



2022 Annual Report
Camp Tuhsmeheta

Contents

Introduction	1
Jill Teegardin	1
Roxanne Balfour	2
New Staff Updates	3
Matt Polzin	3
Patti Ensing	4
Camp T Usage	5
Adventure Camp	7
Alumni Picnic	9
Spring Break Kits	12
Family Nature Club	13
DHH Events	15
Cane Quest	17
Collaborations	20
Camp T Special Guests	21
Camp T Volunteers	22
Facility Updates	23



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Camp Tuhsmeheeta would like to thank State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice and State Board of Education members for their continued support. Special acknowledgement and gratitude are extended to Deputy Superintendent Dr. Scott Koenigsknecht, State Board of Education Member/Trustee Nikki Snyder, and Office of Financial Management Director Spencer Simmons.



Jill Teegardin

Camp Tuhsmeheeta Director

Camp Tuhsmeheeta (Camp T) was established in 1974 by Dr. Robert Thompson, a former superintendent of the Michigan School for the Blind. Dr. Thompson's vision was to establish an outdoor learning environment for students who are Blind/Visually Impaired (BVI). Camp T encompasses 301 acres of land and includes seven miles of hiking trails, a waterfront area for swimming and boating, a climbing tower, a low ropes course, a sports field, a recreation center, and an archery range.

While at camp, students have an opportunity to learn about the environment, participate in leisure activities, practice independent living skills, engage in hands-on learning, and make new friends, all while enjoying Camp T's natural surroundings. We continue to follow Dr. Thompson's vision by engaging youth in the natural world and exposing them to a variety of recreation opportunities.

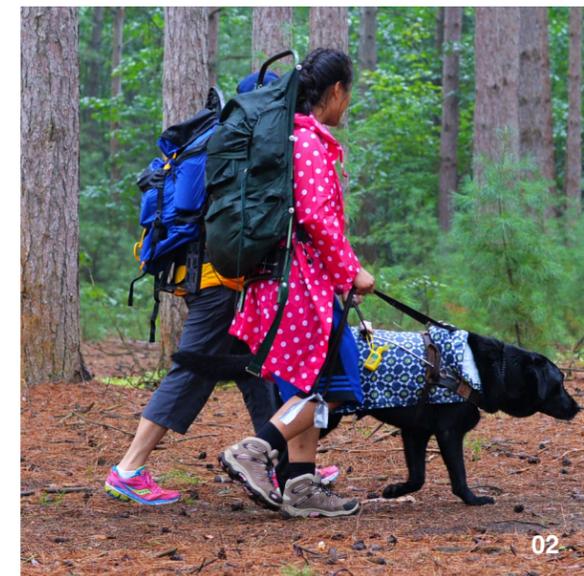
In the fall of 2021, we welcomed campers safely back to camp for in-person experiences. The cool autumn air provided the perfect setting to carve pumpkins and drink hot apple cider.



Roxanne Balfour

Michigan Department of Education - Low Incidence Outreach Director

There is something magical about being at Camp T. As soon as you enter the gate and take the road into the forest, you feel that you are becoming part of a different world. Nature abounds and creates a calm like no other. This is a safe place that provides a sense of security for all who grace it with their presence. It is our honor to carry on Dr. Thompson's vision for students who are Blind/Visually Impaired so that they may experience the pure joy of Camp T.



Matt Polzin

High-Adventure Consultant



In September 2021, Camp T hired Matt Polzin to lead high-adventure activities and help with day-to-day camp operations.

At Camp T, Polzin has trained and certified in aquatic life support, basic first aid/cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), archery, and lifeguarding. He has also completed PaddleSport and SafeSport training. Polzin operates all high-adventure challenge courses at Camp T, such as the low-ropes course and climbing tower.

Polzin, who was born and raised in Flint, enlisted in the Navy in 1988. He was meritoriously commissioned ten years later and trained to be a naval aviator. Polzin has been deployed all over the world, seeing 44 countries and more than 80 different ports of call. After retiring from active duty in 2012, Polzin taught high school Navy Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (NJROTC) as the senior naval science instructor in North Carolina for several years before returning to Michigan. Polzin taught as a substitute teacher in Ionia for all grade levels while he continued his education.

Polzin earned his bachelor's degree in aviation management and flight operations from

Jacksonville University and finished his master's with Davenport University. He also has a master's degree in human services—counseling, family advocacy, and public policy—as well as a graduate certificate in healthcare management.

Polzin's leadership training experience with youth, using many of the same types of high-adventure equipment offered at camp, is integral to the community Camp T serves. Polzin believes overcoming challenges, conquering fears, achieving goals, and building confidence early in life translates to success in the future.

Patti Ensing

Camp T Office Assistant



Patti Ensing, Camp T's new office assistant, grew up not far from Camp T in Greenville. She attended Montcalm Community College for two years before transferring to Ferris State University, known as Ferris College at the time. There, she earned her bachelor's degree in business administration. After graduating, Ensing managed several retail businesses.

Several years ago, Ensing joined Greenville Public Schools as a "lunch lady." Working for the school district brought her to Camp T; Ensing served as the camp's cook for two years. When a part-time office assistant position became available, Ensing saw it as an opportunity to apply her business skills at Camp T. After being hired for the office assistant position, she continued to work at the school district and Camp T until she was hired full-time at camp in August.

In her new position, Ensing looks forward to communicating with groups that make camp reservations and answering questions they may have. Ensing will also help make sure Camp T staff members have the items they need to make camp programs successful for students.

Camp T Usage

597

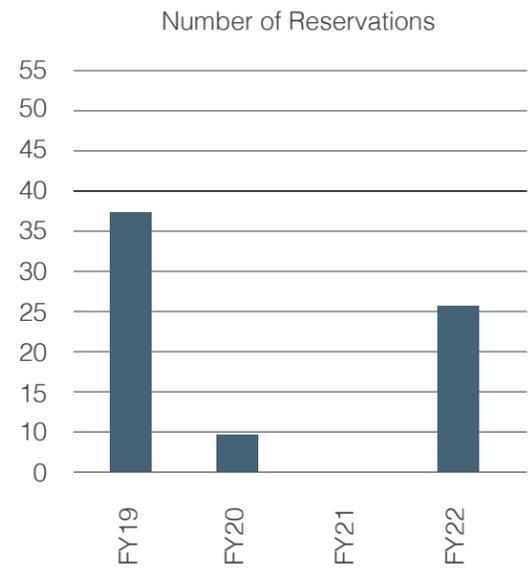
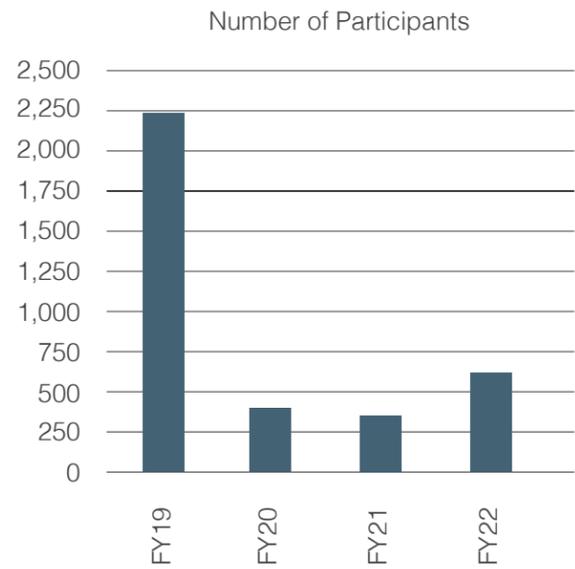
Participants

27

Reservations

14

Camp T Events



- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Family Nature Club</p> <p> 76 Campers</p> <p> 5 Reservations</p> | <p>Hudsonville HS Special Education</p> <p> 26 Campers</p> <p> 1 Reservation</p> | <p>Project TOP Camp T and BSBP</p> <p> 45 Campers</p> <p> 4 Reservations</p> |
| <p>Girl Scouts</p> <p> 77 Campers</p> <p> 3 Reservations</p> | <p>Goalball Team</p> <p> 35 Campers</p> <p> 4 Reservations</p> | <p>DHH Winter Nature Explorers</p> <p> 9 Campers</p> <p> 1 Reservation</p> |
| <p>Spring Break Kits</p> <p> 78 Participants</p> <p> 0 Reservations</p> | <p>Ottawa Area ISD BVI Team</p> <p> 49 Campers</p> <p> 1 Reservation</p> | <p>Kent ISD</p> <p> 67 Campers</p> <p> 2 Reservations</p> |
| <p>Cane Quest</p> <p> 30 Campers</p> <p> 1 Reservation</p> | <p>Holy Trinity</p> <p> 42 Campers</p> <p> 1 Reservation</p> | <p>Camp T Alumni Picnic</p> <p> 32 Campers</p> <p> 1 Reservation</p> |
| <p>DHH Summer Family Fun Day</p> <p> 14 Campers</p> <p> 1 Reservation</p> | <p>Camp T Adventure Camp</p> <p> 10 Campers</p> <p> 1 Reservation</p> | <p>WMU Summer Classes</p> <p> 7 Campers</p> <p> 1 Reservation</p> |

Data:

The data for FY19 and FY20 cover events held between October 1 and September 30.
 The data for FY21 cover events held between October 1 and July 1.
 The data for FY22 cover events held between October 1 and July 31.

Adventure Camp

Camper experienced many adventures at this three-night camp. Participants had an opportunity to prepare a backpack, hike, set up a campsite, practice archery, scale the climbing tower, swim, and enjoy campfires.

Activities:

- waterfront activities
- making foil packet dinners over a campfire
- science, technology, engineering, and math projects
- low-ropes course and climbing tower
- making survival bottles
- hiking and archery

Camper Highlights:

- practicing independent living skills through cooking and day-to-day tasks
- learning about backpacking and tenting while participating in daily activities
- engaging in recreation activities while learning about healthy lifestyles

“Thank you so much for the wonderful experience. Ryan can’t stop talking about every bit of his adventures at camp.”

- Facebook comment



Alumni Picnic

In early June, Camp T held its first Alumni Picnic, which welcomed back former campers to reminisce and share stories from past years, and even stories from before the camp opened in 1974. Many of their stories featured torrential thunderstorms as the main theme. Camp T plans to archive some of these stories in the future Roth Cabin History Museum. At the event, Camp T alumni had an opportunity to climb the climbing tower, practice their archery skills, canoe on the lake, and walk a few of Camp T's many miles of trails. Alumni were also introduced to Camp T's new Oak Recreation Center, where they played goalball.

Activities:

- reminiscing about Camp T
- waterfront activities
- climbing tower
- goalball
- archery

“All of the activities were so fun. I could not choose just one, but I think my favorite part was hearing all of the stories and memories shared around the fire.”

- Survey response



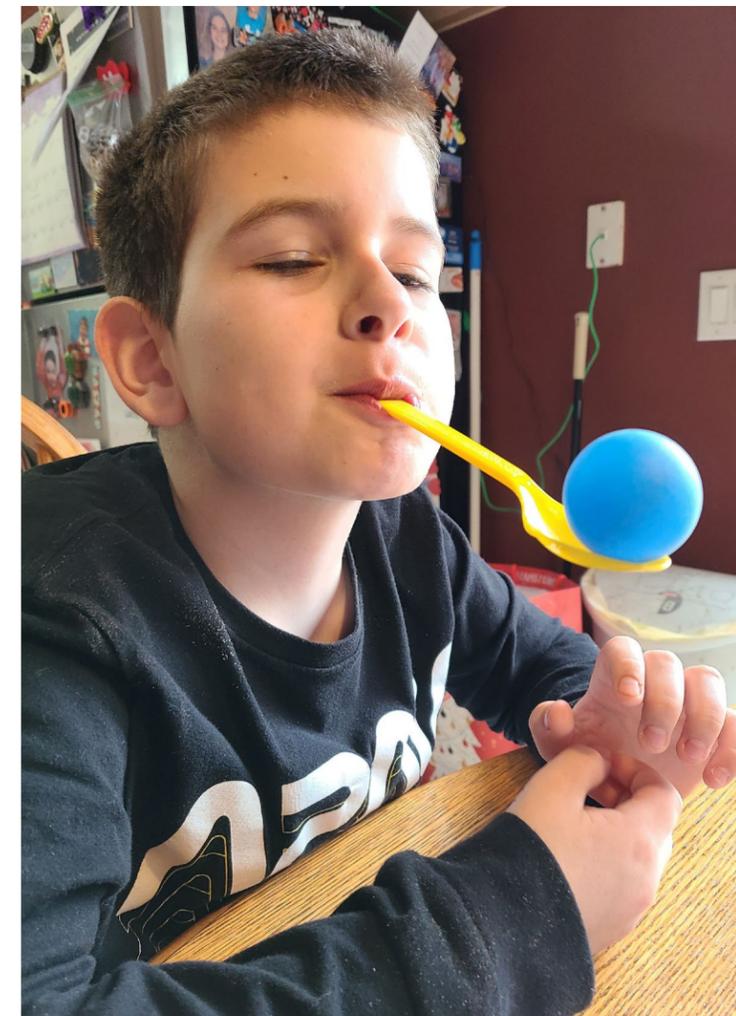


Spring Break Kits

In March, Camp T sent out spring break kits to families. This engaging pack included simple supplies that led to plenty of laughter and fun. Families were able to use the kits during their vacation or staycation. What a great opportunity to make wonderful memories!

Participants:

- had fun with their families
- read and followed written instructions
- made memories while playing a variety of simple games



Family Nature Club

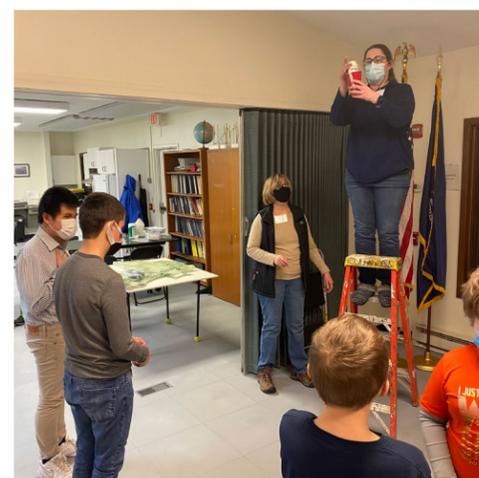
Our Family Nature Club (FNC) event in October focused on fall activities. Families enjoyed the scents, colors, tastes, and sounds of autumn while spending time in the great outdoors. This overnight camp allowed campers to work on independent living skills and expanded core curriculum tasks while participating in fun adventures.

Families learned about fall wildlife while participating in hands-on activities at our November FNC event. This overnight camp also focused on sports skills at Camp T's new Oak Recreation Center.

The January FNC event gave families the opportunity to snowshoe, build snowmen, and sled. This overnight event also allowed campers to explore Camp T and all its beauty during winter.

Our March FNC theme was "forest frenzy." This weekend event offered outdoor recreation activities, forest investigations, baking, a campfire, and more. Campers roasted marshmallows, spent time hiking, enjoyed the company of family, and made new friends.

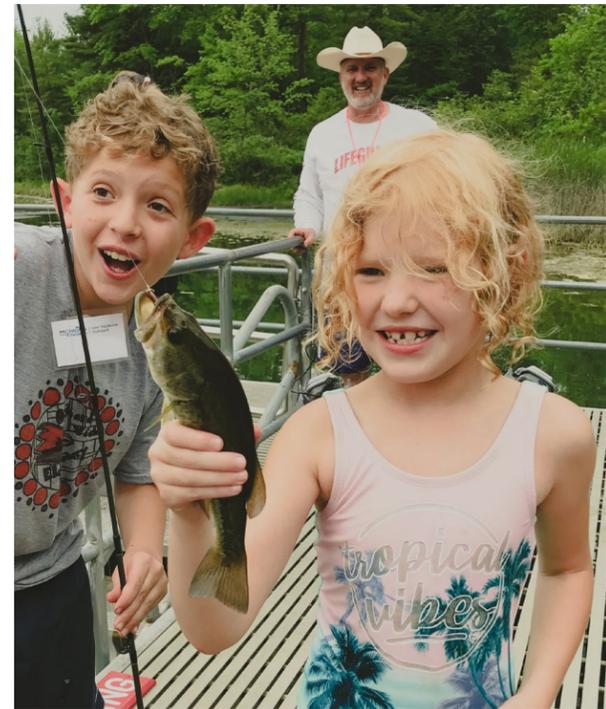
In July, FNC focused on summer fun. Families experienced summer camp together with campfires, hikes, and waterfront activities. Participants had the opportunity to learn adaptive outdoor recreation skills, social skills, and foil-cooking skills.



DHH Events

Winter Nature Explorers

Students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing and their families were able to join in on some winter fun. At this day camp, participants learned how to snowshoe, went sledding, created winter-themed crafts, and made amazing snow sculptures.



DHH Summer Family Fun Day

Families with school-age children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing were invited to a fun-filled summer day camp. At this event, participants enjoyed waterfront activities and outdoor recreation adventures.

DHH Family Summer Party

Michigan Hands & Voices collaborated with Michigan Department of Education - Low Incidence Outreach for this fun-filled summer day. Families were able to enjoy a picnic together while participating in camp activities.



Michigan Regional Cane Quest

On May 14, Camp Tuhsmeheeta (Camp T) hosted the first annual Michigan Regional Cane Quest competition. Cane Quest is a challenging orientation and mobility (O&M) contest for students, created and organized by Braille Institute.

Regional Cane Quest events are held across the country, and contestants are divided into three groups: Scouts, Explorers, and Trailblazers. The May event at Camp T focused on the Scout level, for students in grades 3–6 who are Blind/Visually Impaired.

During the competition, students were challenged to demonstrate fundamental travel techniques and O&M skills, such as locating dropped objects, navigating with a human guide, and using the touch-and-drag cane technique.

While students participated in the contest, their family members were busy with activities of their own. Siblings participated in outdoor adventure activities, and the adults attended a parent workshop. Everyone participated in a goalball workshop hosted by goalball Paralympian John Kusku in Camp T's Oak Recreation Center.

MDE-LIO Education Consultant Beth Brabbs organized the event, along with several volunteers. "Students and families were thrilled with the day's activities," Brabbs said. "I also want to thank the many volunteers who generously gave their time and talents to make this event such a great success. We couldn't have done it without them."

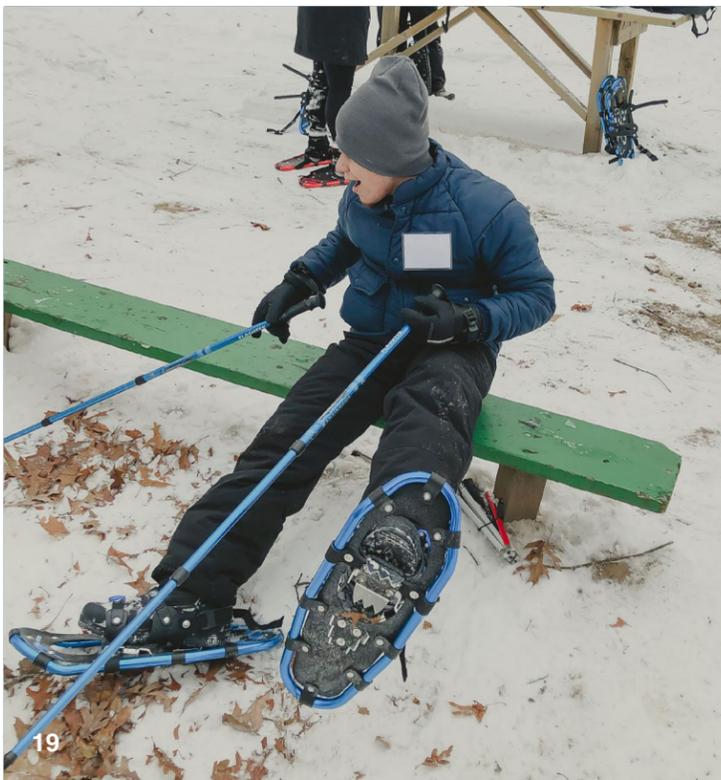
Participants' scores were tallied during the event. Based on their scores, participants were given raffle tickets to win a Victor Reader Stream media player. All participants received an additional prize and a Cane Quest gift bag from Braille Institute.

In June, students received specific feedback on the skills they performed, as well as suggestions for improvement. Their O&M specialists will also receive this information so continued learning can take place next school year.

"Thank you for doing this, our family enjoyed it so much!"

- Facebook comment





Collaborations



Project TOP (Transitions Outdoor Program)

The Bureau of Services for Blind Persons (BSBP) and Camp Tuhsmeheeta (Camp T) collaborated to offer a new program during the 2021-2022 school year. Project TOP was developed to promote blindness skills, improve employability, and increase quality of life through outdoor experiential activities. This program is open to students in the West Michigan area who are Blind/Visually Impaired and are affiliated with BSBP. While participating in Project TOP, students were able to work on functional and adaptive skills in Camp T's independent living skills (ILS) kitchen. They worked on financial literacy and job search skills. They also learned about recreation and leisure skills while practicing archery, snowshoeing, and scaling the climbing tower.



Ottawa Area Intermediate School District (OAISD)

OAISD brought students who are Blind/Visually Impaired out to camp in the spring. The campers participated in canoeing, fishing, hiking, crafts, goalball, the climbing tower, and the low-ropes course.



Kent Intermediate School District (KISD)

KISD submitted and was approved for a grant through the Michigan Department of Education - Low Incidence Outreach. These grant funds helped cover day-camp costs for bus transportation, attendance, and supplies. Two different school groups from KISD attended day camps in the spring. Each group worked on independent living skills (ILS) while following a recipe in the ILS kitchen at camp. They also had the opportunity to scale the climbing tower and go canoeing and fishing. The day camps were filled with adventure and excitement for all who were involved.



Western Michigan University: Teachers of Children with Visual Impairment (TCVI) Summer Course

College students studying to become orientation and mobility specialists and/or teachers for the visually impaired spent a weekend at camp learning about adaptive outdoor and indoor recreation techniques. They also listened to specialists in the field who shared information about career options, adaptive art techniques, and more. Camp T staff assisted with recreation programming during this event.

Camp T Special Guests

This year, Camp T was fortunate to have some special visitors to help with our student and youth activities.



John Kusku

John Kusku, a Paralympian and former Camp T camper took the time to introduce the sport of goalball to many in the BVI community. Kusku has facilitated many goalball clinics at our new Oak Recreation Center and has already dedicated himself to more in the future. His passion for the sport is contagious and ensures goalball will be a camp favorite for years to come.



Tyler and Leanne Merren

Tyler and Leanne Merren also visited camp this year. The Merrens met while playing goalball together with a Western Michigan University group. Camp T has played a big part in their lives: They were both campers and served as staff members when they were younger. Tyler Merren is a goalball Paralympian who brings coaching and mentoring experience to the table. Leanne Merren was a longtime camp counselor and has extensive experience working with youth, including coaching goalball, a sport for which they both have a mutual passion. As members of the BVI community, they form a dynamic team to advocate for sports and physical fitness designed to motivate and have fun.



Leah Porter

Michigan's 2022 Teacher of the Year, Leah Porter, visited Camp T last fall. Porter was interested in how the Michigan Department of Education - Low Incidence Outreach (MDE-LIO) supports students who are Blind/Visually Impaired (BVI) and Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) and about Camp T's efforts to increase outreach to students and their families throughout Michigan. Porter is a third grade teacher at Wilcox Elementary School in Holt and wants to advocate for all children to "have the freedom to be themselves, to have security and trust in their learning spaces, and to be celebrated for all that they are." She has already expressed interest in volunteering for future programs at Camp T.



Camp T Volunteers

Campers enjoy a variety of programs that are available at Camp T. Our volunteers help ensure that campers get the most out of their visit by offering professional consulting and guidance.

John Metz and Teresa Gest are teacher consultants for students with visual impairments and certified orientation and mobility specialists who volunteer at nearly every camp they can attend. Their expertise is crucial, not only to the staff who facilitate the camps, but also to the campers who learn new techniques and gain experience with the world around them. We are honored to have them here!

Donna Posont was introduced to Camp T many years ago. She became a camp counselor in the early 2000s and instantly became a favorite among campers because of her ability, as someone who is Blind, to share the thrill of birding and the beauty of nature. Posont captivates students with her natural charm and colorful descriptions that keep campers returning just to hear her stories.

Facility Updates

Completed in 2022

- Replaced and painted most of the doors around camp
- Replaced drinking fountains in Maple and Birch cabins
- Power washed decks at the cabins
- Power washed tent platforms and Thompson's Bridge
- Power washed climbing tower and low ropes element
- Replaced decking for tent platform near White Pine
- Added underground power to the boathouse
- Purchased a golf cart
- Removed screens from Jack Pine Pavilion

Planned for 2022

- Break ground on the nature center and maintenance building
- Install generators at the main cabins (after a yearlong backorder)

Planned for 2023

- Renovate and convert Elm Hall, currently used for maintenance, into a nature center
- Construct a new pole barn for a maintenance area
- Convert Roth Cabin into a museum
- Add a ceiling to the Jack Pine Pavilion restroom
- Replace the drinking fountain at Jack Pine Pavilion
- Replace shingles and repair roof on Roth Cabin and Red Pine Pavilion
- Purchase program supplies, including goalball nets, beep baseball sets, and nature center supplies





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