



ECOLOGY PROJECT
INTERNATIONAL

EPI Adventure Handbook: Yellowstone 2017



EPI Adventure Handbook: Yellowstone



Welcome to your EPI course! During your time with us in the field, you'll experience life as an ecologist, explorer, and ambassador. Prepare to be amazed.

A little about us: We started working in Costa Rica because of our passion for conservation and education. And what we learned is that the best chance for positive, long-term impact is through youth education and empowerment. Seventeen years later, we've expanded our reach to include six program sites, dozens of student-scientist partnerships, and you.

We're thrilled that you're joining us in Yellowstone. This landscape inspired the creation of the world's first National Park, and for good reason – its wild and fascinating terrain is teeming with wildlife. Get ready to walk among bison, learn about bear management, and scout for wolves.

In the end, this is more than just a trip - your experience is a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We hope your EPI experience impacts you for years to come. Once you've returned home, we look forward to your continued membership in our ECommunity through on-going activities, social and professional connections, and lifelong stewardship of the planet we all share. Welcome on board!

Scott Pankratz

Co-founder & Executive Director

Julie Osborn

Co-founder & Advancement Director



Table of Contents

Welcome to the World of EPI	1
Where You'll Go	2-3
What You'll Do	4-5
The Big Five: Rules to Live By	6
Packing	7-9
Top Tips	10
Making the Most of Your Adventure	11
Meet Your Instructors	12
Oh, the Places You'll Go	13
EPI Exclusive: Be in the Know	14



Where You'll Go

A grand adventure awaits you in our Yellowstone course. Over the next five days, you'll experience the diversity of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), from its sagebrush grasslands to sand hills, from forested mountains to boiling hot, geothermal pools.

Big skies translate to long distances between destinations in this part of the country. We'll travel in large SUVs that can handle rough roads and all our gear. There may be days when we're in the cars up to five hours, but don't worry—the wildlife viewing and scenery along the way is incredible.

Being inside our vehicles is about as indoors as your experience will get though. We're talking true ecosystem immersion here! Each night you'll fall asleep under glittering stars at our campsite, sharing a tent with up to three of your course mates (of the same gender, of course), who will quickly become good friends.



Weather prediction: The GYE is a wild place, and that includes the weather. During your course you may experience temperatures as high as the 90s (during the day) and as low as the 40s (at night). Chances are you'll see ample sun, a rainstorm, and a number of incredible sunsets!



What You'll Eat

While on course, EPI provides three meals a day. You'll be burning a lot of calories - consider bringing along a few energy bars or snacks, but please avoid candy, as we will be surrounded by wildlife with a sweet tooth (e.g. - insects, rodents, and even bears)!

Meals always taste better outdoors, and it doesn't get any better than the kind of outdoor dining you'll experience on course. With your instructor's help, you and your course mates will work together to prepare meals, like mac and cheese, stirfry, and burritos. There's a little something for everyone in our menus, and we think you'll enjoy the food preparation almost as much as the eating!



What You'll Do

Your course will take place in and around Yellowstone National Park, the area that inspired national parks in the first place. You'll experience the grandeur of the area and an unbelievably amount of wildlife while helping the park's biologists to collect data on bison, bears, and maybe even pika. Then get a chance to improve habitat by participating in a conservation service project. Along the way, you'll see geysers and bison, participate in wolf observation, and so much more. Words can't do this adventure justice (good thing you're going to EXPERIENCE it soon)!

With all we'll have to see and do, there honestly won't be a lot of down time during your course, but we'll make sure to find some time for you to relax and reload between activities. During these times, you can take photos, journal, explore our library, or play a game with friends.



Camping allows us to get closer to the wildlife we're studying and the landscapes we're admiring. But camping does introduce some limitations too. We know what you're curious about – Will I be able to shower? Will there be flush toilets? The answer to both of these questions is no, but don't fret! These realities are an intrinsic part of the adventure that awaits you, and you're not in this alone. We'll all smell a little more natural together, and the view from the outhouse is way more scenic than any other bathroom you've ever used! Don't worry, be brave! It's going to be part of the fun. We promise!

Real Research

Before you begin your research, your instructors will train you in data collection techniques, protocols, and safety. Then you'll dive in (sometimes literally!), collect and analyze data, and turn it into research that might just change the world.



You already know you'll be doing hands-on research in the field while you're on course. But do you know what happens to that research? It doesn't sit quietly in a file, waiting for a final grade. Nope. Your EPI research will be used by scientists to make recommendations, influence government officials and resource managers, and create new policies and practices that promote conservation and species protection.



Yellowstone Bison Study (high school groups)

While bison are considered ecologically extinct in many areas in Yellowstone they roam large areas and interact with a wide range of other species. During your course you will help the park's bison team gather data on how bison grazing affects plant communities and what affects bison migration timing and routes. The data that you gather will impact the bison management plan that is currently being written and possibly lead to free roaming bison outside of Yellowstone.

Bear Safety Study (both middle and high school)

Seeing bears in the wild is an amazing experience, but can be a little unerving. In order to help reduce the chances of negative bear encounters the park recommends that visitors travel in groups of three or more and carry bear spray. But do visitors follow these recommendations? Throughout your course you will help the park's bear management team by conducting visual surveys to help answer this question.

Pikas in Peril (middle school groups)

They may not be a very large species, but boy are they cute! They also happen to be a climate-sensitive species. You will be combing talus slopes for signs of pikas and collecting data that will help to inform various climate change scenarios for the park & the western US.



The Big 5

Thanks to *Lord of the Flies*, we all know what can happen on a trip with no rules. So, we've done everyone (you, our instructors, our insurance agents, and, let's not forget, your parents) a favor and created The Big 5 – Five simple rules to follow while on course with EPI.

The Big 5: Rules to Live by

Here's what you need to know about The Big 5: First, we're serious about them. Second, we will enforce them. And third, if you violate any of them, you may be sent straight home (the cost of which will be your and your parents' responsibility). And believe us...you don't want to miss this!

1. **No Tobacco Products**

The use and/or possession of cigarettes or tobacco products of any kind are not allowed and will be grounds for dismissal from the course.

2. **No Alcohol**

The use and/or possession of alcohol is not allowed and will be grounds for dismissal from the course.

3. **No Sexual Behavior or Coupling**

Sexual activity of any kind is prohibited while on course. We've got several reasons for this rule, which you can probably guess: Coupling or pairing off can divide the rest of the group, create cliques, and cause unnecessary tension – not cool. We also want the trust of your parents and schools (call us crazy), and we don't think they'd appreciate this kind of activity. And yes, this is grounds for dismissal from the course.

4. **No Illegal Drugs**

The use and/or possession of illegal drugs is not allowed and will be grounds for dismissal from the course. (This one's a no-brainer – remember that it's illegal and dangerous, considering that we work in some really remote environments.)

5. **No Disruptive Behavior**

Ok, we'll admit, this is a pretty broad category of "no." Basically, we don't want to see any behavior that jeopardizes the safety of other participants or our instructors or that negatively affects your group's learning while on course. If there's a tiny voice in the back of your head telling you it might not be a good idea, then whatever you're thinking of doing probably falls under this category. Disruptive behavior can be grounds for dismissal from the course.

A Little Prep Goes a L O N G Way

You can find tons of field gear for sale in our [Online Store](#). Check it out!

Packing

After more than a decade of packing, repacking, and leaving stuff behind, we'd like to think we finally have this packing thing down. Here are a few tips to help you get it right the first time:

1. You'll be carrying your luggage through camp, so make sure **weight, comfort, and functionality are your top three goals** when packing.
2. Use our [Yellowstone Wildlife Ecology Program](#) packing list to help you stay on track – everyone likes to check things off a list, right?
3. **Stick to polyester or synthetic-cotton blends, when possible.** Your 100% cotton clothing (like jeans) are likely to get wet and stay wet for the whole course, and that's no fun.
4. If you have as much fun as we hope you do, **you're going to get dirty, wet, and sweaty**, so pack two sets of the really important items – you won't have a chance to wash any clothes until you get home.
5. **Buy travel sizes for all your toiletries.** This will help keep your bag light and make organization a snap.

Note: Please do not bring your pocketknife or leatherman - EPI will provide all the tools you need on course.

PACKING LIST

All links point to the [EPI Store](#), where many items you might need are for sale.

It's important to know that the packing list is meant as a guideline, and that students are not required to bring everything on the list. Our goal is to for students to be comfortable on course. We have refined the packing list over the years and feel it is has a good balance of comfort and weight.

WEATHER

The average high around northern Yellowstone in June is 70-80°F, and the average low is 40-50°F. It is possible, however, for temperatures to go above 100°F and below freezing. Past students and chaperones have emphasized the importance of bringing warm clothing. This list is designed to keep you prepared for the average and the extremes! A quick note about proper outdoor clothing: Cotton fabrics should be avoided, since they have little insulating value when wet and will not dry quickly. Synthetic, wool, or synthetic/wool blended fabrics are preferred.

UPPER-BODY CLOTHING

- 2-3 insulating layers for the upper body -these should fit comfortably over each other so they can be layered together
- 1 fleece pullover or sweater
- 1 lightweight cotton [long-sleeved shirt](#) -for sun protection and working on service projects
- Rain parka -Gore-tex or other laminates are recommended. Coated nylon or waterproof breathable jackets and parkas are acceptable
- Fleece or wool hat
- Fleece or wool gloves
- 2-3 t-shirts and/or [tank tops](#) -for the days that reach up to 90°F

LOWER-BODY CLOTHING

- Two insulating layers -should fit comfortably over each other and underneath pants worn throughout the day. We recommend one pair of long underwear bottoms and fleece sweat pants
- Hiking pants -try to find light weight pants that dry easily. Avoid cotton fabrics. Pants that zip-away to shorts are a nice option. We suggest quick-dry nylon pants
- Work pants -these should be pants that you don't mind getting dirty and that are not easily torn. Used Carhartt pants or jeans work well
- Rain pants -coated nylon or Gore-tex rain pants; may double as wind pants
- 1-2 pairs of shorts -lightweight cotton or nylon athletic shorts

FOOTWEAR

- Hiking boots or a sturdy pair of durable shoes -lightweight lugged-sole hiking boots that provide sturdy ankle support. (You may carry packs or equipment that weigh 10-25 lbs.)
- Camp shoes -sneakers or lightweight running shoes to wear around camp
- Sport sandals -Teva/Chaco-type with a heel strap or light weight tennis shoes (wading opportunities require sport sandals)

EPI Adventure Handbook: Yellowstone

- Socks -75 to 100% wool, Merino wool, synthetic/wool blends. Avoid cotton blends. It is common to need two pairs of socks per day

LUGGAGE/SLEEPING GEAR

- Backpack or carry duffel -a duffel bag is fine, as long as you're comfortable carrying it several hundred yards between vehicles and camp
- Sleeping bag & stuff sack -synthetic bags are preferred (down is OK)- with a temperature rating of at least 30°
- Sleeping pad -Thermarest or closed-cell foam at least 3/8" thick
- Pajamas -nights are cold (warm pajamas are strongly advised)

PERSONAL CARE ITEMS

- 2 large garbage bags -for packing wet clothes or dirty shoes; trash compactor bags work well.
- Travel size toiletries (toothbrush, paste, deodorant, etc.)
- Personal Medications (over-the-counter or prescribed) -leave all medications in the original packaging with dosage instructions.
Make sure you have notified EPI of all medications you plan to bring
- 2 inhalers (if you have a prescription for an inhaler)
- Prescription glasses or contact lenses -please bring a pair of glasses even if you prefer to wear contacts, and a spare set of contacts or glasses if you have them
- Sunscreen -30 SPF minimum/water resistant
- Lip balm with sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- Wetwipes (for a quick sponge bath)
- Crazy Creek-style camp chair
- Travel towel -2' x 3' or smaller
- Sunglasses -100% UV protection

DAILY NECESSITIES

- Daypack
- 2 1-qt. water bottles
- 2 pens and 2 pencils
- Watch with alarm (your cell phone cannot serve as a watch or alarm)
- Headlamp (strongly recommended) or flashlight, with extra batteries
- Wide-brimmed [sun hat](#)
- Sandwich-sized Tupperware and a snack-sized Tupperware
- 2-3 1-qt. size zip-lock bags to secure any opened snacks

OPTIONAL/SUGGESTED ITEMS

- Camera with extra batteries
- Film or memory cards
- [Journal](#) or notebook -for taking field notes and journaling
- Binoculars
- Bandana
- Deck of cards, hackey sack, other small games
- Itching remedy (Cortaid, Sarna, After Bite) -check with physician for recommendations
- Crazy Creek-style camp chair

EPI Adventure Handbook: Yellowstone

Be sure to show us some love after your trip! Share your photos & thoughts on our program name FB Page, on Instagram, and on Twitter (@ecologyproject).

By enrolling in our program, you give EPI permission to use your image in promotional materials and press releases.



Digital Cameras & Social Media

Trust us, you'll want your cameras at the ready throughout your trip. So, please bring them along, but be sure to pack them in a Ziploc bag or waterproof case, since they'll be exposed to water, sand, and a whole host of other elements. Keep in mind, though, that there might be times when we ask you to put your camera away so we can focus on data collection, safety, or fun! Note that, because of our Unplugged Policy, you won't be able to use your phone as a camera.



Money

We've got your food and lodging covered while you're on course with us, and you'll be working in pretty remote places, so you won't need a lot of extra cash. However, sometimes we do stop to buy snacks or momentos, and you may want a little (\$50-100 should be plenty!) for your travels to and from Yellowstone.



Communication with Home

Parents worry sometimes, and we don't want them to worry about you when you're with us. So, when you arrive in Bozeman, Montana, EPI will start a phone tree process so every parent knows you've arrived and are in good hands! Remind your parents that when you're on course, our policy is "no news is good news!"

Pro tip: bring addressed/stamped envelopes - you'll have time to write and send letters & postcards home on course!



Prescription Drugs

Under 18? Your meds are collected on Day 1 and administered throughout the course by instructors (except bronchodilator inhalers, epinephrine, and injectable insulin*). Over 18? You're responsible for your meds, unless you want instructors to store them for safety. **Remember:** Bring enough for the full course; keep meds in their original, labeled containers, & record all your meds on the Medical Health History form.

What We've Learned About Staying Healthy on Course:

- Wash your hands...a lot. Put those germs in their place!
- Dehydration ain't pretty. Keep your water bottle filled and on hand at all times.
- Red is not the new black. Sunburns don't go well with anything – bring and wear a hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen any time you're in the sun.
- You'll be hiking, swimming, and walking in a hot climate – is your body ready? Add some extra exercise to your routine in the weeks before your course.

Making the Most of Your Adventure

Changes in Latitude, Changes in Attitude

You're going on a once-in-a-lifetime trip to an amazing place with incredible wildlife. You're also doing it with a group of your peers. On most of our trips, this means that strong, sometimes lifelong, friendships are forged. But, occasionally, tight spaces and spending 24/7 with a group that diverse can be challenging. All we ask is that you keep a little patience and flexibility in your back pocket for those challenging moments. And remember: you can always communicate your needs to your instructors.

EPI Unplugged

EPI courses are awesome. They're so once-in-a-lifetime, unbelievably awesome that we refuse to let a little screen interrupt them. That's right, while on course your thumbs, eyes, and scrolling fingers will get a break from all your devices. No cell phones, tablets, mp3 players, portable video games, or electronic devices of any kind (except cameras!) are allowed on any EPI course.

Trust us, we get it – it's hard to leave those connections behind. Here's the deal, though: We make it our job to make sure you're having so much fun, doing so many activities, and interacting so much with each other and the new world you're in that you won't even notice that device missing from your pocket/purse/hand. If you bring one of these devices for your trip to course, just keep in mind that you'll have to hand it over to your instructor for the duration of the course.



The Thrill of Adventure

Adventure and unpredictability might as well be synonyms. We try very hard to do two things for our EPI-ers: Create a full and exciting schedule and be flexible enough to change when we need to. We're headed out into Nature's territory, and sometimes she throws a lot our way. But if you bring a sense of humor and a love of curve balls with you on the trip, you'll definitely find the adventure in the unpredictable.

Meet Your Instructors

EPI instructors are the heart of our courses. They come from all over the world, and they teach our courses because they love conservation, wildlife, teaching, science, and wilderness training. Collectively, they have a wicked sense of humor and love the thrill of adventure learning. Learn more about your [Yellowstone Wildlife Ecology Instructor Team](#) by visiting our website!

*Please note that our instructor list can sometimes change before courses begin.

"Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference." ~ Winston Churchill

EPI Adventure Handbook: Yellowstone

EPI engages youth from Latin America and the U.S. in hands-on science and conservation projects in six countries. With your help, we hope to create an ecologically literate society where you and your peers are empowered to change the world.



From Once-in-a-Lifetime to EPI-for-Life



Where Adventure Meets Education

EPI co-founders (and husband & wife!) Julie Osborn and Scott Pankratz launched EPI's first program in Costa Rica in 2000. Scott, a teacher, and Julie, a scientist, realized that despite the amazing scientific studies and federal protections offered in Costa Rica, many critical habitats and species were on the decline. They also recognized that the scientists and big conservation organizations needed more help in the field and more local support on the ground. Thus, EPI was born.

Want to learn more about how we got started, what we're working on, and what our goals are? Check out our website: www.ecologyproject.org/about.

In a nutshell, we want to help you learn real, on-the-ground, important science so that you go out and change the world with it one day. We want to inspire you to become a scientist, a conservation journalist, an artist, a volunteer who inspires others to pitch in, and more. We want you to know that you can make a difference - not just when you get your degree or land a job, but right now and for the rest of your life.

Oh the Places You'll Go

Beyond the Yellowstone Wildlife Ecology Program

Like any good parent, we think the Yellowstone Wildlife Ecology Program is great, and we try not to play favorites. But, we'd be awfully sad if you didn't at least check out our other great programs. We hope this trip is just the beginning of your EPI journey.

Winter Ecology Program

If you fell in love with Yellowstone (like we did!), you're in luck - EPI now runs a Winter program in the park. From February to April, come back and work with new partners on moose and cougar tracking projects, learn to snowshoe, and enjoy the stillness and beauty of the park under a blanket of snow. [Learn more...](#)

Baja California, Mexico

The Sea of Cortez is a World Heritage Site, home to 39% of the world's marine mammal species. Our Baja Island and Turtle Ecology programs put you on the front lines of the marine conservation efforts of this unique area. Collect data while snorkeling over coral reefs, swim with sea lions, and study green sea turtles and whales up close in the wild. What are you waiting for? Suit up and dive in! [Learn more...](#)

Costa Rica

Get up close and personal with the leatherback sea turtle – an endangered reptile with a 100-million-year-old history – in our Leatherback Sea Turtle Ecology program. Walk beneath lush rainforest canopies, learn about the flora and fauna of the tropics, and participate in late night beach census walks to collect data on nesting sea turtles. Or, choose our new Pacific program, and tour the rugged Osa Peninsula. Either way, this is an experience you'll never forget. [Learn more...](#)



Belize

The Belize Marine Ecology program will bring you up close with bottlenose dolphins and the vast array of wildlife that inhabit the second-largest barrier reef in the world. Working with the University of Belize, you'll learn about the invasive lionfish and its effect on the reef; then you'll spend time in the water exploring this unique environment of marshland, reefs, mangroves, and turtlegrass beds. As your course moves inland to the jungle, the focus shifts to mammal tracking at a rainforest preserve, as well as a hands-on crash course in Mayan culture. [Learn more...](#)

Galapagos Islands

Giant tortoises, iridescent finches, a surreal volcanic landscape, and waters rich with aquatic wildlife – the Galapagos Islands are also known as the birthplace of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution because of their unparalleled biodiversity. In our Galapagos Wildlife Ecology program, you'll work side-by-side with scientists in the Galapagos National Park to study giant tortoises and help eradicate invasive species from their crucial habitat. You'll visit the still-smoldering island of Isabela to continue your research. [Learn more...](#)



EPI Adventure Handbook: Yellowstone

Be in the Know:

EPI is more than a trip. It's an epic journey that just happens to start on Day 1 of your course.

Without your help on the ground, in the field, in your hometowns, and in your schools, the good work you do with EPI would only last as long as your trip. But we know a little secret: **You hold all the power.**

We may introduce you to sea turtles, grey whales, and grizzly bears, but you're the one who can speak for them. You're the one who can help create a new generation of conservationists.

As an EPI alumnus, you're automatically part of our **ECOMMUNITY** – an extended family of EPIers, a movement, a conversation about our world. Check out what our alumni have been up to, and join in to help us keep conservation alive for the next generation.

BWI Internship: Join other high school students for an amazing summer opportunity! A four-week paid wildlife and conservation internship in Montana focused on conservation service work and one-on-one research. If you enjoyed your projects on your Yellowstone course, the **Bitterroot Wildlife Internship** is for you! Contact bwiapply@ecologyproject.org for more information.

Research Expedition: EPI now offers an 18-day course for motivated high school students. Research Expedition: Costa Rica will take you from the nesting beaches of the leatherback sea turtle on the Caribbean to the wilds of the Osa Peninsula on the Pacific. Learn more...

Join Us Online: A thriving community of conservationists, scientists, & educators are just a click away!



EPI Exclusive



Contact EPI – Any Time, Any Reason

Have questions about your trip? Looking for a specific item or gear you can't find in our **EPI Store**? Just want to chat with someone else who is as excited as you are about your trip? Contact us!

(Seriously. We're real people, and we want to hear from you!)

US Phone (M-F, 9am-5pm MST): (406) 721.8784

Email: info@ecologyproject.org

Website: www.ecologyproject.org

Address: 315 S. 4th St. E., Suite 101, Missoula, MT 59801