



Office of the City Manager

November 29, 2016

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: *DWR* Dee Williams-Ridley, City Manager

Subject: Berkeley Echo Lake Camp Update

The purpose of this memo is to brief City Council on recent changes and accomplishments at Echo Lake Camp.

### **Background**

The City operates two resident Camps: Berkeley Echo Lake Camp located near South Lake Tahoe, and Berkeley Tuolumne Camp, just east of Yosemite. Additionally, the City owns a resident camp in Cazadero that is operated by a Berkeley-based non-profit, Cazadero Performing Arts Camp. Echo Lake Camp has been operated by the City of Berkeley since 1922 under a Special Use Permit on United States Forest Service land. For many of its 94 years of operation, Echo Lake Camp functioned as a summer Youth Camp, providing week-long wilderness experiences to residents between the ages of seven (7) and sixteen (16) at a reduced cost. The Camp program included transportation to and from Berkeley, lodging, food and programming.

In recent years, three natural catastrophic events have forced dramatic structural and programmatic changes at Echo Lake Camp. In the Winter of 2010-2011, the South Lake Tahoe area received record snow. The weight of the snow caused significant damage to the dining hall, recreation lodge and many of the smaller buildings in Camp. The cost to fix the damage exceeded \$600,000 and was largely covered by insurance. The last of the replacement work was completed this fall and involved three different construction contracts and significant maintenance by in-house staff. While the construction was lengthy and impactful, the main infrastructure of camp is now in good shape.

The second event that affected Camp is the ongoing impact of California's continuous drought conditions, which have negatively affected Camp's water sources. This shortage required the City to supplement its water source by trucking in potable water for several years in order to operate camp. This shortage ultimately led to the

development of a new state-of-the-art water system which includes three different water sources, a shallow well, a deep well, and lake water from Echo Lake. The water system construction began in 2010 and just recently received final approval from the State of California.

The third event was the 2013 Rim Fire which destroyed Berkeley Tuolumne Camp near Yosemite. Starting in the summer of 2014, Echo Lake Camp's program was restructured to accommodate a new Family Camp program developed in response to the loss. This new program, along with 50+ new camp sessions have increased the total number of participants at Echo Lake Camp.

Echo Lake Camp now serves thousands of campers annually, offering Family Camp, Youth Residential Camp, City-sponsored Teen Weekend and Pre-K programs, Adult 50+ Camps, and a variety of private group rental programs including a high-school runner's workshop, a blues music weekend and a family-oriented Labor Day weekend. Campers enjoy traditional camp activities for all ages, including world-class hiking, canoeing, campfires, talent shows, and arts & crafts. Artists-in-residence provide unique courses for adults, delicious meals are prepared by a talented food service staff and some notable Bay Area guest chefs. Out-of-camp adventures abound, and families enjoy activities for all ages.

### **Attendance/Scholarships**

Since program restructuring in 2014, Echo Lake Camp has increased annual program attendance 126%. Over 1,000 Berkeley residents attended the Camp in 2016, and nearly all programs ran at or near maximum capacity, serving a record total of 2,185 campers. The Family Camp program brings the most campers to the facility, accounting for 56% of overall camp attendance during five-weeks of programming. The Family Camp program reached 96.5% capacity in Summer 2016, serving a total of 1,223 Campers. The Youth Camp program exceeded enrollment projections, reaching 100% capacity and serving a total of 292 Youth Campers during three week-long sessions. Youth Camp attendance has increased 66% since restructuring, despite a reduction in the number of sessions offered.

The Camp provides scholarships for Youth and Family Campers, and is continuing to offer low-cost and no-cost programs for Berkeley residents that demonstrate financial need. One hundred and seventy (170) Berkeley residents (approximately 8% of all program attendees) received scholarships or attended subsidized Echo Lake Camp programs in 2016. The Berkeley Echo Lake Camp Association (BELCA), a non-profit organization that supports Berkeley Echo Lake Camp, donated \$4,665 to the City in 2016 to offset expenses for Youth Camp and Teen Weekend scholarships, and to offset Pre-K and Teen Weekend bus transportation costs.

### **Revenue**

The diversification of programming and improved outreach at Echo Lake Camp has resulted in higher attendance and better cost recovery. Since restructuring, Echo Lake Camp revenue has increased 230%, and revenue now covers a greater share of the costs of operating the Camp. Staff is implementing plans to continue to grow the popular Family Camp and Youth Camp programs and is exploring the possibility of offering additional private group rental opportunities. However, severe winter weather typically limits the Camp's operating season to summer months only. The Camp is approaching maximum enrollment in most programs, and options for additional attendance and revenue increases are limited.

### **Capital Improvements**

In the last four years, the City has completed numerous capital improvements, major maintenance, and critical facility repair projects at Echo Lake Camp. These improvements (see Table 1) have helped the City accommodate the new programs and increased attendance and dramatically improved camp infrastructure.

**Table 1 - Echo Lake Camp Recent Capital and Maintenance Projects**

| <b>Completed Capital Improvement and Major Maintenance Projects</b> |           |
|---|-----------|
| Surface Water Treatment Plant Completion & Permitting               | 2010-2016 |
| Repair to thirty-three (33) Youth and Family Cabins                 | 2012-2016 |
| Swimming Pool & Pool Deck Resurfacing                               | 2013-2014 |
| Dining Hall Structural Remediation                                  | 2014      |
| Recreation Lodge Deck Structural Remediation                        | 2014      |
| Kitchen Ventilation, Ovens, & Fire Suppression                      | 2015      |
| Full Reconstruction of cabins #6, #7, and #35                       | 2016      |
| Septic Lift Station & Plumbing Improvements                         | 2016      |
| Restroom & Shower repair and improvements                           | 2016      |
| Dining Hall Floor Resurfacing                                       | 2016      |

### **Looking Ahead**

Ongoing program and facility improvements will ensure the Camp's continued provision of unique cultural, social, educational, and recreational opportunities for Berkeley residents for years to come. With more than 90 years of history and tradition, Berkeley Echo Lake Camp is one of the oldest municipal camp programs in the State of California, and has adapted to the ever changing needs of our community. Traditional Camp programs like the pine-cone ceremony, campfire skits and songs, Echo Lake

Pioneers, lake-hike days, family dining, and intentional, outdoor social experiences are as important today as they were when the Playground Commission developed Berkeley's Resident Camps in the early 1920's.

Because Camp programming has become more diverse, Echo Lake Camp staff and teen Counselors-In-Training are receiving more comprehensive training and on-the-job experience working with diverse populations. Important Camp traditions have been revitalized, and positive community connections with local neighbors and regulatory resource agencies have been established, including El Dorado County and the USFS. Most importantly, the camper experience has improved, programs are thriving, and Echo Lake Camp will benefit from these improvements for many years to come.

For Summer 2017, the City is planning to continue a wide variety of programs at Echo Lake Camp including Family Camp, Youth Residential Camp, two (2) 50+ camp sessions, Teen Weekend and Pre-K Weekend, and private group rentals like the new Blues Weekend and Friends of Berkeley Tuolumne Camp (FOBTC) Labor Day Weekend programs. The facility will require additional unfunded capital improvements, including central camp ADA accessible pathways, leach field and septic system upgrades, and continued major maintenance of existing facilities.

Registration for the Summer 2017 Family Camp program will open to Berkeley residents on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Registration for Youth Camp will open in early 2017.

More information about Echo Lake Camp, and all of the City's Camp programs, can be found on the PRW Recreation Division website:  
<http://www.cityofberkeley.info/recreation/>.

cc: Jovan Grogan, Deputy City Manager  
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