



**PURPOSE CASE  
BUILT STUDY**

# The Summit Bechtel Reserve

The Boy Scouts of America developed a high-adventure base in West Virginia to host its signature event and demonstrate its relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



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# Executive Summary

**Organization**

Boy Scouts of America

**Location**

New River Gorge, West Virginia, USA

**Construction Type**

New Construction

**Opening Date**

2013

**Project Area**

10,600 acres

**Project Cost**

\$351 million (Phase One)

**S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation Investment**

\$50 million



Every four years, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) hosts the National Scout Jamboree, a 10-day event bringing Scouts together for outdoor adventure and community-building activities. Originating in 1937, the event rotated through a series of locations before landing at Fort A.P. Hill in Virginia for three decades beginning in 1981. Hosting the event at this US military garrison limited the BSA's ability to expand its programming. It also required costly investments in temporary facilities and improvements for each Jamboree. In a larger context, these Jamboree challenges were accompanied by declining national membership; five million people participated in Scout events in 1999 and that number would fall to under three million by 2014.<sup>1</sup>

In 2007, the BSA embarked on a capital project to build its fourth high-adventure base camp in the US and establish a permanent home for Jamborees. The new facility was intended to provide a better Jamboree experience for Scouts and attract a larger and more diverse membership. The BSA also embraced the project as an opportunity to demonstrate leadership in environmental conservation, and to practice citizenship by partnering with its neighboring community. BSA leaders felt that this project could help reshape the Scouts' image and fuel organizational growth.

In 2009, the BSA selected a 10,600-acre decommissioned mine in rural West Virginia as the site for the new facility and named it the Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve (SBR). With a mandate to complete construction for the next Jamboree in less than four years, the BSA established a wholly-owned subsidiary to manage the project. This approach allowed project leaders to bypass institutional bureaucracy, but limited communication and buy-in with the broader Scouting community.

The project finished on time and on budget, and over 45,000 Scouts and visitors joined the 2013 Jamboree. Although many stakeholders viewed the event as a success, this turnout was the lowest of any Jamboree since 1981. Subsequent usage of the high-adventure camp also fell short of projections, and the SBR experienced a \$9 million operating loss in its first year.

The Scouts and families who visited the SBR were introduced to a modernized, environmentally-focused organization. The site succeeded in offering contemporary adventure activities—such as zip lining, skateboarding, and mountain biking—that could appeal to a new generation of Scouts. At the time of this report, however, the more sweeping intent for the SBR to reshape national perceptions of the Scouts and help usher in a new era of growth was yet to be realized.

On the local level, the project helped advance sustainable wastewater policy in West Virginia and created construction jobs, although the region has yet to see the substantive infusion of economic activity that many anticipated from the SBR.

This case study is based on research conducted by MASS Design Group in July 2015. Funded by the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, it illustrates how a capital project can expand the profile and programming of an organization in ways that showcase its values. It also demonstrates the challenge of ensuring good communication and setting accurate expectations with key stakeholders during a large-scale, fast-track project process.

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## Purpose Built Series

Capital projects often bring lasting benefits to nonprofit organizations and the people they serve. Given this opportunity, foundations grant more than \$3 billion annually to construct or improve buildings in the United States alone.<sup>i</sup> Each capital project affects an organization's ability to achieve its mission—signaling its values, shaping interaction with its constituents, influencing its work processes and culture, and creating new financial realities. While many projects succeed in fulfilling their purpose, others fall short of their potential. In most instances, organizations fail to capture and share lessons learned that can improve practice.

To help funders and their nonprofit partners make the most of capital projects, The Atlantic Philanthropies and the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation commissioned *Purpose Built*—a multi-faceted study by MASS Design Group, a nonprofit architecture and research firm. In 2015 and 2016, MASS conducted interviews, reviewed literature, and examined a diverse set of completed projects around the world; each project was supported by one of the above funders.

The study generated a set of core principles as well as tools for those considering or conducting capital projects:



*Introducing the Purpose Built Series* is an overview of the study and its core principles.



*Making Capital Projects Work* more fully describes the *Purpose Built* principles, illustrating each with examples.



*Planning for Impact* is a practical, comprehensive tool for those initiating capital projects.



*Charting Capital Results* is a step-by-step guide for those evaluating completed projects.



*Purpose Built Case Studies* report on 15 projects to illustrate a range of intents, approaches, and outcomes.

See the full *Purpose Built* series online at [www.massdesigngroup.org/purposebuilt](http://www.massdesigngroup.org/purposebuilt).

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<sup>i</sup> Foundation Center, *Foundation Maps* data based on grants made in the United States, 2006-2015.

**“A place like the Summit  
can impact our movement.  
It can make it more relevant.  
Scouting has to be more  
relevant to today’s youth.”**

**—Troop leader,  
Boy Scouts of America**



**Above.** The SBR Amphitheater has capacity to hold up to 50,000 Scouts and visitors who attend the Jamboree every four years.

**Cover.** The 5,805-square-foot Sustainability Treehouse is a net-zero energy building that educates Scouts on environmental stewardship.

## Introduction

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) is one of the largest youth development organizations in the US, serving males ages six through 20 and females ages 14 through 20. For more than 100 years, the BSA has helped young people build character, maintain mental and physical fitness, and participate in their communities and the environment through outdoor experiences such as camping, aquatics, and hiking.<sup>2</sup> Scouts participate in activities at over 800 local council camps and four national high-adventure bases. High-adventure bases are outdoor recreation facilities owned and operated by the BSA that feature wilderness and related training programs for young people.

Every four years, the BSA hosts the National Scout Jamboree, a 10-day event that brings together Scouts from across the US. The event has been popular since its inception in 1937. A Jamboree typically offers camping, high-adventure activities, and opportunities for participants to advance their rank within the Scouting system. One volunteer described it as a “huge family reunion, steeped in tradition and promoting camaraderie.” Another troop leader emphasized that the Jamboree provides Scouts with a broader perspective on the organization, saying, “[it] excites young people about Scouting, ties Scouts together from all over, lets them meet new people, and

provides a whole new way to look at Scouting.”

Over the years, the Jamboree rotated through a number of locations. In 1981, it landed at Fort A.P. Hill in Virginia and this US military garrison became its home for three decades. The site presented both programmatic and financial challenges for the BSA. The size of the main event space limited the scope of the Jamboree’s operations. The primary roads through the garrison combined both pedestrian and automotive traffic, making Scout safety a concern. One leader recalled that the BSA spent between \$7 and \$16 million every four years on improvements to better accommodate the Jamboree—constructing and then tearing down temporary structures.

In a larger context, the BSA was facing a decline in membership. The number of Scouts annually participating in BSA events in the US fell by 42 percent between 1999 and 2014, from five to three million.<sup>3</sup> Leaders attributed the decline to outdated programming, the struggle to sell families on the idea of Scouting, and the inability to compete with other youth organizations. As one donor said, the BSA needed to “move into the future and not be perceived as the woody guys that are just military-like troops out there doing survival stuff.” Along with declining numbers, the BSA’s diversity and inclusivity was also a concern. The BSA was perceived as a white, Christian organization. Additionally, in the 2000s the BSA was under public scrutiny regarding a policy that prohibited young people and adults who identified as gay or bisexual from participating or leading in the

**The Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve.** Located in rural West Virginia, the facility spans 10,600 acres and features a variety of adventure activities, including high ropes, zip lining, and mountain biking.

**Thrasher Mountain.** The western portion of the Adventure Zone provides programming such as a BMX trail, skateboarding park, archery range, shooting range, and scuba, swimming, and diving pools.

North Entrance

WALTER SCOTT JR.  
SCOUTING VALLEY

Water Treatment  
Facility

James C. Justice  
National Scout Camp

Conservation Area

Consol Energy Bridge

Scott Summit  
Center

Goodrich Lake

ADVENTURE ZONE

South Entrance

New River Gorge

Logistics Center

Gate One

**Mount Hope.** Both the BSA and the local community expected the new facility and programming to affect the nearby town of Mount Hope positively.

**Adventure Valley.** The eastern portion of the Adventure Zone provides programming such as a high ropes course, two mountain biking courses, a climbing wall, and a zip line.



organization. This issue generated considerable debate, discussion, publicity, and institutional angst until the BSA changed its policies between 2013 and 2015.<sup>ii</sup>

The need to improve public perceptions of Scouting as well as expand its relevance and reach to new audiences coincided with the BSA's desire to have a better site for its signature event. In 2007, the decision was made to undertake a large capital project to develop a permanent home for the Jamboree—and to use this new site to help modernize the Scouts and attract a larger, more diverse membership.

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## Project Mission

Recognizing that this effort would represent a significant investment by the BSA and its donors, leaders decided the new site would not only host the Jamboree but also summer camping and programs. A project team member said, “Many felt that if they were to make an investment of this magnitude, the utilization and yield should be high. It should be used 365 days a year.”

The capital project's mission therefore began with creating a fourth high-adventure base that would also be the ongoing home for the National Scout Jamboree. The project needed to be finished in time for the 2013 Jamboree. Its grounds would need to accommodate 50,000 event attendees, with an amphitheater for large gatherings and facilities for outdoor rock climbing, zip lining, skateboarding, and mountain biking—contemporary adventure activities that could appeal to a new generation of Scouts.

To reach and serve more youth, it was important to provide experiences not available to Scouts at regional BSA sites. A project leader stated, “We only serve 8 percent [of youth in America]. This property is about the 92 percent we don't serve.” Ultimately named the Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve (SBR) and located in West Virginia, this site would be programmed to usher the BSA into the 21st century by “reintroduc[ing] the youth of America to the [BSA] as relevant, cool, and a place where you can tackle some of these high-adventure activities.” As one donor put it, the capital project could be a much-needed “change agent,” helping to “bring the BSA into the modern age.”

BSA leaders also came to see the capital project as an opportunity to demonstrate leadership in sustainability and environmental conservation—values long held by the organization. An early

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ii *The ban on gay or bisexual Scout participants was lifted in 2013. The ban on gay or bisexual Scout leaders was lifted in 2015.*

adopter of Leave No Trace (a set of outdoor ethics for environmental conservation), the BSA worked with the US Bureau of Land Management during the 1970s and 1980s, and taught Scouts how to minimize human impact on the environment.<sup>4</sup> With the SBR, the BSA had an opportunity to affirm its commitment to conservation in a setting that would reach thousands of families. As one project member explained, while the BSA “uses sustainability concepts in all of its sites, all of its local camps, [the organization] wanted the Summit to be . . . the platform to send that message out to all of its Scouting families.”

“reintroduc[ing] the youth of America to the [BSA] as relevant, cool, and a place where you can tackle some of these high-adventure activities.”

Through the site selection process, the project mission would further evolve to include supporting a local community that was reeling from the loss of coal-mining revenue.

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## Process

### ESTABLISHING THE PROJECT TEAM

To help meet its looming deadline for the 2013 Jamboree, the BSA formed Project Arrow West Virginia—a wholly-owned subsidiary charged with planning and implementing the capital project. Establishing a separate organization to lead the SBR's development limited the BSA's legal liabilities and allowed the project team to bypass the BSA's internal bureaucracy and expedite decision-making. As one volunteer said, “The Scouts are a well-established organization that does not change very rapidly, so . . . [we] decided to build [a project team], seed it, and get it going outside the mainstream of the Scouts for speed.” Most of the project team members were long-time BSA volunteers who played a central role in initiating the project, creating a vision for it, and devoting personal resources to ensure its success.

The BSA had limited human resources to support fundraising at the national level, especially for a capital campaign of this scale. This led the BSA to create an Office of Philanthropy to bring needed donors into the project. The S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, an organization committed to youth character development and a long-term supporter of the Scouts, invested \$50 million to help the BSA purchase and develop land for the SBR. This was the single largest charitable donation the BSA had ever received and project leaders

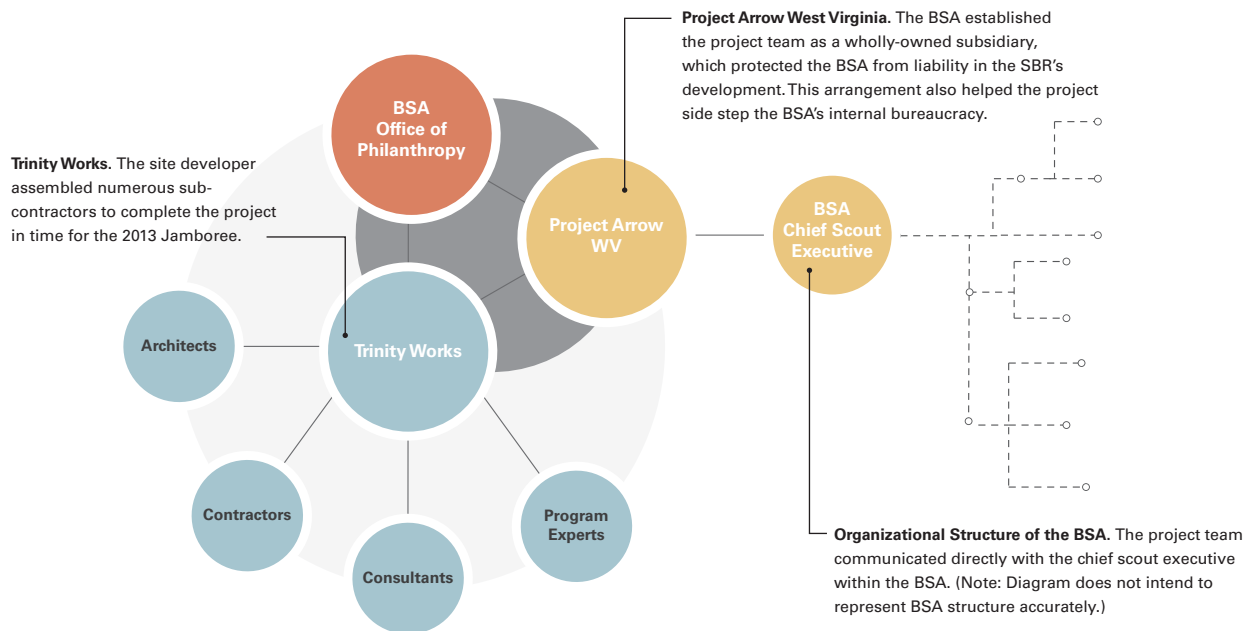


Figure 1. The SBR project organizational structure.

decided in agreement with the Bechtel family to name the facility the Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve.<sup>5</sup>

Project Arrow hired a set of external consultants for the planning, design, and development of the capital project. Trinity Works was contracted as the site developer and owner's representative responsible for managing the project, assisting with site selection, and developing a master plan to guide all design decisions. Trinity Works assembled a group of over 30 designers, consultants, architects, and adventure sports experts, as well as 82 contractors, to ensure project completion by the deadline. Trinity Works coordinated with the BSA to develop programming as well as a long-term vision for the site, and supported fundraising efforts with the Office of Philanthropy. A staff member at the BSA commented on Trinity Works' importance, saying, "Trinity did a great job of gathering the right people, who worked well together, with no one competing against each other."

### SELECTING THE SITE

In 2008, the project team issued a request for proposals that resulted in 80 responses from 28 states. One proposal featured a 10,600-acre former mining site in rural West Virginia. This site was attractive due to its placement relative to much of the US Scouting population and for its landscape adjacent to the New River National Recreation Area as well as the New River Gorge; this area was known for whitewater rafting and mountaineering.

Mount Hope, the nearest city, was enduring hardship due to a declining population and limited economic prospects. In 2011, the town had only 1,400 residents and an unemployment rate close to 10 percent.<sup>6</sup> After the area's largest coal company closed in the 1980s, residents hoped that tourism to the New River Gorge would replace coal mining as an economic generator. However, the number of annual visitors to the area had been stagnant since the early 1990s.<sup>7</sup>

West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin and the residents of Mount Hope imagined the positive effect that the BSA's capital investment could have on the community. Mount Hope's Mayor, Michael Martin, believed the relocation of BSA staff to the town would spur repopulation. In a 2013 interview with National Public Radio, Martin said he "would like for some of those people to consider homes in Mount Hope to live and raise families."<sup>8</sup>

The BSA viewed an investment in Mount Hope as an opportunity to demonstrate its key values of citizenship and commitment to others. The avid support of the state and local government was another benefit of choosing the site, and its location "within a 10-hour drive of 70 percent of [the BSA] constituency," made it accessible to a large number of Scouts.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, the West Virginia site would provide a high-adventure base unlike the others offered to Scouts nationally: the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, the Northern Tier National High Adventure Bases in Minnesota, and the Florida National High



**Left.** The SBR provides Scouts with access to high-adventure activities not offered at other BSA sites, including three zip lines, each with five individual lines. The longest zip line—the “Big Zip”—is a combined 15,500 feet

**Below.** Tents set up in the James C. Justice National Scout Camp, where Scouts reside during the Jamboree event.





Adventure Sea Base. Each base features a unique location, identity, and activities (such as aquatic sports at the Florida base). The geography of the West Virginia site provided a natural landscape for outdoor activities not supported by other bases.

For these reasons, the BSA ultimately selected the West Virginia site. When the decision was announced, Governor Manchin described his optimism for the impact of the project, saying the SBR would “transform who we are as a state, who we are as a people.” He added, “The news that goes forth is that we are a special place . . . I’ve never been more proud of West Virginia than I am today.”<sup>10</sup>

### **GATHERING COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

Throughout the project, motivated leaders within the state and region coordinated efforts and helped the BSA proceed efficiently—expediting the process of obtaining needed permits and waivers as well as supplying public funds to support the project. For example, Governor Manchin committed up to \$16 million from the State of West Virginia Abandoned Mine Land Fund to remove the remnants of coal mining from the site.<sup>11</sup> These partnerships were essential for the BSA to meet its 2013 deadline.

The project team wanted the project to create a positive impact on Mount Hope’s economy and environment. Trinity Works aimed to create a design that was authentic to the BSA and specific to the region, drawing on the vernacular of West Virginian architecture and gaining inspiration from innovations in mining and bridge construction. The design would use local wood and stone harvested on-site or nearby. In addition, the BSA committed to hiring local labor and contractors, stipulating that 50 to 60 percent of all workers would come from Mount Hope and the surrounding area. A local resident noted, “[the BSA] made a very conscious effort to make sure the impact they left from an economic standpoint was felt.”

Construction occurred during the recession in the late 2000s and helped local businesses withstand the dramatic downturn in the US economy. One project team member recalled a story of a man who came to the site during construction to see if there was a need for someone to cut grass. He was hired, and when he realized the site had 10,600 acres, his one-man operation quickly turned into a 10-person business.

### **DEVELOPING THE SITE DESIGN**

The site design derived directly from the project’s mission. To appeal to a larger, more diverse Scouting population with contemporary interests, the site would offer new sporting opportunities. A network of 50 mountain biking trails would become the third largest mountain biking facility in the world, in terms of total mileage. Three zip lines, at a combined length of nearly 30,000 feet, would establish the longest zip line course in the world. BMX (bicycle motocross)

and skateboarding facilities would each rank second in the world in total square footage.<sup>12</sup>

The SBR would also embrace the changing role of technology to help modernize the BSA’s programming. Traditionally, Scouts were required to leave their cell phones at home. Instead, the SBR would integrate Wi-Fi and smartphones into Jamboree activities—accommodating the use of GPS, social media, and weather-tracking applications.

To promote environmental stewardship, the BSA sought to create self-sustaining, regenerative systems that would highlight the natural features of the site and serve as teaching tools. The design minimized disruption of the land while repurposing existing mining infrastructure and access roads. Grey and black wastewater treatment was established on-site for zero effluence to sewer systems. Additionally, the SBR included a Sustainability Treehouse, a 5,805-square-foot, net-zero energy building. The Treehouse would meet standards for the Living Building Challenge (a building sustainability certification program), generating its own power through a solar array and wind turbine, treating its own waste, and using geothermal wells for heating and cooling. The building would use a locally-fabricated weathering steel frame that would resist corrosion, as well as Forest Stewardship Council-certified black locust wood; these materials fit the site’s rustic aesthetic and placement on a former coal mine.<sup>13</sup>

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## **Impact**

### **FALLING SHORT OF ATTENDANCE PROJECTIONS**

The project team completed the SBR in July 2013—on budget and in time for the Jamboree. The site hosted 30,037 overnight guests, 15,732 day visitors, and 6,224 staff for the event.<sup>14</sup> Although many project stakeholders viewed this Jamboree as a success, its attendance was the lowest in three decades.

Following the Jamboree, fewer Scouts than anticipated attended summer camping programs at the SBR. In 2014, a total of 3,821 Scouts and guests used the SBR’s high-adventure base. In comparison, that year the other three national high-adventure bases attracted a combined total of 57,000 people.<sup>15</sup> In 2015, the year this case research took place, SBR attendance was approximately 4,500<sup>16</sup>—well below the 22,000<sup>17</sup> attendees that the BSA estimated as required to reach a financial break-even point. For 2016, the year before publication of this case, SBR attendance increased to 11,200,<sup>18</sup> representing significant growth although still well below the needed utilization level.

BSA leaders recognized that, after three decades in one location, the transition to any new Jamboree site may have naturally resulted in low initial attendance. At the same time, aspects of the project implementation likely contributed to this situation. The project team placed a priority on timely completion of the SBR for the 2013 Jamboree over marketing for this inaugural event and subsequent usage. One team member noted that, because the effort was led by Project Arrow and bypassed typical BSA channels of communication, “[the SBR] had varied degrees of institutional buy-in.”

The larger BSA community developed a perception that the SBR was in competition with, rather than a complement to, other high-adventure bases that held great personal value for many BSA members. A project team member stated, “We misunderstood how hard the information is to get out there . . . people didn’t automatically know about the Summit and we needed to do a better job of communicating and marketing.”

### ADDRESSING FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES

With low usage, the SBR operated at a \$9 million loss in 2014, its first full year. Fortunately, the BSA was positioned to absorb this shortfall.<sup>19</sup> Organizational leaders have put plans in place to grow attendance in tandem with elevating the SBR’s reputation.

Specifically, the SBR staff is working to improve internal communication throughout the BSA, develop additional programming, and lease the site for events held by other

organizations such as the Girl Scouts. These efforts, along with new capital projects—including a leadership training complex, rugged terrain vehicle courses, and youth overnight facilities—are intended to help generate steady revenue in the years between Jamborees and bring more people to the SBR.

### INCREASING SCOUT MEMBERSHIP

Though the SBR’s impact on the BSA’s overall membership remains to be seen, interviewees indicated that the activities available at the SBR have contributed to more relevant programs and more committed Scouts. Survey data from SBR Summer Camps indicate strong enjoyment of the site. In 2014, Scouts rated their overall experience of the SBR as 4.8 out of 5, on average. That same year, 99 percent of surveyed Scouts, parents, and troop leaders reported they would recommend the experience to others.<sup>20</sup>

As one parent visiting the SBR described, “Kids think Scouting is dorky, until they hear the things [a Scout] gets to do. The Summit has the ability to change the perception from goody two-shoes.” Another survey respondent said, “The skateboard program exceeded our most ridiculous expectations. I don’t think I’ll ever have to listen to whining about Scouts being uncool again!” One BSA leader added that “[the SBR visitors are] so surprised. It makes them rethink how they look at Scouting . . . more often than not, it’s renewed [their] commitment [to Scouting].” With more Scouts experiencing the site, visitors are optimistic about the impact of the SBR on the BSA. As a troop leader described, “A place like the Summit can impact our movement. It can make it more relevant. Scouting has to be more relevant to today’s youth.”

### INTRODUCING SCOUTS TO SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

From the SBR’s opening in 2013 through 2015, over 40,000 Scouts have visited the Sustainability Treehouse to learn about energy and water conservation. In addition to meeting LEED<sup>iii</sup> and Living Building Challenge standards,<sup>iv</sup> the Sustainability Treehouse has been highlighted in architectural publications including *DWELL*,<sup>21</sup> *Fast Company Design*,<sup>22</sup> and *ArchDaily*.<sup>23</sup> The Treehouse has received several awards, including the CORE77 Design Award<sup>24</sup> for excellence in sustainable design, and was recognized as one of the Top Ten

iii *LEED, or Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design, is a globally recognized symbol of excellence in green building. Source: <http://www.usgbc.org/articles/about-leed>.*

iv *The Living Building Challenge is an environmental performance standard for buildings. This standard requires buildings to be energy regenerative, self-sufficient, and create a positive impact on the human and natural systems that interact with them. Source: <https://living-future.org/lbcl>.*



Above. The SBR serves as a high-adventure base where Scouts participate in a variety of activities including archery and shooting.



Above. Signage on the Sustainability Treehouse.

Green Projects of 2014 by the AIA Committee on the Environment.<sup>25</sup> Visibility from these awards has contributed to the BSA's brand as a leader in sustainability and furthered its intent to reach a broader, more diverse audience. In addition, the Treehouse has inspired the creation of a new sustainability merit badge, now required for Eagle Scouts (the highest rank in the Boy Scouting program) as a way to infuse the values of the SBR into Scouting life.

The SBR has also led to advancements in state and local policy related to sustainable building in West Virginia. Notably, the project had a meaningful influence on water treatment policy. The project manager recalled:

There were certain things in terms of sustainability and technology that we were able to get permitted that may have been impossible for other potential owners. For example . . . we have our on-site wastewater treatment system, the composting toilets in the Treehouse, the grey water treatment . . . because this project was important, there was someone in the State House saying, "The Boy Scouts want it. Make it happen." That, I think, set a precedent that other organizations will be able to access now . . . [In the state] there was no precedent for potable water capture, collection, treatment, and reuse . . . there was nothing on grey water. Because it wasn't expressly mentioned, it [wasn't] allowed. . . . We had the political will to force the regulators to the table to sit down and work with us on what an acceptable solution would be.

While all of these efforts contribute to fulfilling the BSA's aim to

demonstrate its leadership in environmental conservation, some question whether the organization's leaders have fully institutionalized sustainable practices. One project team member stated:

If we're truly about sustainability, they would follow up and ask "Supply team—how are you implementing it? Operations team—how are you implementing it?" It's a lot easier to build a sustainable building than it is to operate it or to drive that change through your organization. That's the fundamental disconnect.

**BENEFITTING THE COMMUNITY**

As intended by project leaders, the SBR's development helped build local construction capacity as project contractors gained familiarity with new technologies, materials, and processes. For the construction completed in 2013, a total of 2,250 jobs were created—they generated an estimated \$94.2 million in income with an additional \$27.8 million in tax revenue for the local community.<sup>26</sup> The project manager recalled an operator whose mill became the first in West Virginia to be Forest Stewardship Council-certified during the process and who, by the project's completion, was "an owner of a sustainable business [that had] a zero-waste operation." The BSA's approach to investing in local capacity will continue to benefit the construction community in Mount Hope as these businesses now have added expertise and facilities to compete for new and larger jobs.

However, opinions differ on the impact the SBR has had on the overall economy of Mount Hope. Construction of the site raised expectations among community members and spurred the development of local businesses. BSA staff reported:

There are businesses that will tell you, had the Boy Scouts not come to town, they wouldn't exist now . . . the Cold Spot [chicken-]wing place right outside the gate has just expanded and enlarged their business. The little mom-and-pop laundromat in Oak Hill has been remodeled. The Kroger grocery store in Oak Hill was slated to be closed, and they've remodeled the interior and restocked with broader selections. . . . It's generated a new sense of activity in this area that didn't exist before.

But because of lagging SBR attendance, some businesses have not seen the hoped-for increase in patronage. An Economic Impact Assessment in 2009 projected that the SBR would bring \$10.8 million in overnight visitor spending and \$6.5 million in spending at local food and restaurant establishments. These projections proved overly ambitious. Historically, Jamborees had attracted a large influx of day visitors; the previous location at Fort A.P. Hill was less than a two-hour drive from Washington DC, enabling Scouts and their families to easily visit on a day trip. By comparison, the



**Above.** An aerial view of campgrounds with the expanse of the full SBR behind.

closest metropolitan area to the SBR is Charleston, West Virginia, which has lesser-known attractions and a population of only 50,000 people. According to a project team member who recalled attendance challenges at the Jamboree, “This was exacerbated by the BSA putting restrictions on coming and going from the site [for security], so people came here [to the SBR] and didn’t leave, but next time around, they will be out in the community more.” Initial SBR attendance failed to meet the BSA’s projections and the expectations of the community. In addition, the SBR has not yet attracted a substantial permanent presence of year-round staff members, with only 30 full-time staff and 250 seasonal employees in 2015.<sup>27</sup>

One community member concluded, “There was a misunderstanding from the locals on how quick the impact would be.” Another described an experience during the 2013 Jamboree, saying, “I’ll never forget, the first Saturday of the Jamboree, my wife and I [went] to Kroger, and there was no one in Kroger. It was weird . . . everyone was so freaked out. It was like a big storm coming—everyone [in the community] got their groceries on Thursday because they didn’t want to be in the store when all these [BSA] people came in. Well, there was nobody there.”

Today, the community is working to identify economic opportunities for future Jamborees through a group of local leaders called “Beyond the Summit.”

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## Conclusion

The SBR achieved its primary mission of creating a permanent, modern, and exciting home for the Jamboree, demonstrating the Scouts’ environmental values and contemporary relevance. The project process represents an example of efficient management and strong relationship-building with state and local leaders. The process also highlights the importance of effectively setting and communicating expectations among all stakeholders.

Because the BSA’s project team operated outside the organization’s bureaucracy, it was able to streamline decision-making. However, in bypassing the BSA’s traditional chains of command and communication, the project team missed out on developing broad institutional buy-in and affinity for the SBR within the wider Scout community. This lack of a national constituency has hampered the SBR’s success to date. As of 2015, the site had yet to overcome its operating loss, reach its full attendance capacity, and achieve its related goal of changing perceptions of Scouting on a large, institutional scale.

The project team’s partnership with the Mount Hope community and collaboration with West Virginia leaders allowed the BSA to expedite construction and approval processes, and to advance environmental sustainability in the state. The local economy has yet to see the expected ongoing positive impact of the project. The community’s excitement and commitment continues through an effort named “Beyond the Summit.” It features a group of leaders working to identify economic opportunities for future Jamborees, with hopes these events will bring West Virginia the large influx of Scouts anticipated in 2013. Today, the BSA continues to develop the physical and programmatic infrastructure of the SBR, as well as its marketing, in pursuit of fulfilling all aspects of the project mission.

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## Lessons from the Summit Bechtel Reserve

### **Engage stakeholders for insights and buy-in.**

**Shared ownership calls for communication:** The BSA formed a wholly-owned subsidiary, named Project Arrow West Virginia, to lead the capital project. This approach limited the BSA's legal exposure and allowed the team to expedite decision-making, bypassing the organization's internal hierarchy. But moving outside typical channels of communication left this large project with varying degrees of institutional buy-in. The full BSA community was unaware of the offerings at the SBR, and some held a perception that it was in competition with, rather than a complement to, existing high-adventure bases—which held great personal value for many BSA members. As one project team member stated, “We misunderstood how hard the information is to get out there . . . people didn't automatically know about the Summit and we needed to do a better job of communicating and marketing.” When the SBR opened in 2013, attendance was lower than expected, likely due in part to the lack of internal communication.

**Aligned expectations require accurate forecasts:** While the BSA's partnership with state and local leaders helped expedite the capital project, with benefits for all parties, the unrealized positive impact on Mount Hope's local economy to date illuminates the need to manage all stakeholder expectations. The BSA's investment in local labor and materials helped the construction sector—although the project's broader impact remains to be seen in Mount Hope. Lower than anticipated attendance at the 2013 Jamboree and in SBR programs since then, as well as a relatively small number of permanent staff at the SBR, contribute to this reality. As one community member concluded, “There was a misunderstanding from the locals on how quick the impacts would be.”

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# Lessons from the Summit Bechtel Reserve

## **Connect with partners to scale outcomes.**

**Investment in local capacity benefits a community:** The BSA supported a number of area businesses through its decision-making in the design and construction phases. The project team made critical choices in this regard, such as aligning the site's aesthetics with the area's architectural vernacular, selecting local materials, and sourcing labor from the area. All of these approaches had a positive economic impact in the region—and local contractors advanced their familiarity and experience with new sustainable technologies, materials, and processes. The project manager recalled a local mill operator who gained certification in order to meet the material specification of the SBR and who, by project completion, was “an owner of a sustainable business [that had] a zero-waste operation.” The BSA's investments in local capacity will benefit the Mount Hope community for years to come.

## **See financial realities beyond opening day.**

**Everyday usage is vital to ongoing success:** Due to the BSA's overarching commitment to complete construction in time for the 2013 Jamboree, project leaders did not fully consider uses of the SBR beyond the event. With attendance of 3,821 in 2014—its first full year of operation—the SBR was underutilized and operated at a loss of \$9 million. While numbers grew in 2015 and 2016, attendance did not approach its financial break-even level of 22,000 annual users, and the SBR again operated at a loss. Fortunately, the organization was positioned to absorb the financial shortfall, and began developing new programming, facilities, and marketing approaches to increase usage of the facility.

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## End Notes

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p. 4 Courtesy of the Boys Scouts of America. "Aerial of Jamboree." 2013.

p. 5 Map adapted from the Summit Bechtel Reserve North Site Map.

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