



# Memorandum

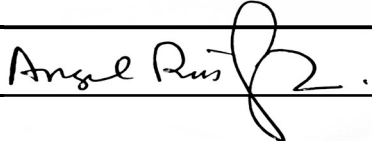
**TO:** NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES  
AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

**FROM:** Jon Cicirelli

**SUBJECT:** FAMILY CAMP STATUS REPORT

**DATE:** February 26, 2024

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Approved  Date 3/7/24

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**COUNCIL DISTRICTS:** ALL

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Accept the report on Family Camp at Yosemite in advance of its return for the 2024 season.

## **SUMMARY AND OUTCOME**

The Neighborhood Services and Education Committee will be updated on the status of the City's Family Camp at Yosemite (Family Camp) in Groveland, California. Family Camp opened for the 2023 season with slightly more than half of its tents available due to recurring staffing challenges and significant damage to the facilities from 2023 winter storms. Family Camp still welcomed more than 2,300 guests during the 2023 summer season and more than 500 guests in off-season group rentals who had meaningful camping experiences. In 2023, staff also implemented the first year of Outdoor Equity Grant free trips to Family Camp for residents in the Guadalupe Washington and Poco Way neighborhoods, developed new outreach efforts for the Campership (scholarship) Program, and started a pilot program in partnership with Project Hope that provided a free weekend at Family Camp with the option of borrowing essential camping equipment. Looking ahead, the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department (Department) is preparing a marketing and outreach campaign to increase the visibility of Family Camp employment opportunities and reach new audiences for 2024.

## **BACKGROUND**

Family Camp is a 51.2-acre site near Yosemite National Park, situated on federal land leased from the United State Forest Service (USFS). It has been managed by the City of San José since

1968. Family Camp provides 65 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 proximity to natural recreation areas such as Rainbow Pool 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 opening day of trout fishing in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and closes for the winter in October.

Family Camp occupancy can range from 70 to 300 campers per night. The summer program traditionally 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 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**

Family Camp opened for the 2023 season with a new Family Camp Manager, one Senior Maintenance Worker, a part-time Cook and 21 summer counselors. This lean complement of staff implemented a full recreation schedule, provided exceptional customer service, and hosted between 75-130 campers daily. The Table below shows 2023 participants in the summer and shoulder season, 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
Summer Season	2,309
Shoulder Season/Groups	
Fish Camp	68
City Youth Intervention Services	38
YMCA of Silicon Valley	150
Outdoor Equity Grant Groups	267
Breathe in Yosemite	43
Shoulder Season/Groups Subtotal	566
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,875</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.

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 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 (capital repairs, increased marketing, enhanced recruitment efforts, Outdoor Equity Grant program and partnerships) and through the leadership of the Family Camp Manager who started shortly before the 2023 season. The Family Camp Manager 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. Additionally, in November 2023, Family Camp filled the Recreation Program Specialist for Family Camp and a limit-dated Recreation Program Specialist focused on the Outdoor Equity Grant program. These positions and an early start to seasonal recruitment are expected to bolster Family Camp in 2024.

Family Camp at Yosemite will reopen reservation registration on Sunday March 3, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. for the 2024 season 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.

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<sup>1</sup> The opening process for the facility begins with an assessment of Family Camp grounds after winter rains and storms for any needed seasonal repairs. It includes project work weeks where Department staff spends 10 to 15 days

## Occupancy and Financial Performance

Attachment A shows Family Camp’s occupancy rates from 2013 through 2023. Attachment B shows Family Camp financial results from 2013-2014 through December 2023. Family Camp hosted over 2,300 guests during the 2023 regular summer season, a 20 percent increase in guests compared to the 1,921 guests in the 2022 summer season, and 75 percent of 2023 summer guests were San José residents. During the shoulder season, Family Camp hosted over 500 additional guests, all of which were residents. Revenue for the 2023 season was more than double that of the 2022 season due to an increase in available tents.

The 2023 season was not without its challenges. While in 2022 Family Camp was forced to close due to poor air quality related to wildfires, in 2023 it experienced a number of Public Safety Power Shutoffs. This resulted in the closure of Family Camp during the Fourth of July weekend, cancellation of 80 reservations and loss of approximately \$30,000 in anticipated revenue. Additionally, due to changes in Tuolumne County Environmental Health Division inspection standards and deferred maintenance issues, the kitchen and dining hall were forced to close for a short period of time for emergency remediations. As a result, expenditures increased due to the cost of repairs and need to bring in outside catering to serve guests, while some guests cancelled their visits or were given discounts due to the inconvenience. As in 2023, Family Camp is planning to operate in 2024 under reduced guest capacity, similar to 2023, 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. Family Camp has fallen far short of that goal since 2014 and struggled to recruit and onboard enough stipend Camp Counselors to support camp services in 2022 and 2023. The table below highlights the troubling downward staffing trend since 2014.

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

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

The Department plans to increase recruitment efforts in the areas surrounding Family Camp, enhance visibility in San José, and focus on retention. Staff has participated in tabling, posted targeted social media marketing, and advertised at local colleges as well as in the Groveland area. Additionally, staff met with and presented to participants in the City’s Resilience Corps. At

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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.

the conclusion of the 2023 season, the Department partnered with the Human Resources Department to convert 11 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 2024 season, the Department will increase the number of counselors at higher levels of responsibility and pay, 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**

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.

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 Department 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 allowing these offices to spread the word about opportunities for San José residents to enjoy an inclusive camping experience in the Sierras.

### **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. 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 educational 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 implemented the first Outdoor Equity Grant programming in 2023, offering residents in the designated neighborhoods an unparalleled chance to immerse themselves in nature. The program's first year included:

- 267 residents from the Poco Way and Guadalupe Washington neighborhoods participating in four trips to Family Camp that included transportation, meals, activities, a two-night stay and a visit to Yosemite National Park.
- 230 residents (approximately 75% unduplicated) participating in 18 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.
- 71 residents (approximately 67% unduplicated) participating in a day visit to Natural Bridges State Beach, with transportation and educational supplies provided, where they observed overwintering monarch butterflies, beach and tidepools.

These initiatives not only serve to enhance the physical and mental well-being of community members but also play a crucial role in fostering a deep connection with their natural surroundings, empowering residents with the skills and knowledge to independently enjoy outdoor activities.

In addition, Family Camp offers a Campership Program with 50 percent off stays for up to four nights to San José families who qualify for assistance programs. In 2023, 53 residents participated in the Campership Program. 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 122 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. Project Hope staff helped Family Camp gather feedback at monthly community meetings. This has allowed staff to fine-tune programs to better meet community needs. For example, community feedback led to a design change for the City's Outdoor Equity Grant program away from separate teen or family trips and towards combined family trips to create a greater sense of safety and community for families and teens considering this opportunity. Community feedback also led to a change to the length of each Outdoor Equity Grant trip to Family Camp to better align to the availability of working families without creating challenges for participants with their employers and jobs. 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 that acknowledges and addresses the unique needs and barriers faced by various communities, staff is aiming to provide tailored resources and support that facilitate positive outcomes for all participants. The Department fosters a nurturing environment that cultivates a strong sense of community and belonging, significantly enriching the lives of participants, and deepening their connection with the natural world.

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 Avi Yotam, Deputy Director, at [avi.yotam@sanjoseca.gov](mailto:avi.yotam@sanjoseca.gov).

NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

February 26, 2024

**Subject: Family Camp Status Report**

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Attachments:

- A. Family Camp at Yosemite Occupancy from 2013 to 2023
- B. Family Camp at Yosemite Financial Results from 2013-2014 through December 2023
- 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 2023**

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

\* 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 2022 and 2023 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%

\*Many tents were not available for reservation due to winter damage that staff could not repair in time for the season 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 rates calculated by dividing reserved tent nights by available tent nights.

**Attachment B****Family Camp at Yosemite Financial Results from 2013-2014 through December 2023**

<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 (Through Dec. 2023)	\$268,244	\$651,976	41%

\* 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); 2021-2022 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 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, catered 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 the water system supporting Family Camp.
- **2017 Flood Projects** – In fall 2024, contractors are expected to begin work to complete 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.

- 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.

## **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.
- 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 that year.
- 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.
- 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 has previously worked with various corporate volunteer programs, exploring opportunities to work with groups locally, and on site at Family Camp.