Camp cannot open to the public during construction. The

Department is planning to re-open Family Camp in 2026 with an improved facility and guest experience, building on the momentum of the 2024 season.

### Results in Brief and Look Ahead

Family Camp opened for the 2024 season with 48 of 65 tents available for summer rental and with a lean complement of staff, hosting between 75-175 campers each operating day, implementing a full recreation schedule, and providing exceptional customer service while creating lifelong memories. In total, Family Camp provided a meaningful camping experience for 2,967 guests during the 2024 summer season and 657 guests in the off-season for group rentals. Of the 3,624 guests in 2024, 470 visited at no or low cost. Staff completed the second year of the Outdoor Equity Grant, which provided free trips to Family Camp for underserved residents in the Guadalupe Washington and Poco Way neighborhoods. Family Camp staff continued outreach efforts for the Campership (scholarship) Program and translated brochures into Spanish and Vietnamese. Family Camp continued a program piloted in the 2023 season in partnership with Project Hope to provide families a free weekend at Family Camp with the option of borrowing essential camping equipment.

The table below shows 2023 and 2024 participants in the summer and pre- and post-season rentals, including Fish Camp and private group rentals for the City's Youth Intervention Services, YMCA of Silicon Valley, four Outdoor Equity Grant adventures and Breathe in Yosemite, a San José nonprofit whose mission centers around sobriety and wellness for residents.

Season	Number of Participants	
	2023	2024
Summer Season	2,309	2,967
Pre and Post-Season/Groups:		
Fish Camp	68	112
City Youth Intervention Services	38	16
YMCA of Silicon Valley	150	168
Outdoor Equity Grant Groups	267	263
Breathe in Yosemite	43	98
Pre and Post-Season/Groups Subtotal	566	657
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,875</b>	<b>3,624</b>

The facility brought these participants back to nature through traditional community programming that is important to the development of youth and families in today's

digitally dominated society. A connection with each other and nature can have a strong impact on visitors who gain a new perspective on what outdoor fun can be.

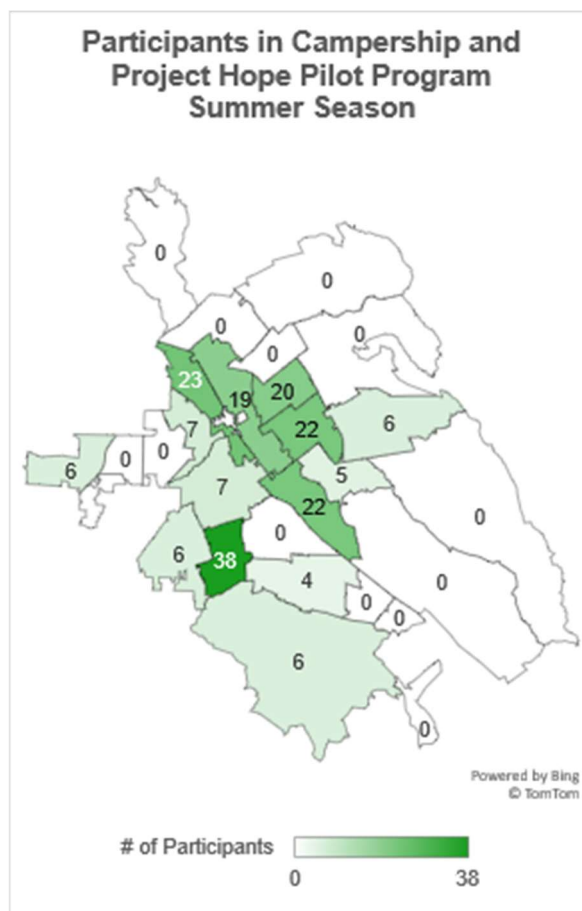
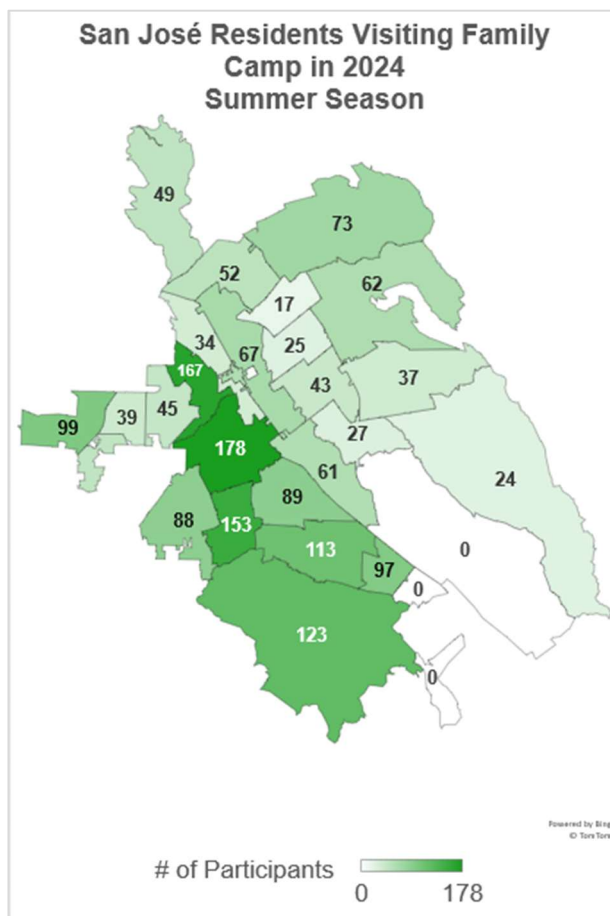
The scope of repair work in 2025 will include demolition, mobilization, grading and drainage, paving, renovation of the playground, installation of a prefabricated shade structure and decking, concrete retaining walls, site furnishings, and re-construction of the revetment rock stone wall. In addition, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) upgrades are required as part of this project. New ADA-accessible pathways, upgrades to the existing parking lot, and accessibility upgrades leading to the fort, beach areas, and existing pavement will be included as part of the scope of work. Due to the scope of this work, especially within the river channel, construction can only begin in late spring, take place during the summer, and must be completed in the fall. This scope prohibits public use of the facility during construction.

While Family Camp will not be open in 2025, staff intends to engage the community through regular social media posts showcasing the construction and teasers related to new recreation program offerings, volunteer opportunities, and other ways to support Family Camp.

Looking ahead to 2026, the Department is preparing a marketing and outreach campaign to bring back past campers and reach new audiences to visit a renovated and more accessible, and inclusive facility. To continue to grow in service to the community, Family Camp must provide a stable working environment for staff members, continue updating facility amenities (Attachment C has facility improvements since 2020) and reach members of the community who have not traditionally camped at Family Camp or other overnight camps. These goals can be achieved through implementing the Department's Family Camp work plan which focuses on capital repairs, increased marketing, enhanced recruitment efforts, Outdoor Equity Grant program and partnerships.

## **Occupancy and Financial Performance**

Attachment A shows Family Camp's occupancy rates from 2013 through 2024. Attachment B shows Family Camp financial results from 2013-2014 through December 2024. Family Camp hosted over 2,967 guests during the 2024 regular summer season, of which 67% were San José residents. While the percentage of San José residents declined from 75% in 2023, the actual number of residents who visited Family Camp throughout the entire season increased by several hundred. The heat maps below show where San José residents visiting Family Camp in the 2024 summer season came from by ZIP Code, overall, and specifically guests who received a campership or visited as part of the pilot program with Project Hope.



During the shoulder season, Family Camp hosted 657 additional guests, of which 98% were residents, including 263 guests from the Guadalupe Washington and Poco Way neighborhoods through the Outdoor Equity Grant program.

The 2024 season was not without its challenges. Family Camp opened with lowered reservation capacity as limited funding to repair tent structures damaged by winter storms and other deferred maintenance meant that 17 tents were unavailable. Staff is exploring strategies to make more tents available for rental through diversified fundraising and volunteer labor including partnerships with Friends of Family Camp and San José Parks Foundation, as well as volunteer workdays.

## Staffing

Staffing is a significant constraint for Family Camp. The Department's goal each summer is to hire or bring back a total of 40 Camp Counselors who are paid a daily

stipend. Most Camp staff are from San José. Family Camp provides training and job readiness opportunities for employee recruitment and promotion within the City of San José. Family Camp has fallen short of the 40 seasonal staff goal since 2016 and struggled to recruit and onboard enough stipend Camp Counselors to support camp services in 2022 and 2023. In 2024, after implementing new approaches, Family Camp saw a 62% increase in the number of counselors. The table below shows summer staffing since 2014.

<b>Year</b>	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020*	2021*	2022	2023	2024
<b>Stipend Staff Count</b>	46	43	40	32	28	34	n/a	n/a	15	21	34

\* Family Camp was closed due to complications from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The staffing level in 2024 was adequate for the number of guests on site during the season but would need to increase if more tents are made available for the 2026 season.

To boost staffing in the future, the Department plans to increase recruitment efforts in the areas surrounding Family Camp, enhance visibility in San José, and focus on retention. At the conclusion of the 2024 season, the Department partnered with the Human Resources Department to convert 17 stipend staff to part-time hourly roles to bolster staff retention by offering them training opportunities, providing staff a chance to continue to work at San José locations, and supporting off-season efforts for Family Camp. For the 2026 season, the Department will increase the number of counselors at higher levels of responsibility and pay and increase the number of days dedicated to training staff specifically for the summer season. An early start to seasonal recruitment efforts and collaboration with universities and the California Conservation Corps are expected to bolster staffing at Family Camp in 2026. Family Camp is also currently developing internships with the USFS and the City's Resilience Corps program, which may begin in 2025 during the closure.

## **Marketing and Outreach**

Looking ahead, Family Camp has a high potential for growth as many residents have not yet visited or heard about the program, emphasizing the need for improved marketing and promotion. The Department seeks to increase Family Camp's reach to new and experienced campers by launching an aggressive marketing and outreach program that utilizes both traditional and progressive campaigns. Marketing for midweek stays in 2026 and beyond will be a focus to increase the occupancy rate as most weekends in 2024 saw nearly full capacity utilization.

Staff will participate in tabling opportunities at San José public events to share about the Family Camp experience and continue cross-promotion with other Department programs and facilities. By using digital and physical marketing collateral, staff will make communication about the program simple and easy.

Family Camp will increase its social media presence through its various social media platforms, including the Department's Facebook, Twitter, NextDoor, and Instagram accounts. In addition, the Department will publish camp information through its internet site and the volunteer partner website, Friends of Family Camp. Staff also intends to create video blogs to be shared through YouTube to showcase Family Camp and its happy campers in action.

In collaboration with San José based non-profits and City of San José programs such as Project Hope and Youth Intervention Services, staff will continue to connect and outreach to residents who may not be aware of or have experienced camping opportunities in the Sierras and inform residents about available Campership (scholarship) opportunities for visiting Family Camp.

The Family Camp team will also share information about the Family Camp experience and key dates with all City Council offices so the offices can spread the word about opportunities for San José residents to enjoy an inclusive camping experience in the Sierras.

### **Access and Equity**

Family Camp has collaborated with the Department's Project Hope and Youth Intervention Services to create opportunities for San José families and underserved vulnerable youth to experience camping in the Sierras through the State of California Outdoor Equity Grant. This partnership reflects the Department's deep commitment to enriching the lives of San José families and providing critical support to underserved and vulnerable youth by connecting them with the natural wonders of the Sierra. Through this initiative, the Department is not only enhancing community engagement and outdoor access but also fostering a profound and lasting bond between participants and the natural world.

In May 2022, the State of California awarded the Department two Outdoor Equity Grants of \$465,555, each, establishing community hubs in San José's Guadalupe Washington and Poco Way neighborhoods. The program names are The Family Camp Experience – Guadalupe Washington and The Family Camp Experience – Poco Way, respectively. The awarded grants are intended to provide approximately 54 solution learning events serving 2,600 residents, 18 trips to natural areas for approximately

1,500 residents including 12 trips for families to Family Camp during three years of programming, offering participants a unique blend of adventure and education against the serene backdrop of the Sierras.

Staff continued Outdoor Equity Grant programming in 2024, offering residents in the designated neighborhoods a chance to immerse themselves in nature. The program's second year included:

- 263 residents from the Poco Way and Guadalupe Washington neighborhoods participating in four trips to Family Camp that included informational session, camping supplies, transportation, meals, recreational activities, a two-night stay and a visit to Yosemite National Park.
- 190 residents participating in 12 nature activities in San José where they learned about careers in the outdoors, topics such as camping basics, local area park information and their own environmental impact.
- 102 residents participating in multiple day trips to Alum Rock Park and Natural Bridges State Beach, with transportation and educational supplies provided, where they observed overwintering monarch butterflies, and explored the beach and tidepools.

The third and final planned year of Outdoor Equity Grant programming will be provided in 2025 and 2026. When programs are completed, staff will evaluate whether any unspent grant resources might be able to support an extension beyond 2026. Staff will also evaluate what it might cost and what funding sources might be available to continue Family Camp adventures beyond the duration of the California Outdoor Equity Grant.

In addition to Outdoor Equity Grants, Family Camp offers a Campership Program with 50% off stays for up to four nights to San José families who qualify for assistance programs. In 2024, 82 residents participated in the Campership Program, an increase of 29 from the 53 Campership participants in 2023. Outreach efforts for this program included Facebook and web posts, email to past campers, and training staff to share this information when booking reservations.

To augment the Campership Program, Family Camp partnered with Project Hope to offer 109 residents from communities that Project Hope works with and who did not participate in the Outdoor Equity Grant the opportunity to stay at camp during the regular season. Project Hope's deep community ties have been crucial in enhancing program reception and creating a more inclusive atmosphere for participants. This



collaboration also extended to providing residents with the opportunity to experience camping, merging resources for a comprehensive support system.

The Department's commitment to continuous improvement is evident in feedback collection. Surveys were collected from Fish Camp, Outdoor Equity Grant participants, and regular season guests by both digital and hard copy means with 89% of guests rating their camp experience as "Good" or "Very Good." Project Hope supported in gathering anecdotal feedback at monthly community meetings, which allowed staff to fine-tune programs to better meet community needs. This feedback has been instrumental in shaping programming, ensuring initiatives are as responsive and accommodating as possible.

Through these concerted initiatives, Family Camp is doing more than just providing outdoor experiences; it is cultivating a community dedicated to stewardship of the natural environment. With a commitment to equity and access that acknowledges and addresses the unique needs and barriers faced by various communities, staff is aiming to provide tailored resources and support that facilitate an improved experience for all participants.

Attachment D describes these and other collaborative partnerships that support Family Camp.

## **COORDINATION**

This memorandum has been coordinated with the City Manager's Budget Office and the City Attorney's Office.

/s/  
Jon Cicirelli  
Director of Parks, Recreation and  
Neighborhood Services

For questions, please contact Shannon Heimer, Division Manager, at [shannon.heimer@sanjoseca.gov](mailto:shannon.heimer@sanjoseca.gov).

## **ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. Family Camp at Yosemite Occupancy from 2013 to 2024

- B. Family Camp at Yosemite Financial Results from 2013-2014 through December 2024
- C. Family Camp at Yosemite Facility Improvements Since 2020
- D. Family Camp at Yosemite Collaborative Partnerships

**Attachment A**  
**Family Camp at Yosemite Occupancy from 2013 to 2024**

Season	Occupancy Rate (2013-2019)*	Occupancy Rate (2022-present)*	Campers Summer Season
<b>2013</b>	39%	-	1,874
<b>2014</b>	45%	-	1,705
<b>2015</b>	47%	-	1,794
<b>2016</b>	59%	-	2,853
<b>2017</b>	62%	-	3,012
<b>2018</b>	54%	-	2,712
<b>2019</b>	50%	-	2,490
<b>2020</b>	There were no reservations during the 2020 and 2021 seasons due to complications related to the COVID-19 pandemic		
<b>2021</b>			
<b>2022</b>	-	68%	1,921
<b>2023</b>	-	71%	2,309
<b>2024</b>		63%	2,967

\* The Occupancy Rate for 2013-2019 was calculated by dividing reserved tent nights by total tent possible nights for the summer season. The Occupancy Rate for and since 2022 was calculated by dividing reserved tent nights by the available tent nights for the summer season, as shown in greater detail in the table below.

Season	Total Possible Tents	Available Tents*	% of Tents Available	Operating Nights**	Available Tent Nights	Reserved Tent Nights	Occupancy Rate***
2022	65	29	45%	48	1,392	945	68%
2023	65	36	55%	48	1,724	1,221	71%
2024^	65	48	74%	54	2,520	1,582	63%

\* Many tents have not been available for reservation due to winter damage that staff could not repair in time for the season, not enough canvas covers or low staffing.

\*\* Operating nights exclude closures that staff could not anticipate or control, such as closures due to wildfire smoke and poor air quality or Public Safety Power Shutoffs.

\*\*\* Occupancy Rate calculated by dividing reserved tent nights by available tent nights.

^ In 2024, 8 of the 48 available tents were open for 45 days.

**Attachment B**  
**Family Camp at Yosemite Financial Results from 2013-2014 through December 2024**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Revenue</b>	<b>Expenditures &amp; Encumbrance</b>	<b>Direct Cost Recovery</b>
2013-2014	\$335,738	\$520,775	64%
2014-2015	\$404,442	\$728,780	56%
2015-2016	\$444,429	\$686,750	65%
2016-2017	\$556,624	\$718,773	77%
2017-2018	\$552,247	\$928,844	59%
2018-2019	\$428,493	\$877,808	49%
2019-2020	\$416,286	\$799,715	52%
2020-2021*	(\$3,596)	\$515,521	0%
2021-2022*	\$60,380	\$693,634	9%
2022-2023**	\$124,125	\$1,057,632	12%
2023-2024	\$388,565	\$1,130,189	34%
2024-2025 (Through Dec. 2024)	\$414,491	\$728,150	57%

\* Family Camp was closed in 2020-2021 due to complications from the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021-2022, Family Camp was open for only limited spring rentals and June reservations.

\*\* Revenues were lower in 2022-2023 than prior years with similar occupancy in part due to the five-day closure in late July because of poor air quality during wildfire season resulting in 27 canceled reservations totaling 87 nights in lost reservations; reduced camp store operations; and minimal pre/post season rentals. Expenses increased due to time-earned payouts for employees who no longer work for the City, overall cost increases due to inflation including food costs, food costs during kitchen renovation, and payment of past due bills from prior years.

## **Attachment C**

### **Family Camp at Yosemite Facility Improvements Since 2020**

During and since the suspension of Family Camp due to complications from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department has continued to support the maintenance and development of new amenities throughout the facility. Examples of continued efforts to bring needed improvements to camp include the repair of the interior service road, the installation of a heating and cooling system to the camp office and Tuolumne Room, and the installation of a new campfire ring. The below list includes projects completed by City staff and contractors.

- **Fire Ring and Campfire Seating** – The deteriorating fire ring was replaced with a larger concrete sleeve in a river rock exterior design. The outdated wood bench seating around the fire ring was partially replaced with updated contemporary seating for families. This year additional replacement seating will be added.
- **Atmospheric River Storm Damage** – Staff cleared and processed downed trees from the meadow, removed log jams from the river, and filled ruts left by water runoff from January 2023 storms.
- **Tent Repairs** – Annually, the Department assesses and repairs, as necessary, the 65 tent frames at Family Camp. In 2023, the repairs were much more extensive due to the 2023 winter storms.
- **Water System Improvements** – Working with a contractor, the Department made significant improvements to both the potable and non-potable water system supporting Family Camp.
- **2017 Flood Projects** – Coordination continues with Public Works to address needed remediation from the 2017 floods including rebuilding the playground, retaining walls, and ADA access to the river.
- **Emergency Kitchen Remediations** – Repairs include drop ceiling repair, electrical space enclosure, replacement of screened opening with new windows, storage space enclosures, and loft storage modifications.
- **Assorted other repairs and projects:**
  - Electrical upgrades to several areas of Family Camp.
  - Installation of a weather station that allows both staff and campers to monitor weather at Family Camp year-round.

- Addition of two 10,000-gallon water tanks for the fire suppression system.
- Installation of several new metal storage containers to allow for more secure off-season storage of supplies and equipment.
- Removal of antiquated swing set near swimming area and replacement with new concrete picnic table.
- Kitchen exterior siding partial replacement due to exposure to moisture and extreme weather.
- Dining Hall deck and railing repairs due to Oak Tree failure during January 2023 Storms.
- Demolition of two tents due to winter 2023 storm damage.
- Installation of roll down doors in the serving area and dish washing area to isolate the kitchen from the dining hall to prevent intrusions.
- Installation of three new doors on the dining hall for winter security and to prevent intrusions.
- Renovations in the kitchen to the ceiling, hood fans and walls to prevent intrusions.
- Installation of four new windows in the kitchen that replaced the screen only design to help with dust and intrusions.
- Repair of the deck in front of the bathroom for the dining hall area.
- Replacement of the fire access gate near the main entrance due to damage from a public vehicle.
- Installation of two additional cargo containers for increased safe storage of equipment and supplies.
- Installation of new water pumps to allow fire suppression tanks to be filled with water.

## **Attachment D**

### **Family Camp at Yosemite Collaborative Partnerships**

Family Camp continues to focus on expanding collaborative partnerships with other City programs, local area groups, corporations, and volunteers to supplement staff, increase outreach and occupancy, and grow participation by underserved groups. These partners and their support of Family Camp are described below.

- Project Hope – Family Camp and Project Hope will continue to collaborate on the Outdoor Equity Grant and Project Hope Campership Partnership. Project Hope has provided valuable connections to the communities the grant serves, translation resources and support in marketing and signing up neighborhood families for the grant activities.
- Resilience Corps – Family Camp will continue to utilize the efforts of the Resilience Corps in and around Camp to have corps members work on environmental stewardship projects such as vegetation management, fuel reduction and, where needed, tree removal while also, in many cases, experiencing overnight camping and nature in a remote location for the first time.
- San José Conservation Corps (SJCC) – Each spring and fall, camp hosts a small group of students from the SJCC who work alongside Department staff helping to open and close the camp season.
- United States Forest Service (USFS) – The USFS utilizes Family Camp as a meeting and training space for its work force.
- California State Parks – Awarded Family Camp two Outdoor Equity Grants for The Family Camp Experience – Guadalupe Washington and The Family Camp Experience – Poco Way, and provides technical support for program implementation in compliance with grant requirements.
- Friends of Family Camp – A community-based organization that has provided volunteer assistance in the opening, closing and enhancement of Family Camp

facilities for many years and continues to support site maintenance, camp repairs and modest fundraising activities.

- Breathe In Yosemite – A non-profit organization that provides volunteer support to assist with opening and closing of camp activities.
- Family Camp Nurse Program – Volunteer nurses provided medical assistance, addressing any non-emergency medical services to campers and staff during the summer season.
- San José Parks Foundation – The San José Parks Foundation has raised and provided funding for marketing and other camp-related efforts. In 2024, through funds provided by an anonymous donor, the foundation paid for the cost of the roll-down doors in the kitchen area.
- Groveland District Rangers (part of the USFS) – Staff has established a relationship with Groveland District Rangers from the Stanislaus National Forest. The Head District Ranger has volunteered time as a speaker for various pre- and post-season rental groups. Weekly presentations from staff were a part of camp programming.
- Corporate Volunteers – Staff has previously worked with various corporate volunteer programs, exploring opportunities to work with groups locally, and on site at Family Camp.