

SCOUTS-L

**LONG RANGE
PLANS
SALES OF CAMPS**

Date: Mon, 28 Oct 1996 14:02:00 +0000
From: "Jim Miller Sr." <jjmsr@LSFCU.ORG>
Subject: Selling Camp Properties

A while ago I posted this to the AOL Scouting Forum but failed to generate any discussion. Thought I'd try it with this group:

There has been some discussion in the past revolving around the sale of camp properties by both Boy Scout and Girl Scout Councils in the USA. Most of it has been along the lines of "Save Camp Cookiemonger" or revolves around a conspiracy theory that either "national" or that "*#\$@%!" council board is/are sitting up nights figuring out ways to get the money out of the property for their own dire purposes. As a BSA council officer, I have been through one camp sale, and now as council president I am constantly confronted with people on one side of the issue or the other. For this reason, and because I respect the collective wisdom I have seen in this forum, I would like to open a dialogue on the positives and negatives of selling camps, and I would like to propose an idea to save camps (where appropriate) for discussion and debate.

DISCLAIMER: All comments are my own and do not reflect the views of my council, BSA, or anyone else in the world as far as I know.

1. There is no conspiracy, or if there is no one has asked me to join it.

2. In SOME cases, selling camp properties may make sense. After a merger, for example, a council can be saddled with excessive camp capacity and without the funds to support it. The camp we sold was severely underutilized primarily because we didn't have the money to keep it up. It needed a new road, new buildings, etc., and no one was stepping up to the plate to provide those funds. Yes, we tried the Army Corps of Engineers and all other avenues to no avail. The question finally became "is it better to have two lousy camps, or put all our efforts and resources into one decent camp?" We obviously concluded the latter. With all good intentions, we then placed the \$1,000,000+ (yes, that's 6 zeros) in "trust" so that we could "live off the income." Well, we're down to \$250,000 and still eating away at the principle. I wish there were some way to stop it but the bills keep coming and they have to be paid.

3. In SOME cases, selling camp properties really doesn't make sense. Our council currently has two camps. Once again we merged and wound up with more property. We really can use both since one is about a 90 minute drive away and makes an excellent long term scout camp (90 minutes from New York area isn't that far). The other is 30 or 40 minutes away and makes an excellent cub facility and weekend camp. Both camps are "full" all year. That is, we book all the available buildings all winter long, but in reality they have far greater capacity if we had more buildings. The only problem is where do we get the manpower and the money to keep up both properties?

In our case, real estate taxes alone (yes, in many states boy scout councils must pay real estate taxes on camps) amount to over \$20,000 per year. In addition, we must have a caretaker/ranger at each camp; must pay insurance year round on both camps; must keep utilities going all year at both camps; and must perform maintenance (constantly) on both camps. In addition staff salaries (without attributing salary for professionals who might work at camp) come to over \$20,000 a year and get higher every time there's a rule change which requires another person over 21 on staff.

How many work weekends can you run? We're already told that the volunteers (including myself) are involved in too many things and that our council level activities cut into the unit programs. Property requires constant attention, ask any landlord.

OK. So much for the trials and tribulations of a council president. Now to the idea part.

As I understand it, BSA is the second largest owner of undeveloped land in the United States of America following the US Parks Service. Add GSUSA properties to that and it's a lot of "wilderness" or open space. We are benefiting the public at large by keeping these lands undeveloped but WE are footing the bill.

Why don't we create a land preservation trust (like the Nature Conservancy) and sell the development rights to our land to people who may not be interested

in scouting but who may be interested in preserving open space. The trust could be written in such a way that WE retain the right to use the land for camping in perpetuity but give up the right to sell it or to develop it for commercial or residential use. It would be a kind of private national parks system. The money we realize for the sale of these rights could be used to deliver better program to kids.

There are similar government programs (in New Jersey it's called the Green Acres program) but funds for these are drying up. This would be in essence a "privatization" of those programs (How'm I doin' Newt?) It is in the public interest to keep our camps "natural." But that doesn't necessarily mean that the government has to do it. We need to find a body of people who see the value of preservation and have THEM put up the money for it. They're out there, I just know it.

Well that's my pitch. What am I looking for? I need comments, criticism, discussion. I need to find people in organizations that can help make the idea work. Maybe Wall Street types to create a "bond" to raise the funds. Maybe people with contacts in the Nature Conservancy. Maybe YOU!

YIS

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Date: Mon, 28 Oct 1996 19:31:43 -0500

From: "Bruce E. Cobern" <bec@PIPELINE.COM>

Subject: Re: Selling Camp Properties

At 02:02 PM 10/28/96 +0000, Jim Miller Sr. wrote:

>1. There is no conspiracy, or if there is no one has asked me to join it.

Agreed, although I remember, some time back, hearing some comments made about national, or region, preferring to have larger "regional" camps which would be used by the Scouts from several councils so that much of the land currently owned could be sold. This might just have been some sort of urban myth, coming from the urban that held the land - the same urban that would probably have become your council's "regional" camp if the policy had taken hold.

>2. In SOME cases, selling camp properties may make sense.
>After a merger, for example, a council can be saddled with
>excessive camp capacity and without the funds to support it.

This is absolutely true. I am generally opposed to selling camp properties because they can never be recovered, but I am pragmatic enough to understand

that it is real difficult to finance the holding of under utilized properties. Also, many councils are too small to operate a summer camp program for most of the summer and so they run for four weeks. That makes

it very difficult to hire staff, etc. It would be much more efficient to join forces with another similarly situated council and to run one GOOD camp

for the whole summer, rather than two SO SO camps for part of the summer.

This could lead to selling one of the camps. This has also, fortunately, been one of the consequences of (and maybe even one of the reasons for) many of the recent mergers.

However, I also believe that providing the opportunity for Scouts to have a quality summer camp experience is, or should be, one of the principal purposes for the existence of the council. Therefore, I am almost unalterably opposed to those councils who close down (whether the camp is

sold or not) their ONLY summer camp program. So, while I had only minor problems with Long River Councils (now Connecticut River Councils) closing down Lake of Isles (even though it was where WE camped) because they had two

other summer camps still in operation, I had major problems when Nassau County Council stopped running a summer camp operation at Oteora, or when Dutchess County Council (now part of Hudson Valley Council) shut down their only summer camp operation at Nooteming, or when Fairfield County Council shut down their only operation at Pomperaug, etc. (You can tell I'm in the NYC area from the councils involved in these decisions.)

The only time I can see this type of thing is when the council has made other definitive arrangements for their Scouts to have a summer camp experience by joining with a neighboring council to make more efficient use of a property, etc. Otherwise, if the council just tells its troops to go find another camp I believe they are abdicating a significant part of their responsibility as a council. But on to Jim's thoughts.

- >Why don't we create a land preservation trust
- >(like the Nature Conservancy) and sell the development
- >rights to our land to people who may not be interested
- >in scouting but who may be interested in preserving open
- >space. The trust could be written in such a way that
- >WE retain the right to use the land for camping in
- >perpetuity but give up the right to sell it or to develop
- >it for commercial or residential use. It would be a kind
- >of private national parks system. The money we realize
- >for the sale of these rights could be used to deliver better
- >program to kids.

This is a great idea, but not original. And, I'm not even sure we would have to create the groups to purchase the land. In many places those groups already exist, including the Nature Conservancy itself. There was, I believe, just such a sale in a council nearby to you. I believe that Westchester-Putnam Council sold the developmental rights to their Clear Lake Scout Camp in Putnam County (or maybe its Dutchess County) to just such an environmental group. They got the money they needed without actually having to turn over either of their camps. (Both Clear Lake and Siwanoy were, as I

understand it, on the block with the plan being to sell whichever one would yield the best deal.) Thus, the sale of the development rights at Clear Lake preserved, for the time being, both access to Clear Lake AND the ownership of Siwanoy.

- >Well that's my pitch. What am I looking for? I need
- >comments, criticism, discussion. I need to find people
- >in organizations that can help make the idea work.
- >Maybe Wall Street types to create a "bond" to raise
- >the funds. Maybe people with contacts in the Nature
- >Conservancy. Maybe YOU!

I think that it shouldn't be hard to find the organizations that exist already. If you contact an organization such as the Conservancy and express an interest in consummating this type of transactions they could probably put you in touch with the similar organizations in the camp's area which might be interested in purchasing.

Its a great idea and I would hope that it would catch on nationally to preserve both the wilds and the access of the Scouts to their camps.

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