



# Memorandum

**TO:** NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AND  
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

**FROM:** Jon Cicirelli

**SUBJECT:** FAMILY CAMP STATUS REPORT

**DATE:** February 21, 2023

Approved

Date

3/2/23

**COUNCIL DISTRICTS: ALL**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Accept the report on Family Camp at Yosemite in advance of its return for the 2023 season.

## **SUMMARY AND OUTCOME**

The Neighborhood Services and Education Committee will receive an update on the status of the City's Family Camp in Groveland, California. After two years of closure, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services successfully reopened Family Camp at Yosemite for the 2022 season with limited capacity due to available staffing. Hiring, attrition, and even air quality challenged Family Camp staff members in 2022, and they rose to the challenge and delivered meaningful camping experiences to nearly 2,000 guests. Looking ahead, the Department is preparing an extensive marketing and outreach campaign to increase the visibility of Family Camp for the 2023 season and is excited to implement grant-funded programs to expand access to nature for residents in Project Hope neighborhoods.

## **BACKGROUND**

Family Camp at Yosemite is a 51.2-acre site near Yosemite National Park, situated on federal land which is leased from the United State Forest Service (USFS). It has been managed by the City of San José since 1968. Family Camp provides 70 wood-framed and 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, which are served cafeteria-style in the dining hall.

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. These amenities are complemented by the facility's close proximity to natural recreation areas such as Rainbow Falls and other nearby hiking trails, making Family Camp a fun, family-friendly natural destination for visitors. Family Camp also has critical support infrastructure, including potable water wells and a sewage evaporation pond facility.

Recreational camps like Family Camp are instrumental in exposing families, children, and adults of all ages, cultures and abilities to the health benefits and unique experiences offered by California's wilderness areas. With an operating history that spans over 50 years, Family Camp has an impressive following of lifelong campers that are dedicated in their support of the campgrounds 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 begins operations on the last weekend in April for the opening day of trout fishing in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and closes for the winter in October.

Family Camp occupancy ranges from 70 to 300 campers per night. The summer program operates seven days per week from mid-June through mid-August, with complete in-house meal services and a variety of structured recreational and interpretive activities. 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 entered into a 20-year use permit/land lease agreement with the USFS. The current permit expires on 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.

## **ANALYSIS**

After being closed for the 2020 and 2021 seasons, the City of San José's Family Camp at Yosemite successfully opened for the 2022 season with a limited capacity due to available staffing. As described below, the facility had minimal staffing for the summer, which limited recreation program offerings as available staff focused on the most essential activities such as facility maintenance and cleaning and dining hall support. The mid-season resignation of the Family Camp Manager left a void in the facility's leadership. Family Camp continued to host families throughout the summer, while also navigating a temporary closure due to air quality conditions from wildfires, thanks to the resilience and persistence of the other two full-time staff, others who came to Family Camp's aid from other Department facilities, and a dozen dedicated Camp Counselors.

To continue to grow in service to the community, Family Camp must provide a stable working environment for staff members, continue updating facility amenities and enhance marketing and outreach, especially for members of the community who have not traditionally camped at Family Camp or other overnight camps. These goals can be reached through implementing the Department's Family Camp work plan and through the leadership of a newly hired Family Camp Manager, who brings to this role more than 15 years of experience with California State Parks with a background in youth programming, nature education, and program development and marketing.

Family Camp at Yosemite will reopen for the 2023 summer season from June 16 through August 11, 2023 at a reduced capacity with limited programming until staffing levels can be confirmed and annual tent repairs can be completed.<sup>1</sup> Once Family Camp has met those milestones, additional reservations will be accepted. Summer 2023 reservation registration will reopen on Sunday, March 5, 2023.

### **Occupancy and Financial Performance**

Attachment A shows Family Camp's occupancy rates from 2013 through 2022. Attachment B shows Family Camp's financial results from 2013-2014 through December 2022. Following two years of closure, new safety protocols were implemented for staff and campers in consideration of COVID-19 safety during the 2022 season, including dining service procedures and tent sanitation. Although Family Camp hosted almost 2,000 guests in 2022, of which 84 percent were residents (up from 60 percent in 2019), revenue for the 2022 season did not track as high as past years with similar occupancy, due to closure in late July because of poor air quality during wildfire season resulting in 27 cancelled reservations totaling 87 nights in lost reservations; reduced camp store operations; and minimal pre/post season rentals. For the 2023 season, Family Camp is planning to operate under reduced guest capacity to maintain adequate staff to camper ratios and promote healthy outdoor activities.

### **Staffing**

Staffing is a significant constraint for Family Camp. The Department's goal each summer is to hire or bring back a total of 60 Camp Counselors who are paid a daily stipend. Table 1 below highlights a troubling downward staffing trend since 2014.

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<sup>1</sup> The opening process for the facility begins with an assessment of Family Camp grounds and any needed seasonal repairs. It includes project work weeks where Department staff spends 10 to 15 days making repairs and additions to site infrastructure. That happens in conjunction with the recruitment of Camp Counselors and the development of schedules for the pre-, post- and summer camping seasons.

**Table 1**  
**Summer Staffing from 2014 through 2022**

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

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

In 2019, Family Camp began to reverse the downward trend in stipend staff retention. Through increased pay, training opportunities, flexible scheduling and more available workdays, stipend staff reported higher morale and a shift towards a positive work culture. This progress was slowed by the closure of Family Camp in 2020 and 2021 and Family Camp struggled to recruit enough stipend Camp Counselors to fully support camp services in 2022.

To move forward, 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 2022 season, the Department partnered with the Human Resources Department to convert 10 stipend staff to part-time Recreation Leaders 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 2023 season, the Department will schedule facility breaks into the summer schedule to provide adequate rest days for staff as well as increase the number of days dedicated to training staff specifically for the summer season.

### **Marketing and Outreach**

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. With the leadership of the new Camp Manager, Family Camp at Yosemite intends to launch an aggressive marketing and outreach program. Utilizing both traditional and progressive campaigns, the Department seeks to increase Family Camp's reach to new and experienced campers.

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

The program will increase its social media presence through its various social media platforms, including the Department's Facebook, Twitter, NextDoor.com, and Instagram accounts. In addition, the program will publish camp information through the Department's 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 Camp and its campers in action.

In collaboration with San José based non-profits and City of San José organizations such as Project Hope and Youth Intervention services, staff will continue to connect and outreach to those that 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.

### **Access and Equity**

Family Camp has been pleased to partner 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.

On October 19, 2021, the City Council approved a resolution providing authority for the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services to submit four applications amounting to \$465,555 each for the State of California's Outdoor Equity Grant. In May 2022, the State of California awarded two of the four applications establishing community hubs in San José's Washington and Poco Way neighborhoods where approximately 54 solution-based learning events serving 2,600 residents will take place during three years of programming starting spring 2023. The program will include 18 trips to natural areas for approximately 1,500 residents, with 12 trips for teens and families to Family Camp. The program names are The Family Camp Experience – Washington and The Family Camp Experience – Poco Way, respectively.

This grant will provide residents in these neighborhoods a memorable opportunity to participate in outdoor experiences. The program will consist of outdoor education in and around San José and a free trip to Family Camp in Groveland, California. Participants will learn about outdoor topics such as camping basics, local area park information and their own environmental impact. The trip to Family Camp will include transportation, meals, activities, a three-night stay and a visit to Yosemite National Park. This will improve the health and wellness of residents by connecting underserved communities to natural areas and providing them with the knowledge needed to continue enjoying the outdoors on their own.

### **Updated Reservation Software**

Currently, the City has a service agreement with Art Street Interactive to provide registration and site management software for Family Camp through its Camava platform. Online registration for Family Camp at Yosemite will open on Sunday, March 5, 2023. Staff is currently conducting a Request for Proposal for a combined solution for all Department recreation programs as well as Family Camp. If a solution is not identified that can adequately address all the needs of Family Camp, then a separate procurement process will need to take place in 2024.

## **Collaborative Partnerships**

Staff continues to focus on expanding collaborative partnerships with local area groups, corporations, and volunteers, to supplement staff, increase occupancy, and improve revenue opportunities as well as participation by underserved groups:

- 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.
- California Conservation Corps (CCC) – The CCC received federal funding to provide wildfire recovery efforts in Tuolumne County in 2019 and used Family Camp as a base camp. Family Camp hosted 30 to 45 corps members from late March to mid-September. While at camp, corps members helped with day-to-day operations and projects. This same group of corps members was instrumental in helping the Department prepare camp for the winter closure.
- United States Forest Service (USFS) – The USFS utilizes Family Camp as a meeting and training space for its work force.
- Tuolumne River Trust (Trust) – The Trust continues to provide onsite Family Camp improvement projects to be undertaken by the Trust volunteer program, including AmeriCorps teams. The Trust also provides forest health and restoration projects in and around the Family Camp area while boarding at Family Camp.

The Family Camp program will continue to work with current volunteer groups and seek to expand volunteer opportunities. The following are examples of current volunteer efforts:

- 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 hours to assist with the opening and closing of camp activities.

- Family Camp Nurse Program – Volunteer nurses have provided over 120 hours of 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. With the Foundation's support, Family Camp hosted several live concerts for campers during the 2019 summer season.
- 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.
- Corporate Volunteers – Staff is working with various corporate volunteer programs, exploring opportunities to work with groups locally, and on-site at 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 Avi Yotam, Deputy Director, at [avi.yotam@sanjoseca.gov](mailto:avi.yotam@sanjoseca.gov).

### Attachments:

- A. Family Camp at Yosemite Occupancy from 2013 to 2022
- B. Family Camp at Yosemite Financial Results from 2013-2014 through December 2022
- C. Family Camp at Yosemite Capital Project Costs Since 2017
- D. Family Camp at Yosemite Programming & Facility Improvements

February 21, 2023

**Subject: Family Camp Status Report**

**Attachment A**  
**Family Camp at Yosemite Occupancy from 2013 to 2022**

<b>Season</b>	<b>Occupancy Rate</b>	<b>Summer Reservations</b>
<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>	n/a	n/a
<b>2021*</b>	n/a	n/a
<b>2022</b>	38%	1,921

\* There were no reservations during the 2020 and 2021 seasons due to complications related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

February 21, 2023

**Subject: Family Camp Status Report****Attachment B****Family Camp at Yosemite Financial Results from 2013-2014 through December 2022**

<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** (through Dec. 2022)	\$113,380	\$532,484	21%

\* Prior fiscal year revenues included full camp years (July through the fall closure of one season, and spring opening through the end of June of another season); 2020-2021 included 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 cancelled reservations totaling 87 nights in lost reservations; reduced camp store operations; and minimal pre/post season rentals. Approximately \$36,500 in revenue has not been posted to the City's Financial Management System due to technical issues with credit card processing and is not included in the table. The Department is working to resolve this.

NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

February 21, 2023

**Subject: Family Camp Status Report**

**Attachment C**  
**Family Camp at Yosemite Capital Project Costs Since 2017**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Cost of Capital Projects</b>
2017-2018	\$122,560
2018-2019	\$126,000
2019-2020	\$140,627
2020-2021	\$152,179
2021-2022	\$269,822
2022-2023 (through Dec. 2022)	\$77,265

## **Attachment D**

### **Family Camp at Yosemite Programming & Facility Improvements**

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 list below includes projects completed by City staff and contractors. Attachment C summarizes capital project costs since 2017.

- **Service Road Repair** – The service road entrance to Family Camp serves as an interior access point for the dining hall side of the facility and the kitchen. Food delivery, trash pick-up, and site maintenance are highly dependent upon this road being accessible. Due to damage from the Rim Fire (2013) and poor drainage, the service road needed repair. The service road repair project entailed a half-mile section of asphalt that was removed and repaved, including installation of new culverts and drains to slow the effects of erosion.
- **Restroom Renovation** – One of the seven on-site restroom buildings was updated with new fixtures, paint, and counters. This spring, another restroom will undergo updates and renovations to improve camper experience.
- **Camp Store Wall and Floor Upgrades** – To improve the appeal of the Family Camp General Store, the paneling of the store was replaced with brand new wooden shiplap that adds a new feel to the space. This was done in conjunction with a grind and floor seal to improve the look of the area.
- **Tuolumne Room/Office Air Conditioning Unit Installation** – Wall-mounted air conditioning units were installed in both the Tuolumne Room and main office at camp. These units will help maintain a comfortable atmosphere in two of Family Camp's most heavily visited rooms.
- **Tuolumne Room Paneling Upgrade** – As a main amenity to many participants at camp, the Tuolumne Room is a welcoming hub of foot traffic for the facility. During the suspension, a large portion of the wood paneling in the Tuolumne Room was replaced to create a very warm and bright atmosphere for campers.
- **Wireless Public Address System Installation & Upgrade** – At the close of 2019, a new wireless public address (PA) system was installed. Since its original installation, additional bullhorn speakers have been added to enhance coverage. Unfortunately, during

this past winter Family Camp was broken into and the PA system was vandalized and will need repairs and reconnection this spring.

- Kitchen Kettle & Hood Installation – To aid in food preparation, staff installed a commercial grade kettle in the kitchen area. In accordance with regulations governing commercial appliances, an accompanying hood was installed as well.
- Fire Ring and Campfire Seating – The deteriorating fire ring was replaced with a larger concrete sleeve that will be finished this spring in a river rock exterior design. The outdated wood bench seating around the fire ring will be replaced with updated contemporary seating for families.
- 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.
- Water System Improvements - In the coming spring, working with a contractor, the Department intends to make improvements to the water system supporting Family Camp.
- 2017 Flood Projects – In fall 2023, contractors will begin work to complete remediation from the 2017 floods including rebuilding the playground, retaining walls, and ADA access to the river.
- Tent Repairs – Annually, the Department assesses and repairs, as necessary, the 70 tent frames at Family Camp.

In the future, in addition to the improvements listed above, the Department is exploring opportunities to include an on-site disc golf area for Family Camp participants. Once designed and developed, it will provide another avenue for community-based outdoor recreation.