The Power of Outdoor Play

By Alison Thomas, Education Coordinator

Research suggests that when children spend time outdoors they are better able to solve problems, think creatively, and experience better health, such as improved vision and lung strength. Although the concept of spending time outdoors as being healthy is an easy notion to believe, it’s nice to read the statistics that prove it too. However, at GMCC no scientific studies are necessary to see the physical and mental benefits everyone is experiencing from their time outdoors learning about Vermont’s natural resources.

Whether you spend an hour or day at camp, the staff and campers’ energy and enthusiasm are telling enough, and it’s clear that everyone is having a really good time playing outdoors. Sometimes the “playing” is more focused during a hunter education or forestry class, and other times it’s less structured, like when campers immerse themselves in mud during a wetlands ecology activity.

GMCC proves that outdoor play is a powerful educational method for subjects ranging from science to ethics. The value of connecting with natural resources in new, challenging and interesting ways is fostered when the fun happens alongside staff who can help interpret the unknown while you are exploring natural areas, hiking tough trails, and learning new outdoor skills.

GMCC staff, JCs, and campers had another great summer, one which I am confident none of them will forget. We can thank a lot of time playing with a dedicated staff in the forests and lakes for the memories.

GMCC By the Numbers

Basic Session Campers = 610
Advanced Session Campers = 263
Boys Attending = 609
Girls Attending = 264
Hunter Combo Certifications = 568
Trapper Certifications = 127
Waterfowl Certifications = 136

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GMCC just ended the 49th year of camp. That’s 49 years of introducing young people to the outdoors. It’s not uncommon to hear from parents on graduation day who say they are pleased their child had a similar unforgettable experience that they did when they attended camp.

Has GMCC changed over the years? Yes, there is no denying that, but I believe the changes have been for the better. Thankfully, some of our staff have been involved with GMCC since they were campers, and it is so dear to their hearts that many traditions hold fast. A perfect example is the final fire during advanced week at Buck Lake. Every Thursday night during advanced week there is a final ceremony when the campers tell the staff exactly what camp means to them, and then they add a stick to the roaring fire. It truly is amazing to hear why campers feel camp is so special, because it’s often an unexpected reason.

Kehoe has an incredibly unique canoe trip during advanced week in which everyone paddles from the docks to Lake Bomoseen State Park. Once at the Park, they portage to Glen Lake and camp overnight.

I could talk all day about ways GMCC is unique, but for me there are two major aspects that stand out, and those are our Junior Counselor (JC) program and volunteer work weekend. Our JCs take time off from their busy summer schedules to volunteer at the camp they loved as campers by assisting with teaching classes and completing work projects. Once again this year, GMCC had about 100 JCs in the program, many of which volunteered for multiple weeks.

Every year GMCC hosts two volunteer work weekends, one at each camp. In only two days volunteers accomplish many large projects, which allow us to keep GMCC in a condition that we can all be proud of for years to come. Some major accomplishments this year at Kehoe include a new canoe rack, a Lets Go Fishing shed, and a slate roof and trim work for our woodshed near the campfire pit. At Buck Lake many doors were repaired, difficult tree removal was done by a skilled forester, and new shutters on the cabins were installed. All of these projects happened along with a lot of deep cleaning throughout camp.

Both of these programs are completely voluntary, require travel and time, and include a lot of hard work. It is because we have dedicated staff can educate Vermont’s resources. thank JCs and volunteers and we look forward to seeing many familiar faces along with new ones in 2016.
To commemorate GMCC’s 50th Anniversary next year, the department is creating a short film, and asking for your help! If you are a GMCC camper or staff alum with photos or stories to share, please send them to Ali at Alison.Thomas@vermont.gov.

New Projects

New interpretive panels were installed at Kehoe’s trailhead and on the deck. The panels invite visitors of the trail to interpret wildlife signs and sounds, and learn more about forest succession and Kehoe's land management plan. The deck panel provides the names of the peaks seen from the overlook as well as the geological history of the unique Taconic Mountain Range.

Kehoe campers build shelters out of forest materials.

Warden Schichtle and Magooch demonstrate F&W K-9 duties.

Kehoe trailhead and deck panels

The GMCC program will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2016! There are a lot of fun projects happening now that will be ready by camp season next summer.

- A new GMCC logo will be unveiled;
- The new Buck Lake Dining Hall & Education Center will be complete;
- Kehoe will have a new 100 ft x 100 ft wildlife garden planted to provide educational opportunities, decrease the lawn and mowing requirements, and beautify the area;
- An aquatic ecology & angling interactive educational display will be completed in the classroom at Kehoe; and more!

Kehoe advanced week campers practice waterfowl decoy patterns.

Advanced week campers from both camps put their outdoor skills to the test during the legendary “Woodsmen Competition.”
Lasting Memories

By Kim Barrett, Hunter Education Technician

Although my title has changed from Natural Resource Instructor to Director to Hunter Education Technician, my ties to GMCC have kept me close to camp. This summer I visited camp multiple times for both advanced and basic weeks. It was wonderful to see new smiling faces and to catch up with returning campers, junior counselors and Natural Resource Instructors. I spent the summer at camp co-teaching Waterfowl and Crossbows for advanced week, as well as taking footage for GMCC’s 50th year anniversary film.

During basic weeks, GMCC staff use a welcoming fire on the first night as a way for campers to introduce themselves, and share what they are looking forward to for the week. It also serves as a metaphor to help campers understand that although we come from different walks of life and experiences, our week together is spent learning with and supporting one another. We leave camp with new experiences that enrich our lives as each stick enriches and enlivens the welcome fire.

I spent the last week of the summer at Buck Lake for a girls advanced week. I had the opportunity to participate in Buck’s final fire ceremony. This fire represents the culmination of each campers experience from basic week to their advanced week. It provides campers with the chance to reflect on their growth and share their reflections. I listened as several campers reflected on their personal growth at camp. Several of them describe GMCC as a safe place to face fears, make friends, and most importantly, learn to accept themselves and others. Campers, Junior Counselors and NRIs alike shared their triumph, gratitude, and reflections together at the fire. I wouldn’t have ended my summer any other way!

Attention Educators

You can become a camper for a week, and learn how to integrate wildlife management education into your classroom while earning 3 graduate level credits through the University of Vermont. Preservice, non-formal, and pre-kindergarten through grade 12 teachers are invited.

For the continuing education experience of a lifetime, contact Ali Thomas for details: Alison.Thomas@vermont.gov or call 802.371.9975.