

(1a)

I AM A GIRL SCOUT, AND I support the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.

We have **discovered** that we almost missed our chance to be heard by the property planning committee because communication from council was ineffective and vague. If we missed it, other girls and volunteers probably did too. We are certain there are many more whose suggestions and opinions need to be heard.

(1b)

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We have **discovered** that WAY too much time is spent with technology, and that stress and pressure to "make the grades" for college is really unhealthy, which makes outdoor experiences -- **CAMPING** -- much more important today than ever before. We have to experience nature and the outdoors to love it, and if we don't love it, we won't care about preserving it.

(2)

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We have **discovered** that putting down our cell phones, ipads, laptops and games and pausing from our finals, SAT's and college applications -- just for a day or two of fun in our beautiful, rustic camps, has made us step outside our comfort zone, taught us new skills, built lasting friendships and given us **confidence and character** to use in our every-day lives and into our future.

We have **discovered** a feeling that council has not done everything they can to make our camps attractive and valuable. No more eye-catching advertising, no more creative resident camps, basic eight skills or retreat weekends. Our camps are in disrepair and sit neglected and unloved.

(3)

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We have **connected** with each other and our leaders. We've spent many meetings brainstorming ideas and strategies to improve and enhance our properties. We've **connected** online with fellow scouts and caring adults, and we know other councils across our nation as well as GSUSA are facing the same struggles. We've read and shared articles, personal stories and comments.

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We want to **connect** with other councils who are having some success with their financial challenges without having to sell off their properties. We want to **connect** with others outside our Girl Scout community who run sustainable and profitable camp programs and learn how they do it.

More importantly, we want to **connect** with all of you, the property planning committee, and we want to have meaningful conversations about how, together, we might help to make our camps valuable to outside groups as well as our Girl Scout community.

(5)

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Let's **take action** and get girls and leaders crazy about camping. How about a camping and outdoor skills Journey? They could discover new environments (indoors and outdoors) and learn new skills; girls could connect with nature, themselves, each other, new friends, other caring adults; and take action through service projects at camp, and protecting the environment in their communities and beyond.

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Let's **take action** and use our savvy technology -- U-Tube, Twitter, instagram. There are already a few successful facebook sites sharing our story: "Help us Save Camp Lakota, Friends of Skyland Ranch, GSUSA, Are you Listening," and others. Together they have over a thousand hits, and more people are liking and sharing them every day. It's a huge resource. And it's free!

(7)

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Let's **take action** and launch a separate website for our properties. Do you know that when you google-search "Camp Grounds" or "Family Camping" or even "Girl Scout Camps", that over 20 facilities pop up and none of them are GSGLA properties, or even show an option to go to our website? Let's change that. When the public searches for things like "Family Camp, family reunion facilities, snow play accommodations, back packing trails, team building facilities, retreat centers, meeting facilities, wilderness survival, dry camping, cabin camping" and more, at the top of the search list, we could see "Camp Lakota, Skyland Ranch, Camp Osito Rancho, El Potrero" and links to all our fabulous program centers. We could offer online reservation services and we could probably raise our fees and still be more affordable than lots of camps out there.

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Let's **take action** and invest a little in improving our properties. That means fundraising. There's lots to do if our camps are going to compete, but we can do it gradually. We need an action plan! Let's roll up our sleeves!

We know you have other challenges to face, but if we could make this a priority for just a little while, we could launch a huge campaign and reach out to volunteers who will donate their time, services and goods to make these improvements happen. Let's really make the public understand the urgency of our situation. "Voices to Vision" doesn't immediately describe our plight. Something like "Facing the Fire Sale" might, and maybe more people will sit up and take notice.

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We are VERY grateful to have this opportunity to speak. We know that not all councils have let their membership be heard. We are also VERY grateful to councils across the nation and GSUSA whose efforts have kept our movement current, modern and relevant to the needs of girls and young women today. If Juliette Gordon Low were alive today, she would be very proud of that. But Juliette Gordon Low would NEVER have allowed us to stray from the importance of protecting nature and the environment and NEVER would have turned her back on the benefits of outdoor experience which is the foundation of Girl Scouting.

Thank you.

WORKS CITED

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"The Outdoor Journey Project," http://outdoor-journey.com/try_a_journey.html; Betsy Sheppard of Rockfield Kentucky.