

Hey Manito-wish Staff, it's Luke Wade! Karen is taking a well-deserved vacation to sunny California so for this staff email instead of her thoughtful, comprehensive writeup of what's been happening at Camp lately you get whatever I come up with for this *fashionably* late January staff email.

With that said, in this email...

- Highlights from the 2026 Staff Retreat!
- Program Director Updates.
- Projects in progress for this summer.

2026 Staff Retreat

We had a small but mighty group of Manito-wish staff for this year's staff retreat, with Anna Amfahr, AJ Hanratty, North Seiberlich, Spencer Roane, Peter Thomson, Sarah Weh, and Sarah Earing in attendance. Topics of discussion included (But were not limited to) staff training, kayaking trips, section games, and supporting a positive Camp culture, particularly in terms of encouraging collaborative problem-solving. Below is a sentence or two on each of these, and given that I can't recount the entirety of everything discussed at the staff retreat I encourage you to connect with any of these people or Sean, Karen, or myself if you want to learn more.

- **Staff Training:** We want to continue focusing on building relationships and community between staff, both during sessions and at meals, as well as using more of the Camp property (North fire ring, looking at you). We also want to try and shift training sessions to be less lecture based, and more focused on interactive learning to keep everybody engaged.
- **Kayaking Trips:** Concerns were discussed about the absence of an Expeditionary Kayaking trip, and that a lack of an Expo to work towards may discourage camper interest in Advanced kayaking trips. This provided an opportunity for full-time staff to hear these concerns and share that we have no intention of getting rid of kayaking, rather that the focus is on safe, high quality programming.
- **Section Games:** All sorts of ideas were brainstormed, including LARP'ing (Live Action Role Playing, for anyone who may not know), Pioneer Day challenges, Camp Clue, and a Scavenger Hunt to reassemble Mike Manitowish. The intention here is to provide a greater variety of activities to increase camper engagement rather than Wells Fargo and Frosty Ball making up most of the section games.
- **Positive Camp Culture:** Here we talked about wanting to move forward from the 'Us vs. Them' culture and towards a culture that tries to more collaboratively overcome challenges, because we are all here for the same reason. One strategy that stood out was providing clear communication about the 'Why' behind various changes to things like staff training or operational policies to encourage understanding. Another recurring point of discussion was setting clear staff expectations while also finding ways to allow staff freedom both during sessions and staff training.

Program Director Update

As some of you may have heard, life is carrying the beloved Kevin Gibbens along a different path and he will not be returning to the Summer Camp Program Director role for 2026. Kevin's devotion to the Manito-wish experience, cheerful personality, wealth of operational knowledge, and skillful guitar playing will all be sorely missed. Having been at Camp long enough that campers of his are now returning staff members, words seem inadequate to properly express the positive impact Kevin had here and how grateful we are all to have had the opportunity to work alongside and learn from him. Kevin, you are a delightful person and I hope to see you return for a visit.

Projects In Progress

As Jeff Pereles told me a bit over a year ago, when summer ends things don't get less busy they are just busy in a different way. With that in mind, everyone at Camp is juggling multiple projects, with highlights including working to meet our goal of 375 summer campers, revamping our staff evaluation process to better support seasonal staff growth, renewing our Firewise grant to support brush removal around property, building a bear on wheels for Outpost staff bear spray training, hiring training trip leaders, and interviewing literally hundreds of applicants to find the best staff for the upcoming summer.

Okay everybody, that's what I've got for you today, thank you for reading! As always, if you have any questions please feel free to reach out.

[Luke Wade](#), Wilderness Risk Director

[Sean Diamond](#), Camp Director

[Karen Christopherson](#), Director of Operations

P.S. Enjoy a few pics from our Winter Staff Retreat. We laughed, we prepared meals together, we talked, we explored challenges and solutions, we skated, we stretched, we did a winter re-set and enjoyed one another!





**Mass email sent to all hired staff for 2026 camp season.

and in a separate and identical email:

**Mass email sent to all 2025 staff eligible for rehire and currently in the hiring process for 2026 camp season.

Hi Manito-wish Crew,

I have three things for you.

First, check out the most recent Seasonal Staff Update below.

Second, we know that summer plans fluctuate throughout the year and if your thoughts and plans regarding a summer at Manito-wish have changed, reach out.

Third, following this email, we will officially transition your address to seasonal staff alumni communications unless your plans change. We will miss you. We are here if you need anything. This includes references, professional connections within our expansive alumni network, or simply a chance to talk.

**Mass email sent to 2025 staff eligible for rehire in 2026.

(not included in the email – this is for those that either dates didn't work or they declined the offer presented)

Hi Manito-wish Crew,

I have three things for you.

First, check out the most recent Seasonal Staff Update below.

Second, if you are still exploring your summer plans and are still considering returning for another summer, now is the time! **Submit your [REHIRE TODAY](#)**. Staffing numbers are looking solid, and we don't want you to miss out. We are currently 97% hired for Boys Camp Counselors and 76% hired for Girls Camp Counselors! We also have a few open admin positions. If your availability is limited, you are 21, and you have a clean driving record, you might enjoy being one of our celebrity drivers.

Third, following this email, we will officially transition your address to seasonal staff alumni communications. We will miss you. We also understand that life may be taking you to new places beyond summers at Manito Wish. We are here if you need anything. This includes references, professional connections within our expansive alumni network, or simply a chance to talk.

**Mass email sent to 2025 staff eligible for rehire in 2026.