

A letter from NOLS President, Terri Watson



Dear Friends,

For the past three-plus years, I have been honored to serve the NOLS community, which makes the transition communicated in this letter both difficult and proud.

In this time, we have weathered COVID-19, a full shutdown, and finally, a full reopening of our global footprint of Fall 2023. We've launched some large initiatives to address outdated technology and business systems, long-standing compensation challenges, and made some substantive first steps in addressing deep-seated organizational culture issues all of which have led to a rise in employee sentiment. This work will continue for many years.

We've undertaken the above in support of providing excellent student training and exceptional risk management across our programs and locations. Our student outcomes and satisfaction scores remain enviable, and our faculty and program support staff continuously strive to improve each day. When the tragedy of Jack Murphy's death hit, our community responded in a way that highlighted the best of us all, and made me so immensely proud of our instructors, Jack's classmates, and the entire NOLS team that pivoted to support and respond not just in the moment, but in a still ongoing way with connections with the Murphy family.

At this point in time, the school is positioned to move forward into a new phase of adjustment and strategic planning for the longer-term future, as well as plan and launch an extended comprehensive campaign to fundraise for needed costs. It is a natural inflection point in which I and the board have taken to pause and evaluate the best path forward for the next many years that this will entail.

We have concluded that it is time for a transition to new leadership at this juncture rather than a few years in this work, which would be the time of my originally planned departure. Considering this, I would like to let our NOLS community know that I will be stepping away from my role as President in three months' time and offer my support in transition to new leadership as designated by the board.

Onward communications of next steps will come via the board to our community. In the interim, I thank you for the opportunity to serve our mission, and I will also be on the NOLS bandwagon as we navigate into our future. I have always and will always believe that the world needs NOLS, and that we empower our students to change the world.

All my Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terri Watson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Terri Watson
President

**A letter from NOLS Board of Trustees Chair, Stuart Harris M.D.,
M.F.A., F.R.C.P. Edin.**



Dear Friend,

It is with humble appreciation that I announce the planned transition on April 30, 2023 of Terri Watson, President of NOLS. Terri has served as leader of our storied organization for over three years and has skillfully guided NOLS through the challenges posed by the global pandemic.

Within months of her hire, the pandemic struck and our global educational mission faced an existential threat. Terri responded to this unprecedented challenge with agility, good humor, unstinting work, and deep compassion for her team, instructors, and staff. Her level-headed leadership and decision-making ensured that NOLS not only survived, but served students during these uncertain times. She has earned a place in the pantheon of NOLS' outstanding leaders.

Terri's actions remind us that our mission serves students and our communities in ways that have never been more important. She has brought grace and poise to difficult conversations that have roiled institutions across the US. Her generosity, kindness, and deep commitment to the school she loves have created a lasting legacy. Terri is a friend and I profoundly admire her integrity. She will be deeply missed.

As we prepare for this transition, I am pleased to announce that as of May 1, NOLS will be led by Interim President Sandy Colhoun. Over the next three months, Sandy will serve as Vice President, working with the Executive Team to transition into his role. Sandy is a *Wind River Mountaineering* graduate and recently completed an extraordinary tenure as the Chief Campaign Officer at Colby College. He will step down from his role as a NOLS trustee immediately. Sandy brings a wealth of non-profit experience to the interim President's role. He has infinite energy and love of the school, its mission, and the people who create the transformative experiences that make NOLS who we are. The board has absolute confidence in his ability to provide strong leadership during this transition period.

As part of this ordered transition, a global executive search for our new President will commence immediately. The search will be thorough, ambitious and include a robust and diverse slate of candidates. Please be on the lookout for more information about this effort. We welcome your nominations for this critical role.

While we search for the next President of NOLS, the board has unwavering faith that the Executive Team will continue to lead the NOLS community in fulfillment of our mission.

NOLS creates transformative experiences. I have been told repeatedly, “NOLS taught me how to become my best self.” I’d be skeptical, except I have lived it personally. My *Fall Semester in the Rockies* in 1987 with instructor Caroline Byrd altered my life and continues to shape my career. Over the last 18 years, our *Medicine in the Wild* course has altered lives — and national policy leadership. NOLS’ mission matters — and now more than ever.

NOLS’s mission is to be “the leading source and teacher of wilderness skills and leadership that serve people and the environment.” NOLS remains mission-driven and deeply committed to our values and the people who define this institution. Our extraordinary reputation has been earned one student at a time over 58 years. We remain vigilant and act on the certain knowledge that we earn our reputation every day. NOLS will continue to build a thriving culture of inclusion and belonging that values all NOLS team members and authentically supports each and every one of them in fulfilling their potential and purpose.

I would like to extend the profound gratitude of the entire board of trustees to all our dedicated NOLS instructors, staff, our Executive Team, alumni, and parents. We remain committed to supporting the best educators on the planet. Your passion and support for the school’s world-class wilderness medicine and wilderness education are the source of our success. Your unwavering dedication makes NOLS possible.

I am excited for the opportunities that lie ahead. NOLS will continue to be the world leader in wilderness experiences that empower individuals and strengthen communities.

I am grateful to Terri for her years of service and leadership. I am thankful to our community for their dedication, hard work, and trust.

I look forward to the next chapter of NOLS with confidence. We will continue to build our enduring family of NOLS graduates and generous supporters. As Robert Frost wrote in *The Pasture*, “You come too.”

Our mission has never been more relevant. NOLS’ best days are to come.

You come too!

With warm regards,



Stuart Harris M.D., M.F.A., F.R.C.P. Edin.

Chair, NOLS Board of Trustees