

“When NOLS was founded, mountains were its heart and soul. But as the school has grown, so has our understanding of that heart and soul and what it can teach us. In addition to mountains, wilderness is also embodied in gravel coastlines reached only by a few hardy paddlers, or winding desert canyons, or sweltering jungles. Leadership doesn’t only mean attaining a summit in good style; it also means forging relationships across cultures and acting decisively in an emergency.”

- Molly Herber, in *A Worthy Expedition: the History of NOLS*

To our NOLS community,

Like much of the world, NOLS is reeling from the impact of COVID-19. As the virus spread picked up speed in our operating areas in mid-March, we did the only responsible and safe thing: we cancelled our field and classroom-based programs and pulled all of our students and instructors from various locations around the world.

As a non-profit organization that relies almost exclusively on tuition revenue, we knew this would have significant financial impact, but the safety and welfare of our students and staff is our highest priority.

Now that mandated closures, travel restrictions and physical distancing policies are in effect for an extended and unknown period, the expected fiscal impact to our organization will be devastating. We have run through every conceivable option, and we are convinced that drastic measures are the only way we can remain viable and maintain the hope of one day starting to offer a NOLS education again.

As a result, the leadership of NOLS and the Board of Trustees made the decision to dramatically reduce our workforce to maintain the long term viability of the school. Unfortunately, this means that we are forced to let go of many of the valued and valuable members of our community. Full-time employees will be laid off, and hundreds of our faculty will not be offered the work they rely upon. Without revenue coming in, we simply cannot support these positions.

To our employees and friends that are impacted by this decision, and the members of our NOLS community around the world, we are deeply sorry. In each location we operate, NOLS plays a part in the local economy. We know that this will especially impact Lander, Wyoming, as this vibrant western town is home to our world headquarters, our largest expedition location, and our world-class Wilderness Medicine campus in Red Canyon. We are committed to being as supportive and helpful as possible to the people affected by these reductions during this difficult time. We have established an online support site where staff impacted by layoffs can ask questions and access community resources. We already have staff asking how they might volunteer and help NOLS and the broader community, and we are hoping to develop these connections and share them here as well.

Our sincere hope is that once this global pandemic has abated, we will once again come together as a school to lead and serve. If you're reading this, you know how relevant a NOLS education is in this dynamic world. Keep our mission alive by leading in your own life, and being a source of inspiration to your community. And check back here soon...we're not finished yet.

Be safe and well,

Terri Watson
President