

Message from the Board of Trustees to the Farm & Wilderness Community.
October 26, 2007

Dear Friends,

Over the past several years, the Farm & Wilderness Board of Trustees has been deeply engaged in the process of reviewing the practice of suitless swimming at F&W. We have heard from many members of our community for whom this is a cherished tradition. We have also heard from our current program staff about the salutary qualities of this practice: helping campers to become comfortable with their bodies, demystifying their young-adult body within our community, and engendering a sense of respect for others. These are significant benefits. However, the Board has also heard from many children and parents who feel deeply uncomfortable about suitless swimming. We have learned that suitless swimming creates an insurmountable barrier to enrollment at F&W for many. Such a barrier is in conflict with one of our highest priorities: creating an inclusive and diverse community.

At the October Board Meeting, the trustees engaged in thoughtful discernment on this topic. An important aspect of the discussion focused on how it might be possible to end suitless swimming at F&W, yet still retain our cherished emphasis on physical self-respect and respect for others. After much talk and prayer, the Board gathered the sense of the meeting that we must end the ordinary practice of suitless swimming at this time. While the decision was made to end suitless swimming as it has been traditionally practiced at Farm and Wilderness, it is contemplated that individual camps may still have occasional skinny-dipping to the extent that it serves programmatic purpose.

Each of the camps is now developing a Program Plan to transition smoothly away from our prior policy regarding suitless swimming. Part of this plan will be to define when skinny-dipping would be appropriate within the context of each camp program, and to determine how best to ensure that the positive values identified with suitless swimming will not fade.

Change is never easy. However, the F&W Board of Trustees, which is majority alumni, strongly believes that our new swimming policy is the best way to balance the many important values our community holds dear. As a practical matter, current campers will notice little difference in the program as the actual practice of suitless swimming at many of the individual camps had waned sharply in recent years, another important factor in the board's deliberations. We ask that you hold our staff in the Light as they make this transition.

In closing, we want to emphasize that the Board's decision was the result of consideration over many years and was informed by hundreds of discussions with our stakeholders. While staff helped enormously as we sought clarity and consensus, this was the Board's decision alone. We ask, therefore, that you relay your thoughts, concerns or agreement directly to the Board rather than to any staff. To do this, please email us at: board@farmandwilderness.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

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