

Report details needed Eagle Island upgrades

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An engineering report on the condition of the historic Great Camp property at Eagle Island Camp points out numerous upgrades needed at the site.

But it also indicates years of careful maintenance.

FRIENDS WANT CAMP

Built in 1904 for American financier Levi P. Morton, the property has been owned by the Girl Scouts since 1938. The recently merged Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey Council has opted to sell the property, a 31-acre island on Upper Saranac Lake.

A coalition of former campers called Friends of Eagle Island Camp has begun fundraising to buy the historic island and restore its buildings for continued use as an outdoor wilderness camp.

COST DISAGREEMENT

The engineering study, done by CT Male Associates of Latham, put the cost to reopen Eagle Island at near \$350,000, said Dorcas Hardy, chairwoman of the Friends group.

"But with lots of additions from the (Heart of New Jersey Girl Scout) council, including an entire new water system — after tearing down the historic water tower because the council considers it dangerous — and new electrical and some other items, the council (estimated) a restored Eagle Island Camp is more like \$750,000 to \$1 million.

"There are many updates and repairs needed, but our view is that much can be done by professional volunteers that are part of Friends group."

WATER BARREL

The most expensive project needing attention at Eagle Island Camp is the water-storage system, according to the engineering report.

Listed as an historic landmark, an antiquated wooden barrel is still an active part of the water system today.

"The existing water storage is a 2,800-gallon wooden barrel on top of a 40-foot tower," the report says. "The wooden barrel has rotted to the point where the top is missing and it is leaning on top of the tower.

"Based on age of the tank, it is recommended that the tank not be filled again because it would create an unsafe condition and not meet safe-drinking-water standards."

Instead, the report suggested putting in a new, elevated tank that does not use the existing tower.

"The cost for this option is estimated between \$150,000 and \$200,000. Because of the difficulty in performing heavy construction on the island, this cost could be significantly higher."

SEPTIC TANKS

In addition, the septic tanks for the main area of camp have to be pumped and cleaned, the report said, estimating the cost to pump the main system and two washhouse tanks at \$18,000.

The leach field for the main camp septic system is located under the archery range.

"The absorption field did not have any signs of failure or overuse," the engineers said.

But a distribution box that conducts effluent to the field was full of soil and needs to be checked once the wastewater-treatment system is back in operation, the report said.

ASBESTOS

The inspection found two locations with materials containing asbestos: one on the boiler and pipe insulation beneath the infirmary building and the other on asphalt roofing materials on a shed porch. The estimated cost for abatement was put at just more than \$10,000.

Traces of lead on the paint on the kitchen floor and the windows and door trim at the infirmary were above what is considered safe by the Environmental Protection Agency. Any restoration will have to follow lead-construction standards, the engineering report said.

"This requirement should be noted in any bid documents or specification."

The inspection also found \$95,000 worth of non-compliant electrical safety issues, mostly for installing new power poles and rewiring.

HISTORIC LANDMARK

Saranac Lake Historian Mary Hotaling, considered a regional expert on the renowned architect William L. Coulter, who designed and built Eagle Island Camp, spent some time at the property last summer with the engineering crew.

"They hired me as a subcontractor. What I did was make sure that they knew which buildings were part of the National Historic Landmark designation. We wanted to identify which buildings conformed to the list to know what is eligible for Save America's Treasures funding."

'REMARKABLY GOOD'

The historic buildings are sited on the southeast shore of the island, the engineering report notes.

"They are used for administrative functions and gatherings of the (Girl Scout) campers, who are housed in tents on platforms in the woods away from the historic buildings. This separation of uses is likely largely responsible for the remarkably good state of preservation of the historic buildings."

Hotaling said the condition of the historic structures is remarkable, especially given that they are mostly rustic in design and made of timber.

"They were well-built to begin with, and they were maintained," Hotaling said, giving credit to the Girl Scouts for 72 years of careful maintenance.

Part of the reason for the Great Camp's preservation is that it is used only in the summer months and not year-round, she added.

Eagle Island Camp is in many ways a museum piece still working as a summer camp, an interest the Friends Group hopes to preserve.

"The Girl Scouts used it rather lightly," Hotaling said. "They didn't try to house the girls in the buildings, and they did not make a lot of changes to suit their programs."

SUPPORT

Friends of Eagle Island have generated a survey for former campers to draw support for their effort.

Former camper and longtime Eagle Island liaison for the Girl Scouts Chris Hildebrand said support has grown quickly in a few short weeks.

"The Friends of Eagle Island are attempting to acquire Eagle Island and to run it as a camp for Girls, honoring the history and traditions of EIC and taking advantage of the wilderness and surroundings we all love."

Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey Council is forming a committee to oversee the sale of Eagle Island Camp.

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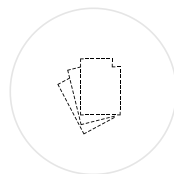


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