

Frequently Asked Questions concerning the proposal to purchase Camp Myeerah – 8/13/12

The following questions have been received in response to our call for comments about the Camp Myeerah proposal. Thank you for your comments and for sharing your concerns; feedback can still be shared by emailing council@girlscoutsofwesternohio.org or by calling Susan Osborn, Chief Strategy Officer, at (513) 489-1025. All comments will be shared with the Board of Directors prior to the decision.

What was the process used to develop the task group recommendations? Were property planning experts involved? Did the task groups have access to reports prepared by previous property experts?

Since 2009, the board has had two task groups involved in the long-term strategy of council camp property. The first task group, which worked from 2009- 2010, was charged with developing the principles, criteria and process that would be applied to an assessment of council property; the second task group, working from 2010-2011, was charged with using the process and the resources developed by the first group and applying them in their evaluation of each camp property. This system guaranteed an overall objective process: the first task group established the criteria and the second task group utilized the criteria in their evaluation.

The first task group consisted of individuals with a broad perspective on property and the steps that one would use to objectively make decisions about camp property. The seven members of this task group included a professor from the University of Toledo who specialized in health and the outdoors and also helped advise the YMCA about their camp property; a professor of Geology from the University of Ohio, Lima campus and father of a Girl Scout; a property project management consultant who is also Girl Scout volunteer; and two current Girl Scout Board members: one member was a past chair of the Appleseed Ridge board property committee and the other is an executive for Messer Construction Company. In addition to developing the principles and processes to be used in reviewing the camps, the first task group prepared a summary of the information available about each camp to provide to the next committee. Any existing property reports, including the 2002 Myeerah Camp Study, were used as sources to complete the summary report for each property. This information was a part of the data packet provided to the members of the second property task group.

The second task group consisted of long-time Girl Scout volunteers who are active campers and passionate about Girl Scout camps, so that in applying the criteria, process and summary data from the first task group, they would also assess the camps using an experienced, practical perspective. This 12 person task group included a former Girl Scout day camp director; council trainers and outdoor volunteers; service unit managers and troop leaders; lifetime Girl Scout members and program volunteers; and a Girl Scout parent and a council board member. Every member of the second task group was expected to visit the majority of the camp properties and a few toured every camp. As the task group conducted this evaluation process, they found that three distinct “camp tiers” emerged, based on camp usage, conditions, risks and desired program resources available.

The complete report of the 2011 task group is available at:

<http://www.girlscoutsofwesternohio.org/who-we-are/News%20Documents/property%20task%20group%20report%20-%20June%202011.pdf>

Did the Board utilize external experts, such as hiring a specialist in camp consulting?

The first task group did not recommend the use of a camp consultant because the primary purpose of most camp consultants is to develop camp properties, not to evaluate existing resources. Since most consultants make more money when camps are developed, such consultants typically ask "How do we develop this property?" not "How do we best use council resources to provide a quality Girl Scout experience?"

Rather than hiring a paid consultant, the council asked their GSUSA property consultant to review the process and the report. He supported the process used and the recommendations made, and has commended them for their work.

Will only Tier 1 properties be maintained? How will the council continue to fulfill the guiding principles of environmental stewardship and maximize access for members?

It is not now and has never been the intent of the board to retain only Tier 1 properties; rather, the report and recommendations of the 2011 Property Task Group serve as a foundation for guiding short and long-range property decisions. The classification system is a tool for the Board to use when considering property development and disposition, with the Tier 1 camps identified as the council's "premier" facilities. Click here for the criteria for property decision-making:

<http://www.girlscoutsofwesternohio.org/who-we-are/News%20Documents/property%20task%20group%20summary%20of%20recommendations%20-%20rev%207-10-12.pdf>

Why did the task group use cost per girl and not cost per acre in their evaluation?

The cost per girl is used because the council mission is to provide support to every girl in the council footprint; consideration of the cost per girl is the most equitable way to distribute council resources and support to all girl members of Girl Scouts of Western Ohio. Cost per acre or other similar measures, does not tell us anything about what that resource does for girls, merely if the facility is large or small or if it is developed or undeveloped.

Why didn't the second task group recommend more development of the Tier 3 camps to attract more girls?

The task group determined that considering camp capacity as a whole, the council has more than enough camp opportunities and capacity to serve all girls in the council, even without the Tier 3 camps. The task group did suggest some overall recommendations to bring all of the council camps to more consistent standards for accessibility, safety and use.

If you offered more programs there, would it cover the costs to keep Myeerah open?

It costs more than a \$1 million to cover the direct costs of camps (that is, the physical camp property management and not including any programming costs); program revenue offsets only about 10% of those expenses. For Camp Myeerah, program revenue is less than this 10 % average.

Note that these costs do not include the expenses or the revenue of program opportunities offered at camp; overall, the council underwrites the cost of program opportunities by about 50%. As you can see, providing both the camp properties and program opportunities at camp is a major expense in the council budget, but providing this support is truly part of our values and philosophy.

In addition to the costs related to simply having the camps, the board has also established a financial reserve earmarked for capital improvements at council camp properties. This reserve allows the council to fund the \$250,000 to \$350,000 in capital repairs and improvements required annually. More than \$60,000 from this "capital purchases fund" has been expended at Camp Myeerah since the merger for improvements that have included a new furnace, new roof, kitchen renovations and a new tractor.

What is the financial reserve of the council? Is this about money?

The decision to recommend that Tier 3 camps be sold or an alternative ownership arrangement pursued is not because the council does not have enough money, but rather because the board is exercising its responsibility as good fiscal managers. Since this is an unsolicited offer, the Board is acting in a financially responsible manner to review the option; the decision will be based on the good of the council as a whole and our commitment to all Girl Scout members, not merely the financial income such a sale would produce.

As a component of the charter requirements established by GSUSA, each council is expected to maintain a six-month reserve of their operating budget. Girl Scouts of Western Ohio has such a reserve, which is held in long term investments and not part of our available funds.

How were decisions about programming at Myeerah made?

Program opportunities at all council facilities are made based on certain criteria, primarily: a strong alignment with the Girl Scout mission and goals, an activity that Girl Scouts is uniquely able to provide and one which balances cost with number of girls served. Program decisions are outcomes-based, with evaluation focusing on how well the event supported the Girl Scout mission and council goals.

The number of program opportunities offered by the Lima region has remained relatively stable over the past few years; in fact, in the *2012-2013 Program Opportunities* book, 37 different council-sponsored program opportunities in the Lima region are listed, many with multiple sessions. Program opportunity locations are chosen based on attendance at past events and current info on where girls are most likely to attend.

One important aspect to note: The role of the program staff specialist has changed since the merger: from the previous focus on directly offering program opportunities to the current focus on supporting volunteers and collaborating with community resources to offer program opportunities. Girl Scouts of Western Ohio has also shifted from using Girl Scout program staff's time and resources from serving outside groups to focusing on Girl Scout needs.

Would camp alliances or other methods make it economically feasible to keep Myeerah open?

Girl Scout councils have used camp alliances in the past, but most councils across the US now have too many camps based on the needs and interests of today's girls; in fact, many councils are looking for ways to reduce total camp capacity by either selling or closing camps.

The four councils that merged to become Girl Scouts of Western Ohio actually partnered in a camp alliance for several years and today, girls from every part of the council have the opportunity to use any of our camps. It doesn't matter what region a girl is from, she can attend camp and program opportunities at the location and time that fits her interests. Camp attendance records show that Girl Scouts of Western Ohio members are using camps across the council.

What about Camp Brookside?

Camp Brookside, a former facility in the Appleseed Ridge region, was never owned by the Girl Scouts of Western Ohio, but rather by the Sidney Community Foundation. In 2009, when faced with major capital improvements, the board made the decision that we could no longer financially support a property that we didn't own.

What is the agreement with US Fish & Wildlife agency?

Girl Scouts of Western Ohio has an agreement with the US Fish & Wildlife agency to eradicate the autumn olive from a section of the Camp Myeerah property. Under the agreement, the council would be required to reimburse the agency (on a prorated basis) if the land is not maintained in its natural state for 10 years; however, the proposal to purchase Myeerah contains a notation that the buyer would "assume the seller's obligations" related to this agreement.

There are three Girl Scout camps in Warren County. Could one of those camps be sold so Myeerah can remain open? What would percent of capacity be at each site if you used population or membership potential? Why are those camps Tier 1 & 2 while Myeerah is classified as a Tier 3 camp?

While there are three camps in Warren County – Camp Stonybrook, Camp WhipPoorWill and Camp Butterworth – all of the camps were evaluated based on usage by Girl Scouts, camp features, quality of the facility and maintenance, encroachment or other risks associated with the camp.

68% of the council girl members live in the Cincinnati and Dayton regions, so it is not surprising that camps in those regions would be highly used. When Girl Scouts of Western Ohio was formed by the merger, two of the regions had camps in Warren County; currently the Warren and Butler counties area is one of the fastest growing sections of Ohio. For a map of council girl members, click here:

<http://www.girlscoutsofwesternohio.org/who-we-are/News%20Documents/Girl%20Scouts%20of%20Western%20Ohio%20map%20--%20membership%20distribution%20-%202010.pdf>

The three Tier 3 camps that have been recommended by the board “to be sold or investigated for other options for ownership, management, or use of the camp,” came from three of the four original councils: Camp Ladigrau in the Cincinnati region, Camp Greene in the Dayton region, and Camp Myeerah in the Lima region.

Would Girl Scouts of Western Ohio consider donating Camp Myeerah to an entity that would preserve its natural treasures and allow continued Girl Scout use? Are you considering offering the camp for public sale? Have you investigated what other similar properties are selling for in Logan County?

As part of its decision process, the Board will compare the proposed offer to the current market value, along with considering other options for disposition of the camp. The board has a responsibility to consider the appropriate stewardship of council resources, including financial resources to support delivery of the program to our almost 50,000 girl members.

Is there concern that the camp could be used for “canned hunts” or something adverse to G.S. principles?

While the proposed offer does not guarantee how the facility would be used in the future, the potential buyer has noted their interest in keeping the facility “as is” as a natural area.