



# WILD ROCKIES

## FIELD INSTITUTE

March 16, 2020

Dear WRFI community,

With current levels of uncertainty surrounding the status and spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)—and out of an abundance of caution in response to the World Health Organization's pandemic declaration—**WRFI has made the very difficult decision to postpone our upcoming Colorado Plateau spring semester course**, initially scheduled to start on March 26. Given the rapidly changing public health landscape and evolving policy responses, we feel that postponing the course's start date is the most responsible measure we can take to protect our students and instructors, as well as the public health interests of the communities that we travel to.

**We are still planning to run our Summer 2020 and Fall 2020 courses as scheduled.**

Safety is our top priority at WRFI. Since our organization's inception in 1993, we have delivered safe and engaging field courses guided by comprehensive risk management plans designed to ensure the health and safety of our students and instructors. As COVID-19 cases develop across the country, we are continuing to monitor the evolving public health situation and to update our risk management plans accordingly.

We have been monitoring updates on COVID-19 information and recommendations from the following sources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 travel information: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>
- World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for international travel: <https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/updated-who-recommendations-for-international-traffic-in-relation-to-covid-19-outbreak/>
- Missoula City-County Health Department COVID-19 updates for Missoula County: <https://www.missoulacounty.us/government/health/health-department/emergency-preparedness/coronavirus>
- University of Montana (UM) and Montana University System (MUS) guidelines for continued learning: [https://www.umt.edu/coronavirus/default.php?utm\\_source=um\\_homepage](https://www.umt.edu/coronavirus/default.php?utm_source=um_homepage)

### **Current Travel Guidelines:**

We currently have six field courses planned for the remainder of the 2020 season, only one of which will spend time outside of the U.S. (in Alberta and British Columbia, Canada). We will continue to monitor federal travel warnings or restrictions that would impact our students' access to these areas. At this point, the CDC has issued a [Level 2 Alert](#) for these locations, recommending that older adults and those with chronic medical conditions



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consider postponing travel to (and within) the U.S. and Canada. As new information becomes available, we will continue to assess implications for our courses and respond accordingly.

### **Travel Insurance:**

In preparation for the summer and fall courses, we strongly encourage students to purchase travel insurance prior to their course, which may cover a broad variety of expenses, including illness, injury, family emergency, etc. One option is [World Nomads](#), which has provided travel insurance for many WRFI course participants over the years. However, World Nomads is just one of many available options, and we encourage students to talk to an insurance agent to assess their insurance needs. **Be sure to read the details to understand what claims the policy will cover in response to COVID-19.**

In accordance with WRFI's current withdrawal and cancellation policy, if a course is postponed, canceled or reduced in duration, we are not responsible for non-refundable airline or other travel tickets, or any other associated travel costs. It is for this reason that at this time, we are asking students who have not already made travel arrangements to/from their course start location to hold off on purchasing any airfare, lodging, etc. until our summer and fall course plans become more solidified.

### **Individual Response Guidelines:**

It is imperative that our students and instructors remain vigilant with their personal preventative practices, and we ask that everyone in the WRFI community (and beyond) be particularly mindful of the following:

- Engage in frequent hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
- Avoid touching your face—especially your eyes, nose, and mouth—with unwashed hands
- Avoid close contact with people who are ill;
- Limit your exposure to large crowds;
- Cover your mouth when coughing and/or sneezing, being sure to do so into an elbow or shoulder, not your hands;
- We are still in the midst of influenza season, so please get your flu shot if you haven't done so already;
- If you have knowingly been exposed to someone who has tested positive for coronavirus, please contact your doctor's office immediately and notify us here at WRFI;
- If you find yourself feeling under the weather before the start of your course, please get in touch with the WRFI office as soon as possible.



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**Impact to WRFI Headquarters:**

To limit the potential of transmission of COVID-19 among our employees and those visiting our office, our staff will begin working remotely on March 17<sup>th</sup> until at least March 31<sup>st</sup>. During this time, we will retain our normal business hours of Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (MST). We'll be checking voice mail messages regularly and we can be reached by email at [wrfi@wrfi.net](mailto:wrfi@wrfi.net).

Thanks to each of you for your understanding during these unprecedented times. This is certainly new territory for all of us and our commitment at WRFI is to handle these challenges with compassion, grace and resilience. Please do not hesitate to reach out to our office with questions or concerns.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Keri McWilliams".

Keri McWilliams

Executive Director