Introduction to the National Camp Accreditation Program

In late 2012 and 2013, the Boy Scouts of America will begin transitioning to the new National Camp Accreditation Program to accredit long-term camps for Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Varsity Scouts, and Venturers and day camps and family camps for Cub Scouts. Scouting’s goal in this transition is summarized in the purpose of the NCAP:

*The purpose of the Boy Scouts of America’s National Camp Accreditation Program is to help councils bring camps to new levels of excellence in delivering Scouting’s promise to youth. Councils will engage in rigorous review of camps and properties, continuous improvement, and correction or elimination of substandard practices.*

This *Introduction to the NCAP* outlines the major elements of the NCAP and the critical role the council, the area, and the region will play in raising BSA camping to an ever higher level of performance.

**Elements of the NCAP**

The NCAP consists of the following elements:

- The *national camp standards* provide for a consistently safe and quality camping and outdoor program for youth. They represent the minimum program that Scouting will deliver to youth who choose to participate in our program.

- The *application* challenges the council to convert the consistently safe and quality program required by the national camp standards to a good or great dynamic and relevant program by committing to concrete steps for quality and improvement.

- The *application review* by a team of trained region and area specialists provides a “reality check” that the council’s camping program has evident quality and is viable and sustainable.

- The *Authorization to Operate* issued by the region provides clarity, consistency, and accountability in the application of the national camp standards to each camp and sets forth the program quality, facility quality, and financial sustainability commitments the council has made to operate a safe, high-quality, and dynamic program for youth.

- The *Continuous Camp Improvement Program* provides a series of tools that, if used well, will help the council continuously improve the safety, quality, and relevance of its camping program by focusing on its customers and meeting their expectations for what a Scouting camp should deliver.

- The *camp assessment process* conducted by the area provides an annual verification that camp meets the national camp standards and commitments made in the council’s Authorization to Operate and provides valuable feedback to local councils on improving program implementation and program design.
• The accreditation or accreditation with silver or gold recognition awarded by the area at the conclusion of the camp assessment provides concrete recognition that a council’s camp is delivering Scouting’s promise to youth and is an important assurance to parents and interested parties of the safety and quality of the council’s camping program.

• The questionnaire and reporting program provide the council, area, region, and BSA nationally objective measures of the council’s camping success to assist the council in improving its program and the BSA in identifying dynamic and relevant programs that will attract and retain youth in Scouting.

As can be seen from this description, the NCAP is more than just a repackaging of the BSA’s traditional camp standards; it is a process designed to help councils, with the assistance of the area and region, develop a safe, high-quality, dynamic, and relevant program that appeals to youth, encouraging membership growth and retention. In short, the purpose of NCAP is to ensure that we deliver Scouting’s promise to youth everywhere.

To achieve this purpose, the NCAP operates on two cycles: a multiyear application and Authorization to Operate cycle, where the council focuses on developing the safest and highest possible quality program while assuring sustainability; and an annual assessment, continuous improvement, and accreditation cycle, where the council works to continuously improve its program, and the area verifies that the council is implementing its program as planned, provides feedback on strengths and possible improvements, and grants accreditation to deserving programs.

The NCAP Multiyear Cycle

The NCAP process starts with the council submitting an application to its BSA region. The application contains a description of all the council’s camps for which it is seeking an Authorization to Operate and ultimately accreditation. For each camp, the application will describe the program goals, the facilities, and how the council will meet the national camp standards; will identify any recommended practices the council intends to adopt; and will set forth additional quality commitments the council intends to meet to provide the safest and highest possible quality program to participants. The application requires approval by the Scout executive and the appropriate council officer.

The Authorization to Operate represents a determination by the National Council, through its region or appropriate national committee, that the council has demonstrated that its camp(s) meet the requirements for accreditation or accreditation with recognition. The Authorization to Operate identifies additional commitments, if any, made by the council concerning the operation of its camp(s). The terms and conditions of the Authorization to Operate are treated in the same fashion as standards. Authorizations to Operate remain valid for a definite term (up to five years), unless the region determines there is a basis to revoke the Authorization to Operate or to issue an Authorization to Operate for fewer than five years.

In addition, the Authorization to Operate may clarify how a particular standard applies to a camp or may include a variance, exemption, or waiver from a standard. If questions arise on the application of a standard to a camp, the authorization should be consulted to determine if it provides resolution. The Authorization to Operate is binding on both the council and the camp assessment team. Effective 2017, a council must have an Authorization to Operate and must
file both the Notice of Intent to Operate and Declaration of Readiness for its camp to be accredited. The Notice of Intent to Operate and the Declaration of Readiness are discussed below.

The NCAP Annual Cycle

The NCAP annual cycle involves the following elements: post/pre-camp inspection, Notice of Intent to Operate, Declaration of Readiness, developing and implementing the Continuous Camp Improvement Program during camp operation, assessment and accreditation, and annual reporting. The steps in the typical annual cycle are discussed further below.

The NCAP annual cycle starts with the Notice of Intent to Operate, which will typically be completed in the fall of the year. In the notice, the council lists all the camps it intends to operate during the next program year. This may include day camps, family camps, resident camps, trek camps, specialty and high-adventure camps, COPE and/or climbing courses, and year-round camps. The notice is used by the area to coordinate local council self-assessment of day and family camps and area assessment of resident, trek, specialty and high-adventure, and year-round camps and COPE and/or climbing courses.

The Declaration of Readiness is the next element in the annual cycle. It is filed typically 30 to 60 days before camp is ready to open, typically after the post/pre-camp inspection is completed. In it, the council declares that the camp is ready to open and will offer a program that meets the requirements of the national camp standards and its Authorization to Operate. Any exceptions are noted. In addition, councils are encouraged to submit as much as possible of the administrative material covered during camp assessment with the declaration to free up time during the assessment for visiting program areas.

The camp assessment typically will occur within the first weeks of camp operation. A team led by trained area volunteers will come to the camp and assess its operations. The team will evaluate how well the camp complies with the national camp standards and the camp’s Authorization to Operate. Equally important, the assessment team will evaluate how well the program design approved in the Authorization to Operate is actually implemented and will make recommendations to the council on possible improvements. Similarly, the assessment team will make non-mandatory recommendations on possible improvements in program design, all consistent with Scouting’s commitment to continuously improving its camping program quality. Finally, the assessment team will issue the camp’s accreditation letter or, for resident, trek, specialty, or high-adventure programs that meet additional criteria, an accreditation with silver or gold recognition, which recognizes program excellence above and beyond.

If there are issues at the camp, the assessment team will work with the council to address them. A camp that promptly corrects items that are not serious will maintain its accredited status. A camp that cannot correct items promptly or that has a history of shortcomings may be recommended to the region authorization review team for placement into conditional accreditation or, in serious cases, possible reopening or revocation of its Authorization to Operate. In cases of possible threat to life or health, the camp assessment team may direct that the program causing such threat be closed until the threat is removed as part of BSA’s commitment to the safety of its participants. Area leadership will be notified immediately and provide oversight in this situation.

Local councils will conduct a similar self-assessment process at each day camp and family
camp and provide the results to the National Council and the area. Each council is encouraged to appoint a council assessment coordinator to work with the area assessment coordinator and help facilitate area assessments of resident, trek, and similar camps and ensure that the council conducts all required assessments of day and family camps. Councils are encouraged to conduct similar assessments of other council-organized activities under the direction of their council assessment coordinator with the assistance of the council camping and enterprise risk management committees. These assessments are not reported as part of the NCAP.

At the conclusion of camp, the council will file its annual camping report that provides information on its successes. The National Council will design and provide some specific questions to assist in nationwide efforts to improve BSA camping and build its excitement, dynamism, and relevance for youth.

**Transitioning to the NCAP**

In the summer and fall of 2012, 13 councils are piloting the new national camp standards and the application and authorization process. Based on the results of the pilots, any necessary changes will be made prior to general implementation in 2013.

Starting in 2012, the regions will recruit and begin training authorization review teams. Similarly, the areas will recruit area accreditation coordinators, who will begin training new assessment teams and offer training to local councils.

In the fall of 2012, the National Camp Standards Task Force will sponsor several webinars for region, area, and council personnel responsible for implementing the NCAP. Webinar sessions will include general overview, council application and self-assessment, the area assessment and accreditation process, and the authorization review process. Additional training is anticipated at Top Hands and at a Philmont Training Center course September 16–25, 2012. All region chairs and coordinators, regional authorization review team members, area accreditation chairs, and council directors of camping are encouraged to attend the Philmont course.

In late 2012, each council will be required to file its Notice of Intent to Operate for camps offered in 2012. This process will use the new form.

In late 2012 and early 2013, area accreditation personnel will contact councils to assist in evaluating which national camp standards will apply to each camp.

Beginning in early 2013, all camps will be required to meet the new national camp standards, except that the requirement to have an Authorization to Operate is waived until such time as the region requests the council to submit its application. Councils will file the Declaration of Readiness by May 15, 2013, or as directed by their area.

Councils will be required to file their applications with their respective region by the date specified by the region. Half the councils are anticipated to file in 2014 and half in 2015. Any council interested in filing an application earlier, such as in 2013, is encouraged to contact their area and region accreditation chairs. Early application is encouraged.

Please contact your area accreditation chair if you have questions. If additional guidance is needed, please contact Outdoor Programs, and a staff member or National Camp Standards Task Force member will provide assistance.