

Camp Crystal

Frankfort, MI

<https://www.crystalconferencecenter.org>

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The Christian Church

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Community Need:

Camp Crystal has 70 acres protected by a conservation easement through the Grand Traverse Land Conservancy. This land has been connected to the camp for over 100 years, yet much of it has never been utilized to its full potential. Developing a sustainable trail system would provide campers with greater opportunities to explore and appreciate the property while also making this beautiful, untouched old-growth forest more accessible to the surrounding Frankfort and Cottagers Association community. The trail system would encourage outdoor recreation, environmental education, and a deeper connection to the natural landscape while preserving the ecological character of the property.



In recent years, Camp Crystal has also made strides to become a place where both children and adults can come to reconnect and learn about God's creation. Along with building the trails as a community, educational and spiritual signage will be added along the trails with information about the flora and fauna around them and scripture to reflect on

Solution:



Using the very limited existing trails, landmarks, topography, and proposed site for a viewing tower, a new set of trail loops were sustainably designed. Keeping in mind accessibility, the “learning loop” was designed to be a shorter trail close to the center of camp with a focus on a simple tread for younger youth to enjoy. The half-mile trail also has access to the prayer circle, parts of the adventure course, and the access road. Educational signage focuses on ideas that children are interested in and can easily grasp. The “lookout loop” is a longer trail with the idea of use for older youth and adults, along with other groups that rent our camp, like cross-country and mountain biking teams. This loop also comes to the highest point of the property where a lookout tower is proposed to be built. The trail was designed with special consideration of the camp topography, while also offering hikers environmental transitions and diversity throughout the property. Together, these loops create a sustainable trail system that encourages exploration, recreation, and environmental education for all ages.

Collaborators:



Collaborators on this project include representatives from the Grand Traverse Land Conservancy, Surveyors from Fishbeck, Armond Aronson from Cascade Christian Church, and people of all ages from every single Christian camp this season. I brought my knowledge of trail development and GIS through my major in Environmental Soil and Water Science and minor in Sustainable Trails at West Virginia University.



Grand Traverse - proposed trail approval for appropriate sustainability for property on a conservation easement, providing property boundaries, trail consulting
Fishbeck - detailed topographic mapping, teaching and assisting with land surveying
Armond - sign building
Campers - building the trails !!

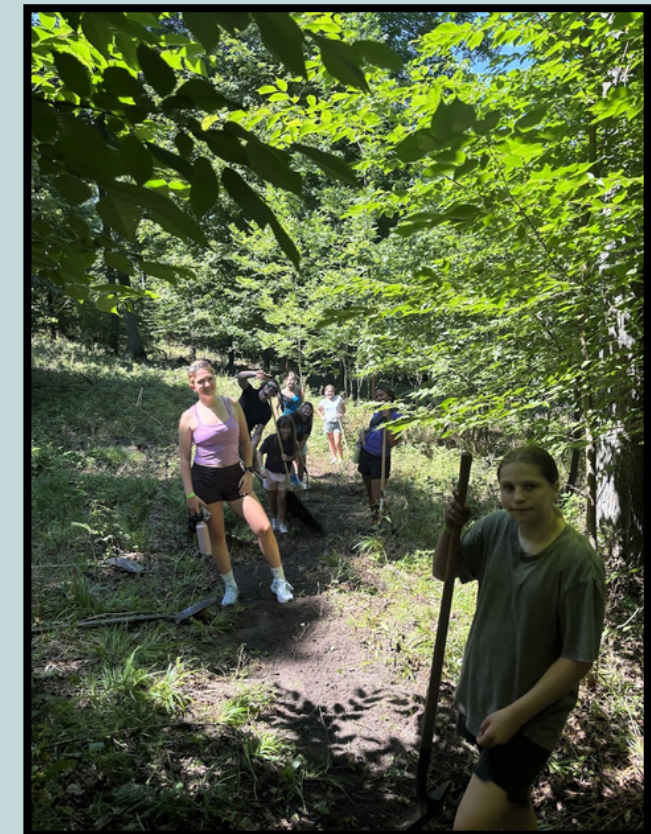


Connection and Impact:

The new trail system will create a lasting connection between Camp Crystal, its campers, and the surrounding community by making the camp's 70 acres of protected forest more accessible for outdoor recreation, environmental education, and ministry. The Learning Loop will provide younger campers with a safe and accessible space to explore nature, while the Lookout Loop will offer opportunities for older youth, adults, and visiting groups. The project's impact can be measured through the number of campers, community members, and visiting groups who use the trails each year, as well as the educational programs and activities supported by the new trail system. In total, we had five camps with over 270 campers of all ages who worked and enjoyed the new trails!



Elementary Camp
Day Camp
Beloved Community Camp
Middle School Camp
High School Camp
Family Camp



Presence of God:

I noticed the presence of God most clearly through the relationships and community that grew out of this project. I saw God working through the teamwork and collaboration between campers who, at the beginning of the summer, had never even spoken to one another.

Watching them work together, encourage each other, and build new friendships was incredibly meaningful. The conversations we shared about Christ, nature, faith, and everything in between were some of the most beautiful parts of the experience. I also spent a lot of time in the woods and found countless moments where I could see God's handiwork throughout the ecosystem and appreciate the complexity and beauty of His creation. I felt especially blessed to have time for my own reflection and connection with God while also creating opportunities for campers to slow down, explore, and reconnect with God through nature.

