



32ND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Facing Challenges Together

Portland, Maine | September 30 - October 2, 2025



2025 Action Steps

The true value of attending the WRMC is in the resulting action you take upon returning to your organization. The following list is intended to help you know where to start.

Action steps are measurable tasks or ideas you should be able to do or implement in your program within a reasonably short time frame. They are not meant as large sweeping changes, rather as small steps to move you forward in your risk management strategy.

Each presenter has contributed three action steps from their 2023 WRMC workshop. In some cases, the action steps parallel the main take-home points of the workshop; in other cases, the action steps are examples of a multitude of possible follow-up action.

The following action steps are arranged alphabetically and include pre-conference workshops, workshops, posters, and short talks.

A flash flood, a fatality, a lawsuit. A case study in critical incident response and preparing to successfully defend a lawsuit

Leah Corrigan

1. Review your website and participant facing documents to consider how well your language and systems would hold up to scrutiny;
2. Review your incident response plans to determine whether they would effectively function in an emergency;
3. Consider all of the important human relationships that may be relevant in the event of a critical incident or lawsuit.

Accidents in Outdoor Pursuits - Their Causes and Cures

Jed Williamson

1. Develop an understanding as to how using the "Understanding Causes of Accidents In Outdoor Pursuits" Matrix (Williamson, Meyer) prior to engaging in activities/expeditions could help prevent accidents AND develop a plan for how to use it as a framework to review incidents/near misses.
2. Create a plan for how to use this tool *with Program Staff* to analyze an accident in order to help you articulate what might have gone wrong and what to do going forward with Staff Training
3. Create a plan for how instructors/field staff might use the tool *with participants*.

Adventure-Ready HR: 5 Tips for Outdoor Organizations Without an HR Team

Vic Kerr, Tess Carlson

An Adult Discussion on Substance Use in Outdoor Spaces

Josh Goldstein

1. Destigmatize substance use in order to increase open and honest communication around use, provide education and resources around substance use in order to create environment of support, have a plan and knowledge of resources in the event that consequences of substance use arise.

Befriending the Nervous System, a Body Centered Approach to Managing Difficult Situations

Stacy Earlywine

1. Participants will discover their body contains a lot of information to help them get through difficult experiences.
2. Participants will be able to view a difficult situation through the lens of the nervous system and will have tools to stabilize themselves and help others do the same.
3. Participants will learn to track their own cycles of activation and to recognize activation in others as well as how to de-activate / de-escalate a situation.

Beyond better decision making: Accident reduction in avalanche terrain

Ian McCammon

1. Identify where causal chain assumptions may have weakened accident prevention in your program
2. Procedures and tools for adapting the system safety model to your program
3. Recipes for removing cultural barriers to improving safety thinking in your organization

Beyond Boundaries: SafeSport Principles for Youth in Outdoor Programs

Michele LaBotz, Alicia Heyburn

1. Conduct a "Gen Z Boundary Vulnerability Assessment" - Systematically review your program elements to identify risk areas requiring updated policy development. We will share a tool to assist programs with this process.
2. Develop/implement staff training modules - We will share several role-based training modules with concrete decision-making scenarios that staff may encounter with Gen Z participants.
3. Implement wilderness adaptations of at least one of the MAAPP-based recommendations.

Borderlines: From Awareness to Action

Elyse Rylander

1. Transition to Action - Focus on moving from panel insights to practical, field -based decision-making and problem solving.

2. Risk Assessment & Adaptation - Emphasis on assessing risks and adapting programs in response to immigration enforcement in outdoor spaces.
3. Empowering Practical Strategies - Goal to equip participants with real -world tools and strategies for managing sensitive field situations.

BRAINS - their differences, their needs, and how to support them

Teresa Jennings, Margaret Kelso

6 minutes Action Items:

1. *Assess any universal approach / one size fits all processes/procedures*
2. *Evaluate courses and gear for possible need for sensory training.*
3. *Review HR practices and the appropriateness for neurodivergent brains. *Remember 1 in 5 brains process information differently.*
4. *FIDGET giveaway - participants will name one practice they can go back to work on Monday and change to have an alternate/additional approach! We will have so many fidgets.*

Building organisational resilience for climate change

Loren Miller

1. Develop a Climate-Adaptive Risk Management Plan Conduct a risk assessment specific to climate-related hazards (e.g., heatwaves, floods, storms).Integrate real-time weather monitoring tools into planning and operations.Establish clear emergency response protocols for extreme weather events.
2. Enhance Organisational and Staff Preparedness Provide staff with training on climate-related risk assessment and adaptive decision-making. Implement scenario-based drills to practice responses to dynamic outdoor risks. Update Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to reflect changing climate risks.
3. Strengthen Community and Stakeholder Engagement Collaborate with local emergency services, land managers, and meteorological agencies. Educate participants and outdoor users on climate risks and self-responsibility. Develop a communication strategy for real-time alerts and risk updates."

Chance Favors the Prepared Mind: Purposeful Admissions for Stronger Risk Management

Dave Haffeman, Amina Simon

1. Attendees will identify at least two elements of their admissions process that could contribute to risk management challenges in the field and explore admissions resources that can help navigate challenges as they arise.
2. Attendees will feel empowered to use various new tools and strategies discussed during the presentation to improve the quality of the admissions "ramp" for participants, field staff, and administration.
3. Attendees will clarify the purpose of their admissions systems and lay the groundwork to craft an Admissions mission statement.

Contemporary Critical Incident Management Planning (CORE)

Dr. Clare Dallat, Deb Ajango

1. Ask a selection of managers and field staff what they expect would happen if a call came in regarding a critical incident on your program. Do you get consistency? Are there gaps in understanding? What needs to happen to get consistency in response?
2. After 1, recraft the critical incident contact card (that attendees are provided with in the workshop) and make them contextually relevant for your program.
3. Schedule a practice scenario for both in-field and administration team members (using the template provided to create one that is meaningful in your organization). If possible, have 1-2 observers take notes of their observations, and meet afterward to identify what worked well and what can be modified to improve your response.

Crisis Management Case Study: NOLS' Pre-plan in Action

Katie Baum Mettenbrink

1. Use the provided crisis management diagram to begin developing your own plan, or assess an existing plan and identify gaps.
2. Identify key players in your organization and tentatively assign roles. Identify people who have particular skills (or people in key roles who do NOT have particular skills). Become familiar with your people resources, including how you might get more help if needed (i.e. who is on your "bench"?).
3. Create a regular practice schedule, and practice! Run a drill to trouble-shoot your plan, identify strengths and gaps, and maintain familiarity with it over time.

Critical Evacuations: Helicopter Responses in Remote Areas

Helene de Lagillardaie

1. UNDERSTAND and COMMUNICATE the reality of emergency response in remote/wilderness areas
 - a. Advanced communication devices (Garmin, InReach, etc.) are crucial but must be fully integrated into emergency protocols.
 - b. Develop and maintain an organizational understanding of the reality of emergency response in your specific area/s of operation.
 - c. Staff must be trained not only in device operation but in what happens after an SOS is activated.
2. STRENGTHEN training and preparedness
 - a. Regular drills on remote emergency response with real-world constraints.
 - b. Decision-making frameworks for classifying emergencies and activating air support with or without PLB/SOS devices.
 - c. Mental preparedness and resilience for handling critical incidents during and post incidents.
 - d. Clear process and systems for each level of response of your organization including clear frameworks for escalation and internal responsibilities.
3. COLLABORATE with local Emergency Services & STAKEHOLDERS

- a. Building and maintaining relationships with local agencies for more efficient coordination.
- b. Understanding local response capabilities and limitations.
- c. Pre-planning for multi-agency and cross-borders incident response, including extended patient care.

Debunking Mental Health Myths

Michelle Lange

1. Attendees will be knowledgeable of elements of mental health conditions that are essential and non-essential to address when encountered on programs.
2. Attendees will be knowledgeable of concrete strategies to best support participants experiencing common mental health concerns while on program and to support de-escalation of mental health issues as they arise.
3. Attendees will be made aware of the importance of bringing to light and correcting mental health misinformation, which they can incorporate into staff training and program manuals to better support participants in the field.

Don't Wait (For Incidents to Occur) - Learn from Everyday Work Using Human & Organizational Performance (HOP) Principles

Gates Richards, Steve Smith ([Handout](#))

Participants will:

1. Understand HOP Principles and be able to take them back to their program
2. Examine their incident debriefing / analysis methods and consider adding Operational Learning into their routines
3. Receive resources and materials to support ongoing learning about HOP principles

Engaging and Experiential Staff Training

Sara Boisvert, Juan Francisco

1. Develop a Mission-Aligned Risk Management Framework: Utilize the initial session on "The Why Behind the What - Mission and Vision Alignment" as a foundation to create or refine your risk management strategies to help ensure alignment with staff training goals. This involves assessing current risk management practices and identifying areas where they may not fully support or align with the overarching goals. Engage stakeholders in this process to ensure a comprehensive understanding and commitment to aligning risk management with organizational objectives.
2. Implement the Kolb Cycle for Continuous Learning and Improvement: Apply the Kolb Cycle of Experiential Education to your risk management training and practices. This means actively involving staff in experiences that allow them to learn from real-world applications (concrete experience), reflect on these experiences (reflective observation), conceptualize the lessons learned (abstract conceptualization), and test these in new situations (active experimentation). This cycle should be embedded in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of risk management strategies to foster an environment of continuous learning and adaptation.

3. Incorporate Structured Feedback Mechanisms: Following the model of the workshop, establish regular and structured feedback sessions to evaluate the effectiveness of risk management training and practices. This should include both formal methods, such as surveys or assessments, and informal methods, like breakout groups or open discussions. Use this feedback to make informed adjustments to the training and risk management strategies. Emphasize the importance of a culture where feedback is welcomed and acted upon, ensuring that risk management practices are responsive to the evolving needs of the organization and its staff.

Firewatch: A 3-Tiered Systems/Training/Field Authority Approach

Moleek Busby

1. Participants will be aware of some support tools to help effectively communicate with their field staff/volunteers/members.
2. Participants will feel motivated to bring a systems/training/ and equipment approach to their organizations regarding wildfire and AQI hazards.
3. Through this session, participants will be able to grade their own environmental hazards protocol and be motivated to leverage pre-existing systems or create some new ones for their respective organizations.

Harnessing AI for (Outdoor and International) Program Administration: Efficiency, Risk Management, and Innovation

Motts Mueller, Chelsey Thwaites

1. Identify opportunities to leverage the power of AI to supplement and enhance existing Risk Management strategies.
2. Effectively deploy ai solutions to streamline and improve operations.
3. Guard against the Risks and understand the limitations of AI in program administration and risk management.

How Administrative Action is Reshaping the Risk Landscape for Outdoor Recreation Service Providers

Joshua Cole, Jahir Morris

1. Identify emergent physical, emotional, administrative, and business risks to your organization, staff, and participants
2. DO NOT overcorrect. One of the worst decisions you could make at this point is to dissolve equity programs without substantive reasoning for doing so. The best course of action now is to use this information to accurately assess the risks that your organization might be facing and position yourself to better defend your work under a hostile administration.
3. Build a plan to create organizational resilience to face the myriad changes impacting our public lands and land managers.

How SAR Works In The US

Christopher Boyer

1. Will understand how to initiate SAR

2. Will have realistic expectations about SAR response
3. Will be able to support the decision to call SAR

How to Prepare Your Employees to Act in Medical Emergencies Big and Small

Robin Larson, Josh McNary

1. Review and train your staff with support tools.
2. Think about the resources you're providing. are they easy to use and easy to find?
3. Keep training and practicing!

Insurance 101: Have you got it covered? (CORE)

Lach Zemp, Mike Lucas

1. You will be able to utilize a Heat Map to Identify & Assess your Major Operational Risks to better Quantify your Risk Profile,
2. Evaluate at a high level the adequacy of your Insurance Program vs. your Risk Profile.
3. Using claims scenarios, we provide, and the audience learns when and how to report and navigate claims.

Integrating Real-Time, Relational Environmental & Human Variables for More Accurate Risk Forecasting

Matthew Sheahan

1. Information pertaining to which variables are contributing to the risks at play in any adventure context, giving operators the knowledge of what needs to change with ORION's risk mitigation interface (e.g. a particular amount of snow on ground heightens risk of accidents, therefore we must create more snow)
2. Understand which days staff volume may need to fluctuate based on the risk value ORION provides for any given day/time (e.g. putting more staff on call for a given day based on the intersection of demographical client volume and weather)
3. Understand where staff/resources should be concentrated for a given day based on ORION's geographical assessment tool (e.g. assigning more ski patrol on a particular section of the resort)

Keep Your Team's Wilderness Medicine Training Sharp

Nadia Kimmel, Abby Rowe

1. Facilitate accurate scenario-based patient assessment drills.
2. Use case studies effectively.
3. Utilize field guides and texts to promote cognitive offloading and improve performance.
4. Create team cohesion and clarify roles and responsibilities among a team/staff with varied wilderness medicine training.

Leading with Curiosity: Building Safety Culture That Sticks

Luc Mehl

1. How can you seed curiosity in your personal practice and programs?
2. How can you use creative arts to seed curiosity?
3. Consider these factors in your safety culture work:

- a. Self-categorization
- b. Seeding curiosity
- c. Emotional connection
- d. Recallability

Legal Fundamentals: Understanding How to Protect Your Organization

Leah Corrigan

1. 1. Review how your organization handles contracts, and what changes you might need to make.
2. Review how you collect health history information and consider improvements to the substance or process.
3. Review your Critical Incident Response Plan, or make a plan to draft one.

Minding the Generational Gap

Lisa Schott

1. Assessment plans – ways of bringing stakeholders together to evaluate current- state and identify where generation gaps between staff and volunteers may be impacting the organization.
2. Training plans – ways to mitigate generation gap-related risk via staff (and/or volunteer) training
3. Evaluation plans – ways to take the intangible topic of generational differences and narrow your focus to have clear objectives with measurable outcomes to work towards resolution of challenges.

Navigating the Fork in the River: Risks and Opportunities in DEI Work Amid Changing Political Landscapes

Elyse Rylander

1. Conduct a DEI Risk Assessment for Your Program - Linked to the discussion on assessing risks of engaging and not engaging in DEI work.
2. Integrate DEI Scenarios into Staff Training - Reflects the opportunity to mitigate risks by preparing staff to handle challenging DEI-related interactions.
3. Develop a Clear Incident Reporting and Response Plan - Tied to mitigating reputational and societal risks through transparent and consistent practices.

Now You Can! Recent legislation allows the use of liability release agreements on federal lands

Frances Mock, Paul Sanford

1. Review your liability release agreement (with the help of an attorney). Remove carve out language. Add language required by NPS. Stop any use of the VAR (assuming you have a better release).
2. For state entities, confer with your institution's risk management office and with your agency permit administrators to determine your eligibility for permits under the relaxed indemnification requirement.
3. Educate your staff about the new rules for release, indemnity and insurance.

Parent Phone Call Lab

Paul Dreyer, Kevin Porter

1. Identify two characteristics or behaviors of potential parents (or clients) that are likely to hook you into angry or defensive communication. Write down one strategy for responding constructively to each of those behaviors.
2. Identify five pieces of information you want to have written down before making your next parent phone call about a behavioral incident. Then do the same for a medical incident. Incorporate those lists into your next staff training.
3. Identify two people in your program or a similar program who can serve as resources for you in preparing for or debriefing a challenging parent phone call. Contact those people in the next six months about serving as resources for you in the future.

Partnering with Purpose: Building Strong Alignment Between Ground Operators and Educational Institutions

Dave Haffeman, Kevin Porter

1. Attendees will receive a tool they can use to evaluate their own organization and the relationship with their partner organization to identify points of strength and where to focus resources to improve communication and align programmatic vision.
2. Attendees will learn ways to structure pre-program conversations to ensure the program offering is feasible and inline with each organization's capacity.
3. Attendees will receive a checklist with considerations for implementing the various tools and strategies discussed during the presentation.

Reason for hope; The Federal EXPLORE Act legislation and its impact on permitting and recreation on federal lands.

Paul Sanford, Matt Wade

1. Educate your administrative staff on the contents of the EXPLORE Act and identify any opportunities it may create. At the same time, recognize that recent agency staff losses and budget cuts may impact the timeline for implementation.
2. Consider whether any of the program activities you run or would like to run could be authorized using the new “organized group recreation activity or event” sections of the new law.
3. Contact your permit administrator(s) to determine where your public land unit(s) stands regarding implementation. Offer to assist them with understanding the contents of the new law if you are able to do so. Alternatively, offer to connect them with organizations like AMGA or the Wilderness Society to learn more.

Risk, Rapport & Reflection: Making the Daily Debrief Worth the Squeeze

Kristin Arnold, Sheldon Kerr

1. Implement one new debriefing question that targets reflection on psychological safety and inclusion.
2. Structure daily debriefs to be productive, engaging, and actionable within five minutes.

3. Train staff on using debriefs as a tool for reducing uncertainty by soliciting high-quality information.

Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response: Applying national best practices to the intimate work of outdoor education

Deirdre Loftus, Nathan Lyczak

1. Using the Socioecological Model, participants will evaluate and identify gaps in their organization's preparedness to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct and boundary concerns.
2. Using the Socioecological Model, participants will plan for imperative changes within their organization to mitigate the risk that sexual misconduct poses to their community.
3. Through a series of scenarios, participants will apply best practices to enhance their sexual misconduct prevention and response efforts at all levels of the Socioecological Model. Additionally, participants will leave with a copy of Krocka Expeditions community guidelines and select Krocka Expeditions training materials. Both resources can be molded and used as each organization sees fit.

Strategic Communication: De-escalation Skills for Challenging Conversations

Karen Pick, Jenn Layman

Before your next challenging conversation:

1. Isolate the specific, recent behavior and its direct impact
 - a. Write it down
2. Practice managing your nonverbal signals by focusing on two things when a conversation escalates:
 - a. Anchor your voice
 - b. Offer a choice
3. Practice active listening - Listen first and respond second.
4. Commit to consistent follow through - Keeping your promises will help build long term trust.

Strength-Based Risk Engagement & You Can Too

Misty Blakesley, Tony Dixon, Ellie Mullin, Christian Sommer

1. Learn trauma-informed practices.
2. Identify opportunities for implementing or improving culturally inclusive practices.
3. Reflect on "risk management" vs. "risk engagement"

Stress Injury Awareness: Tools for Early Recognition in Your Staff and Yourself (CORE)

Josie McKee

1. Share language with all staff as a universal precaution
2. Utilize Stress Continuum check-ins in operations
 - a. Plan to support staff in Orange/Red
3. Revisit your Individual Resilience Plan

The Bear Necessities: Current and Emerging Field Practices and Risk Communication Strategies to Reduce Human-Bear Conflict

Katie Baum Mettenbrink, Neal Fox, Grant Breidenbach

1. Ensure that your current food (etc) storage practices conform to relevant local regulations on the lands in which you operate.
2. Conduct a review of your organization's risk communication and education practices around bear safety.
3. Assess your organization's existing field practices around food (etc) storage and human-bear conflict avoidance.

The Words We Choose: Power, Inclusion, and Outdoor Program Design

Alexandra Rhue

1. Evaluate and Adjust Language in Program Design: Reflect on current program descriptions and marketing materials to ensure they use inclusive language that resonates with diverse participants, especially considering non or less experienced individuals. Aim to shift from traditional, exclusionary language to terms that emphasize belonging and inclusivity.
2. Utilize Frameworks for Inclusivity: Use tools like the ACPA Framework for Racial Justice, the Intercultural Development Continuum, and the Power & Identity Wheel to assess your personal and organizational approach to inclusivity. Identify where adjustments can be made to create a more welcoming and culturally aware environment for participants.
3. Reframe Programs with an Intercultural Mindset: Consider our personal Shift the approach to program design from a monocultural to an intercultural mindset, focusing on building programs that promote inclusion while fostering meaningful connections and a sense of belonging for all participants.

Understanding Contracts and Why You Need to Pay Attention to Those Clauses You Never Read!

Doug Stevens, Lach Zemp

1. The importance of reading and understanding all the terms of a contract.
2. Understanding the most important contracts in your operations, including liability waivers, assumption of risk agreements, and contracts with key partners, vendors and subcontractors
3. A checklist of the significant risk allocation terms that should be considered for every contract.

Unimaginable Disaster: Hurricane Helene's Impact on WNC

Alex Schwartz

1. Assess ERP for impact of infrastructure failure (e.g., communication systems collapse)
2. Identify opportunities to improve self-reliance (property, power, water, communication, etc.)
3. Investigate ways to create resilience and flexibility (relationships, systems, knowledge, etc.)

What does colonialism have to do with this? The development of a risk management microcredential for Indigenous Land Based Program practitioners

Julie Bremner, Gail Kuhl

1. Reevaluate, change or adapt standard risk management practices to bring in more culturally relevant activities and program components (ex: no tobacco policies can exclude tobacco offerings)
2. Identify and address gaps in applications of risk management training and practice to better support the needs of Indigenous land based programs: (ie: how do policies and practices support having Elders and knowledge keepers as program facilitators and activity leaders? Or how program policies support harvesting, preparing and eating wild foods or carrying and using hunting tools?)
3. Assess your own blindspots and learning areas to facilitate taking up this work as an ally (ex: learn who's land you're operating on and relevant protocols and local knowledge to support risk management)

When Good Programs Get Bad Press: Managing Incidents and Media in Real Time

Sarah Hoyer, M.J., Frances Mock, Emily Ten Eyck, Anne Morrison

1. Understand who their media contacts are in the locations where they are operating
2. How to determine whether the information shared would be subject to FOIA
3. Understanding the number of revisions that a media statement will go through as it's reviewed by your attorney and revised by your comms lead.

When the River Takes: Navigating Crisis, Trauma and Loss in the Outdoors

Kallie Kurtz

1. Develop a Toolkit to Understand, Recognize, and Respond to Trauma in the Moment and After Incidents
2. Create a Toolkit to Redress Outdoor Culture So Fear, Trauma, and Loss Can Be Acknowledged and Addressed improving psychological wellbeing
3. Establishing a Framework for Returning to Activity in Emotionally Healthy Ways After Traumatic Events