

At Girl Scouts, our mission is to provide high-quality outdoor programming that fosters confidence, independence, and a love of nature. As we prepare for the upcoming camp season, we want to share the reasons behind essential changes to our summer camp programs. Some adjustments were necessary due to factors beyond our control; others were made in response to feedback from Girl Scouts, caregivers, volunteers, and staff.

This FAQ is designed to provide transparency about these decisions and help families understand why they were made. We recognize that change can bring questions and concerns, and we want to assure you that every decision was made carefully considering the impact on the Girl Scout Experience. We aim to maintain exceptional outdoor experiences while being fiscally responsible, ensuring camp remains accessible to as many Girl Scouts as possible.

***Throughout this FAQ, we will address:***

- Overall shift in our focus to in-camp programming
- How camp spots and program opportunities are determined
- Reasons for reducing field trips
- Changes to our tripping programs
- Challenges related to travel logistics, permits, and certifications
- Details on the costs associated with running camp, trips, and programs

We appreciate your trust in us and the Girl Scout Program. Our commitment to providing safe and meaningful outdoor experiences remains. If you have questions or concerns, contact us at [info@gsnwgl.org](mailto:info@gsnwgl.org) or 888.747.6945. We are here to answer your questions or help you find the best opportunity for your camper. Thank you for being part of [this adventure](#) with us!

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### **Focus On Camper-Led Adventures and In-Camp Experiences**

In response to national camp trends and feedback from campers, caregivers, and staff, we focus on in-camp programming with less over-scheduling and time on the road and prioritize our camper-led approach. This change primarily focuses on well-being, allowing campers to slow down, recharge, and immerse themselves in nature and adventure without the pressure of tightly scheduled activities or excessive time on the road going to field trips.

That said, camp will still be full of adventure, shenanigans, and challenges, and as always, campers will meet new friends that will feel like family at the end of camp! Campers will have plenty of opportunities to swim, hike, paddle, spend time around the campfire, get dirty, try new things, test their limits, step outside of their comfort zone, and make new friends. Camp is about pushing boundaries, both physically and emotionally, in a safe, supportive, and fun environment. Campers will be empowered to embrace new challenges and explore the great outdoors through a variety of activities (of their choice!), such as archery, axe-throwing, slingshots, kayaking, canoeing, low ropes course, nature hikes, campfire cooking, and all-camp games. Whether it's conquering a physical challenge or simply enjoying the adventure of being outdoors, every camper will be left with memories of personal growth, laughter, and a sense of accomplishment.

Here's what to expect at camp:

- **Restoration & Connection:** With increased awareness of stress, burnout, and mental wellness challenges, camp programming will emphasize unstructured time where campers are empowered to spend how they choose. Some may choose to rest and hang out with their friends; others may be ready to take on another skill or adventure! Research shows that breaks, especially in nature, support mental clarity and emotional well-being. Combined with all the adventures camp offers, campers will notice a slower pace with dedicated downtime.
- **Camper-Led Activities:** Campers will have more say in shaping their experiences and choosing activities that inspire creativity, collaboration, personal growth, and self-expression. Camp is a safe space with a positive atmosphere where campers can try new things. Under the guidance and support of counselors and role models, they'll learn they can fail and try again until they hit the mark or accomplish their goal.
- **Tech-Free Environment:** To create a space for presence and connection, camp will remain screen-free, reinforcing the benefits of unplugging from digital distractions.

*Through this approach, we aim to combine a love for the outdoors and adventure with a fulfilling and restorative camp experience—one that nurtures confidence, connection, and a lifelong love of the outdoors.*

## Camp Spots & Program Opportunities

We know that Girl Scout families want a variety of camp program options that provide exciting experiences while being accessible and high-quality. Each year, we carefully evaluate our participation trends, camper interest, staffing capacity, and all the logistics of running camp to determine which camp sessions we offer. Some programs remain strong, while others evolve or phase out based on participation and sustainability.

We work to ensure fair access to camp across all age levels, proportionally offering opportunities based on camper participation. Here's a look at the breakdown of campers in 2023 and 2024.

### ***2023 Camper Participation by Level:***

- Daisy (K-1): 6% (36 campers)
- Brownie (2-3): 21% (109 campers)
- Junior (4-5): 29% (152 campers)
- Cadette (6-8): 34% (179 campers)
- Senior (9-10): 6% (33 campers)
- Ambassador (11-12): 3% (14 campers)

### ***2024 Camper Participation by Level:***

- Daisy (K-1): 2% (11 campers)
- Brownie (2-3): 12% (64 campers)
- Junior (4-5): 28% (146 campers)
- Cadette (6-8): 42% (223 campers)
- Senior (9-10): 11% (56 campers)
- Ambassador (11-12): 5% (25 campers)

With Brownies, Juniors, and Cadettes making up the majority of campers, we have more sessions for these levels while still maintaining meaningful opportunities for younger and older campers.

## **Why Are Some Programs Changing or Being Reduced?**

**Older Girl Program Adjustments:** Senior and Ambassador programs consistently have the lowest registration. Feedback shows interest in non-leadership and non-wilderness options, but enrollment remains low. Many Cadette programs are travel-intensive, requiring significant staff time, transportation, and logistics. Due to rising costs and complexity, some field trip-based programs were reduced.

**Staffing & Program Limitations:** Fewer seasonal staff means fewer sessions can be offered overall. Program availability has slightly reduced at every age level. Cadettes, Juniors, and Brownies—our largest camper groups—have about two programs per week available.

**Program Popularity & Cancellations:** Programs with consistently low registration were adjusted or discontinued. In both 2023 and 2024, multiple sessions, including backpacking, canoeing, and specialty-themed programs, were canceled due to low enrollment. Some previously low-performing sessions were restructured or merged with similar, more popular options to improve the overall camper experience and program efficiency.

*Looking ahead, our goal is to provide exciting, high-quality outdoor experiences for all Girl Scouts while ensuring programs remain sustainable. We will continue refining camp offerings based on participation trends, camper feedback, and available resources. We appreciate your understanding as we work to create the best possible camp experience for every Girl Scout!*

## Field Trips

Field trips have been a beloved part of camp, but due to a combination of logistical challenges, rising costs, and staffing limitations, we've decided to significantly scale them back. We want to be transparent about what brought us to this decision and will continue to evaluate the possibility of field trips in future summer camp years. Above all, this change allows us to focus on creating a smoother, more sustainable, adventure-filled in-camp experience while maintaining the quality and safety of our programs.

**Staffing & Coordination Challenges:** Field trips require extensive planning, including transportation logistics and ensuring proper supervision. In past years, we needed up to three vans and a school bus each week, with two adults per vehicle—sometimes pulling as many as five to six staff members off-site for field trips. To meet supervision requirements, we relied on volunteers and council staff, which added complexity and made scheduling more difficult.

**Rising Costs & Financial Assistance Demand:** Transportation and field trip fees continue to rise, making it harder to keep these trips affordable. More families than ever are requesting financial assistance, and for the first time in our history, our assistance funds ran out last year. Redirecting resources ensures we can continue providing affordable, high-quality camp experiences for all campers.

**Logistical & Safety Considerations:** Many field trips required multiple daily departures, creating tight schedules, meal adjustments, and logistical strain. Insurance policy changes now prevent international staff from driving, and only staff 21+ years old can transport campers, limiting our available drivers.

*By reducing field trips, we're able to invest more in on-site programming, increase accessibility, and ensure every camper gets the most out of their camp experience. While camp may look a little different, the spirit of adventure remains—full of swimming, hiking, paddling, campfires, skill-building, and trying new things!*

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## Change in Pick-Up Time: From Friday at Noon to Thursday Evening

This year, we've decided to adjust our camper pick-up time from Friday at noon to Thursday evening, and we'd like to share some of the reasons behind this change.

**Program Focus and End-of-Week Activities:** By Thursday evening, most programming had concluded, and campers mainly focused on packing and cleaning. Programming beyond Thursday evening was minimal, which made it logical to shift pick-up. This change better aligns with the week's flow, allowing us to wrap up camp in a more relaxed, orderly manner.

**Flexibility for Families:** While some caregivers appreciated the Friday afternoon pick-up, as it allowed them to use time off or leave work early, others found it challenging to manage. Moving the pick-up to Thursday evening provides greater flexibility for families, especially those with less ability to take time off during the workday. This adjustment helps make the transition smoother for all families, offering an inclusive option that accommodates different schedules.

**Staff Well-Being and Sustainability:** With a limited team this year, we've had to adjust to ensure our team's well-being. Previously, we could rotate duties to manage back-to-back programming, including troop weekends and Outdoor Extravaganza, without overwhelming our team. However, with fewer staff members, we must provide our team with a full day off between programs for proper rest, camp turnover, and preparation for the next session. This break ensures that our staff can show up as their best selves, preventing burnout and maintaining the quality of camp experiences for our campers.

The shift to Thursday evening pick-up helps us better serve our campers and staff by streamlining our programming schedule, offering more flexibility for families, and providing essential rest for our team to avoid burnout. This change allows us to continue delivering high-quality camp experiences while maintaining a sustainable work environment for our staff.

## Tripping Programs:

The information below outlines some adjustments we have made to our tripping program. These changes were made for numerous reasons, with cost, time investment, and logistics being the most impactful. *For reference, GSNWGL charges campers \$1,000 for a wilderness trip experience. The actual cost to our organization is closer to \$4,000 per camper per trip when we factor in staff, equipment, etc.*

## Previous vs. New Levels

The updated tripping program refines skill progression, adjusts difficulty, and ensures age-appropriate challenges. Below is a comparison of the previous and new levels.

### Level One Wilderness Trips

Previous	New [age group: 6-7 <sup>th</sup> grade]
Skills:	Skills:
- Put up a tent so that it is secure and will stay dry	- Put up a tent so that it is secure and will stay dry
- Collect good firewood	- Collect good firewood
- Store gear for the night	- Store gear for the night
- Proper dishwashing and cleaning techniques	- Proper dishwashing and cleaning techniques
- Use and care for tents and ground clothes	- Use and care for tents and ground clothes
- Learn to prepare two simple meals that have easy ingredients	- Learn to prepare two simple meals that have easy ingredients
- Proper water filtration	- Proper water filtration
- Weather-related emergency preparedness	- Weather-related emergency preparedness
- Non-weather emergency preparedness (separated from group, illness or injury, lost or broken equipment, etc.)	- Non-weather emergency preparedness (separated from group, illness or injury, lost or broken equipment, etc.)
Duration: 2-3 days on trail	Duration: 2 days on trail
Suggested Daily Mileage: Kayak [4-6], Canoe [2-3], Hike [3-6]	Suggested Daily Mileage: Canoe [2-3], Hike [3-6]

### Level Two Wilderness Trips

Previous	New [age group: 7-8 <sup>th</sup> grade]
Skills:	Skills:
- Cache food securely and correctly	- Cache food securely and correctly
- Learn three meals to prepare	- Learn and cook four different meals, cook meals over a campfire
- Proper use and care for all equipment brought on trail	- Proper use and care for all equipment brought on trail
- Jackknife safety	- Jackknife safety
- Open a tin can with a can opener	- Open a tin can with a can opener
- Knots for caching and tarp shelters	- Knots for caching and tarp shelters
- Observed the stove being lit and a campfire being built and lit	- Observed the stove being lit and a campfire being built and lit
	- Start and use the stove safely
	- Start a campfire with matches
	- Read the map and understand the route, use a compass
Duration: 3-5 days on trail	Duration: 3 days on trail
Suggested Daily Mileage: Kayak [6-8], Canoe [3-5], Hike [5-8]	Suggested Daily Mileage: Canoe [3-6], Hike [5-10]

### Level Three Wilderness Trips

Previous	New [age group: 8-9 <sup>th</sup> grade]
Skills:	Skills:
- Read the map and understand the route, use a compass	- Learn and cook at least six different meals
- Start and use the stove safely	- Plan the route with help from peers
- Start a campfire with matches	- Plan the menu with help from peers
- Learn and cook four different meals, cook meals over a campfire	- Know all the equipment for the type of trip + proper care & use
Duration: 4-7 days on trail	Duration: 5-6 days on trail
Suggested Daily Mileage: Kayak [8-10], Canoe [4-6], Hike [7-10]	Suggested Daily Mileage: Canoe [4-8], Hike [7-12]
	<i>*Campers will also receive First Aid and CPR certification.</i>

### Level Four Wilderness Trips

Previous	New [age group: 8-9 <sup>th</sup> grade]
Skills:	Skills:
- Learn and cook at least six different meals	- Campers should be proficient in all camping skills needed for a successful trip.
- Plan the route with help from peers	Gain the skills necessary to plan and lead trips, wilderness or otherwise, for family and friends.
- Plan the menu with help from peers	
- Know all the equipment for the type of trip + proper care & use	
Duration: 4-7 days on trail	Assist with level 1 or 2
Suggested Daily Mileage: Kayak [10-12], Canoe [5-7], Hike [8-12]	*Weekend spent with just Trip Leader in Training group, white water rafting and camping on the Wolf River.

### Troop Leader In Training

### Level Five Wilderness Trips (discontinued)

Previous	
Skills: Campers should be proficient in all skills needed for a successful trip.	Duration: 12-18 days on trail
	Suggested Daily Mileage: Kayak [10-14], Canoe [5-8], Hike [8-12]

Here are a few additional notes about why we had to adjust our tripping schedule to remove these trips:

- Apostle Islands Kayaking:
  - New national park and lakeshore regulations require a Level 3 ACA Sea Kayaking Guide as the lead guide. This certification takes years of training and costs thousands of dollars, making it impractical for our seasonal staff.
  - Sea kayak maintenance is costly and time-consuming. The number of trips and available staff made it impossible to keep up with necessary repairs.
  - We can't access the islands for Level 4 Trips, which removes the option for Level 5 trips. Level 5 trips include travel to Canada, which takes two staff members two full days for drop-off and pick-up. International staff on visas cannot leave the country, limiting available trip leaders.
- Boundary Waters Canoe:
  - Entry permits must be booked by January 31st to secure the correct date and location.
    - If travel is delayed or the group isn't ready, we will lose our entry permit and cannot enter the Boundary Waters.
  - New bear food storage regulations require storing all food in approved, costly, bear-proof containers. Improper storage results in fines of up to \$5,000 and six months in jail, making compliance essential but costly.
  - Special Use Permits are now required for guides, and approval is not guaranteed.
  - Transportation logistics are complex and expensive:
    - The driver must be available for two full days for drop-off and pick-up.
    - Overnight stays in a hotel add extra costs and time to the trip.
- Isle Royale Backpacking:
  - Group size is limited to six unless group campsites are pre-booked.
    - Pre-booking restrictions limit flexibility.
      - For example, In September 2023, we submitted our planned route for approval, but the National Park did not approve the route we mapped.
      - Because sites must be booked so early, Girl Scouts could not participate in the route planning, a key learning experience at this level.
    - New regulations require a Commercial Use Authorization Permit, adding another layer of cost and administrative work.

*Since the Superior Hiking Trail is not a state or National Park, we are not limited to the number of people who can go on it. Additionally, there are no permit requirements that we do not meet. We decided to keep the Superior Hiking Trail as the trip for Level 3 backpacking.*

Alternative Options for Wilderness Adventure:

- Explore other travel and wilderness opportunities offered through [Girl Scout Destinations](#).
- Plan your own trip. We have [resources](#) to help!