

Adirondack Daily Enterprise

Summer camps await guidance on whether they can open

Some have already canceled this year's sessions



A Boy Scout descends a rappelling wall at Massawepie Scout Camps in the town of Piercefild in July 2017. (Enterprise photo — Dana Hatton)

As local summer camps await direction on how, when and if they will open this summer, their directors are preparing for a multitude of possibilities, including altered or even virtual camps.

On Friday, while leaving his daily press conference, Gov. Andrew Cuomo gave some guidance, saying, *“Summer camp decisions will follow regional decisions.”* As non-essential businesses and activities are reopened in each region of the state, so will summer camps in that region, he said.

The state Department of Health regulates summer camps, and DOH Director of Communications Jonah Bruno said in an email, *“The opening of children’s camps this summer season is under consideration, and any decisions made will be part of the comprehensive plan to lift the Governor’s PAUSE order.”*

Some camps have already halted their summer season, such as Camp Guggenheim in Saranac Lake, run by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ogdensburg, and Camps Dudley (for boys) and Kiniya (for girls) in Westport, on the shore of Lake Champlain. Clarkson University has said it aims to run its academic camps, such as Horizons and Young Scholars, virtually but keep its sports camps in-person.

Camp Colby in Saranac Lake is run by the state Department of Environmental Conservation, and it’s waiting on a fellow state agency to make the call.



Camp Director Katrina Dearden is led by campers, blindfolded, around Eagle Island while playing “Hug a Tree” in July 2019. (Enterprise photo — Aaron Cerbone)

“At this time, DEC is continuing to plan for the summer youth camp program,” the DEC says on the Camp Colby website. “During the COVID-19 public health crisis, DEC will follow the NYS Department of Health’s recommendations for opening residential camps when guidance becomes available.”

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Massawepie

Massawepie, the Boy Scouts of America camp in Piercefield, is waiting on a domino effect of guidance from the state and counties, according to Stephen Hoitt, executive director of the BSA Seneca Waterways Council.

He said the state gives regulations for camps, and then counties interpret those regulations, sometimes differently. He said he works with St. Lawrence County, where Massawepie is, as well as Ontario and Seneca

counties, where his council's scout troops come from. He said the DOH has been *“very helpful.”*



Girl Scouts learn about basket weaving at Lake Clear Camp in July 2017. (Enterprise photo — Dana Hatton)

He said he is still hiring staff in hopes of operating this summer, but his number-one priority is a safe experience.

He said he is still getting calls from parents saying they want their children to have a camping experience.

“To some extent, you can’t blame families,” Hoitt said. “You know, they’re kind of cooped up at home, they want to get out and get back to a level or normalcy.

“For a lot of kids, they only have one or two summer camp years in their entire life.”

He said there is a *“go or no-go”* date all camps are looking at now, when they need guidance to make a decision by. He said Massawepie’s date is

June 1.



Kids pose smile at 4-H Camp Overlook in Mountain View in July 2017. (Enterprise photo — Dana Hatton)

Hoitt said if the camp opens, it will need to make changes, like only doing “*patrol cooking*” in smaller groups for meals instead of eating in the dining hall.

He also said they are looking into the possibility of gathering virtually while backyard camping.

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Eagle Island

Eagle Island Camp, in the middle of Upper Saranac Lake, reopened to campers last summer for the first time in 11 years, after several years of construction to restore the former Girl Scout camp. Starting with day camp sessions, Friends of Eagle Island Inc. planned to expand its offerings each

year, but the coronavirus has stalled construction on the island. Organizers are figuring out how camp will be run this year.



Young people help sand a wooden canoe being built at Camp Treetops in Lake Placid in July 2017. (Enterprise photo — Dana Hatton)

Executive Director Paula Michelsen said she anticipates running a camp of some sort, but that there are many options for how.

“We’ve got lots of ideas and contingencies, and contingencies of contingencies,” Michelsen said.

Camp Director Katrina Dearden said Eagle Island’s advantage is that it was already in transition mode when the virus hit.

Dearden said she is tuned into the *“camp world”* and is also waiting on guidance from the American Camp Association, which she said is waiting on guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Dearden said the camp is in a couple of holding patterns now as it awaits guidance. These guidances will need to be interpreted for island camping,

too, which she said is different than most camps.



Young people navigate a high-ropes course up in the trees at Saranac Village YoungLife camp on the shore of Upper Saranac Lake in July 2017. (Enterprise photo — Dana Hatton)

“I think it’s easier; I think it’s harder; I think it’s just different,” Dearden said.

For now, the camp is putting out activities on its website for campers to keep busy at home, including videos of camp staff singing silly songs, paper airplane instructions and outdoor scavenger hunts. On Saturday it is holding its first *“virtual campfire.”*

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