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Gilmanton Boy Scout camp

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GILMANTON — A plan to develop a 35-acre section of the Hidden Valley Scout Reservation here could eventually increase the number of campers at the facility by as much as 50 percent.

Officials of the Daniel Webster Council of the Boy Scouts of America are seeking approval from the planning board here for 10 new camp sites and the construction of an administration building, docks and swimming area at the Camp Bell section of Hidden Valley.

William Phillips, immediate past president of the council, said that if the new programs, which would include water skiing, prove popular with campers it could mean as many as 250 more summer campers would be using the 3,700-acre facility in a few years.

"Camps go in and out of focus with kids. We have 425 for the 10-week session this year summer," said Phillips.

The camp currently has space for about 500 campers.

The expansion would take place at the former Camp Leo property on Manning Lake, which was acquired by the Hidden Valley Reservation in 1991, the same year that development rights to the scout reservation and Camp Leo were acquired by the state's Land Conservation Investment Program for \$700,000.

Planning board members toured the site of the proposed expansion yesterday afternoon in preparation for a public hearing last night on the proposal and some expressed concern over the traffic and environmental impacts of the expansion.

Hidden Valley wants to construct a new administration building on the site of the former Camp Leo main building, which was razed several years ago, and build 10 camp sites, each capable of holding up to 24 campers.

Scout officials also want to put in a

floating dock at the former Camp Leo waterfront activities area and to keep sailboats, canoes, rowboats and two powerboats at the docking and swimming area. The powerboats would be used for water-skiing.

Vic Carbonneau, reservation manager, said waterfront activities at Hidden Valley now take place in Lake Eilleen, which is too small to allow water skiing. He said that having a water sports program on Manning lake will also allow larger sailboats to be used.

Plans also call for using a 36-foot by 60-foot barn on the Camp Leo property as an activities area and putting about 10 cabins that have fallen into disrepair back into use.

The proposed expansion of use is not popular with many of the residents of Manning Lake Road, a narrow and winding dirt road off from Crystal Lake Road, which leads to Camp Bell.

One of the residents who lives on the

seeks to expand

road asked the planning board members to stop by his home after they finished their tour of the site so that he could express his concerns about the impact of increased traffic on the area.

Access to the camp is from Crystal Lake Road and Mountain Road and for the last two years Hidden Valley has placed a temporary sign at the intersection of the two urging parents bringing their children to the camp to use Mountain Road on the weekends.

Scout Executive Al Lambert said it is ironic that the scouting organization now has to go through the approval process. "The Scouts used to own it and it was known as Camp Manning. But in the 1940s they couldn't raise \$7,500 to keep it and it was sold to the Saint James Association and became Camp Leo."

The 315 acre Camp Leo property, which has about 7,000 feet of frontage on Manning Lake, was reacquired by the Daniel Webster Council in 1991 for \$354,000.

Hidden Valley is seeking three waivers from the planning board in order to start work on the project. It seeks waivers on occupancy fees and permits and wants to be able to use smaller scale drawings when it presents the plans.

Planning Board Chairman George Twigg III said occupancy fee waivers are normally sought by charitable organizations like the Boy Scouts and that a requirement that all necessary permits be in place before any work can be undertaken could force delays in the project.

He said Hidden Valley wants to seek the permits when they are prepared to work on each section of the overall project.

And requiring maps of a normal scale would mean that the maps of the 3,700-acre scout reservation would more than cover the walls of the meeting room.