



May 20, 2025

Dear Widji Friend and Partner,

As the seasons change at Camp Widjiwagan, I find myself reflecting on an incredible past year made possible by the generosity and commitment of our equally incredible community of donors like you. Your support fuels every part of our mission, and I am eager to share with you some exciting updates as we head into what is sure to be another awesome summer ahead at Widji!

WELCOMING NEW LEADERSHIP

Last year, we welcomed **a new Executive Director** (that's me!), as well as **a new Program Director, Clara Pena-Hansen, and Canoe Master, Tom Grant**, to our team. Their passion and expertise have already had a profound impact on our community, enhancing the camper experience and strengthening our programs.

JOE SMITH ENDOWMENT SUCCESS

Our community's generosity was on full display as the **Joe Smith Endowment** soared past its initial goal of \$25,000 to **over \$60,000!** This fund will provide sustained support for Widji's programs and help future generations experience the wilderness in meaningful ways.

LOOKING AHEAD: WHAT'S IN STORE FOR SUMMER

This summer promises to be one of growth, learning, and adventure, with exciting initiatives that deepen our campers' experiences, including:

- **Specialized wildfire management training** to enhance our team's preparedness and environmental stewardship, fueled by **Brent Saxton's leadership** as our Wilderness Program Director.
- **Growing Community Council engagement**, giving campers a voice in shaping their experiences and fostering leadership skills.
- **Expanded backpacking opportunities**, building on our successful co-led Widji Trips model with additional advanced backpacking adventure offerings.

PROGRAMMATIC GROWTH THAT MATTERS

Thanks in large part to your support and that of other donors, we continue to expand key programs and initiatives that connect more people to the Widji experience, such as our:

- **Outdoor Learning Program (OLP)**, led by **Program Director Henry Hark**, which maintains a full calendar and receives consistently positive feedback, continuing to welcome participants from **4th graders to seniors**, engaging them in outdoor education, skiing, and environmental stewardship.
- **BOLD & GOLD Internship Program**, which continues to draw a **high number of applicants** (with 25+ candidates applying for just six spots!) and aims to foster diversity and inclusion across all that we do, reflecting the broader community we serve.
- **Land and Water Acknowledgment**, which we are currently revisiting and revitalizing, is being increasingly utilized to inspire environmental stewardship and respect within our community of staff and campers.

(continued on backside)

YOUR IMPACT: EXPANDING ACCESS & GROWING COMMUNITY

Your generosity has helped transform and improve Widji in many significant ways, including:

- **The Sauna Project:** Thanks to donor support, construction is back underway! **Jake Cahill, Property Manager**, is leading the project, collaborating with **Rehkamp Larson Architects** on their generous design support and local vendor **Kovall Construction** to ensure completion in 5–8 weeks, just in time for summer!
- **The Annual Fund & Widji Wayfinders:** Contributions to our Annual Fund are critical in helping us maintain our programs and expand access for all campers through scholarships. Continued donor support is essential to keep up with the rising demand for financial assistance. We invite all our generous supporters (like you!) to join us in our **new Donor Ambassador Program** called the Widji Wayfinders, which will provide opportunities to engage with fellow alumni and supporters, as well as explore new ways to get involved. It's easy to sign up at www.tinyurl.com/3v3su6sw or connect with me directly for more information.
- **Building Community via Community Council Expansion:** Widjiwagan's Community Council Directors are dedicated individuals with a passion for our mission and programming. They are committed to being a supportive and inviting group that helps **advise, advocate, and support** Widji's strategic direction and mission delivery. We are looking to add members! If you or anyone in your network might be interested, please complete or share this interest form: www.tinyurl.com/r9vbwnhk

MISSION MOMENTS: BRINGING WIDJI TO LIFE

As you know, Widji isn't just about canoeing and backpacking — it's about personal growth, resilience, and community. Below are some recent examples of our mission in action that I am humbled to share with you.

- **Widji Warm-Up:** In February, we hosted an awesome event that reconnected alumni and engaged supporters with our work and mission, strengthening our network of passionate community members.
- **OLP Success Stories:** Seeing participants of all ages step into the wilderness and discover new strengths through our Outdoor Learning Program is a persistent and wonderful reminder of why we do this work. Here are some **chaperone and student quotes** that convey the broader impact of this programming:
 - "The programming taught basic science and culture ideas to our 4th–6th graders, but students also learned to appreciate one another and trust themselves and their resilience."
 - "The staff are excellent, and I genuinely enjoyed being a chaperone on this trip. I view Widjiwagan as a valuable way for kids to learn important life skills, and the bonus is that they get to play in the natural surroundings while learning all these skills!"
 - "I loved it because everyone was so welcoming, and I always felt included."
 - "I liked Widji because you got to be in the wilderness outside, and I had never experienced that fully before."

Through all of the transitions this past year, our team has weathered every storm and made incredible progress toward our mission. **We couldn't have done it without you, truly.** Speaking with Widji community members, I am constantly reminded of the deep and lasting impact this place has on so many lives. Your ongoing support helps ensure these transformational experiences continue.



Thank you for being a part of our community, helping make every adventure, every learning moment, and every lasting memory possible through your generosity. We can't wait to see what the rest of the year brings!

Together, we will continue to inspire, challenge, and connect people to the wilderness.

With deep appreciation and excitement for the adventures ahead,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Hoffman".

Ben Hoffman, Executive Director

WIDJIWAGAN
YMCA WILDERNESS ADVENTURES