

2016 Presenter Biographies



Drew Leemon: *National Outdoor Leadership School, NOLS Risk Management Director*

Drew began his career in outdoor education with NOLS in 1978 as an instructor teaching mountaineering, climbing, hiking, and winter camping courses. He has held his current position since 1996. He serves on the steering committee for the annual Wilderness Risk Management Conference (WRMC). Drew has co-authored six papers on wilderness injury and incident data, is co-author of the Manual of Accreditation Standards for Adventure Programming and co-authored *Risk Management for Outdoor Leaders*. He was the recipient of the Charles (Reb) Gregg Award in 2013 for exceptional leadership, service and innovation in wilderness risk management.

Erin Walsh: *Mind Positive Parenting, Speaker/Trainer*

Erin is a dynamic, knowledgeable speaker who has addressed a wide range of audiences on topics related to brain development, child and youth development, and digital media. Erin was instrumental to the development of the MediaWise movement and enjoyed working with her father for 10 years at the National Institute on Media and the Family before creating Mind Positive Parenting in 2010. In addition to her work with Mind Positive Parenting, Erin is a speaker with the Bolster Collaborative and teaches undergraduate students at the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs where she teaches a program called Making Media, Making Change. Erin currently serves as outgoing board chair of YMCA Camp Widjiwagan. She has consulted with schools, school districts, parent groups and other youth serving organizations across the country on issues related to digital media, children, and youth. She lives in Minneapolis, MN with her partner and two young sons.

Grant Herman: *Camp Manito-wish YMCA, Operations Director*

Grant is the overall director of program delivery at Camp Manito-wish YMCA. He chairs the Program Team comprised of the Summer Program Director, the Leadership Program Director, the Wilderness Program director, the Executive Chef and the Property Manager. In addition, Grant sits on the marketing, recruiting and management teams and collaborates with all staff to ensure overall risk management and camp systems function. He also plays the role of sustainability advisor for the camp. Grant previously coordinated, over a range of years, the Outdoor Education and Environmental Studies Departments and directed the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute for Northland College in Ashland WI. He co-owns Living Adventure Inc. a sea kayak outfitting and adventure travel business near the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore in Bayfield, WI with his wife, Gail Green.

Paul Lovaas: *Camp Manito-wish YMCA, Wilderness Program Director*

Paul is the Wilderness Program Director for Camp Manito-wish YMCA and is responsible for facilitating over 15,000 user days of wilderness canoeing, backpacking, and kayaking trips across North America each summer. Paul followed his interests in wilderness tripping leading and environmental justice after graduating from Kalamazoo College in 2013 and spent recent years working as an educator and administrator at Conserve School in Land O' Lakes, Wisconsin. Paul has a Master's Degree in Environmental Education from the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point and is passionate about integrating environmental and social justice into the wilderness programs of Camp Manito-wish. Paul describes himself as a wilderness advocate, photography enthusiast, and aspiring Ultimate Frisbee specialist. Paul also serves on the MRMS steering committee.

Tim Sheehan: *Camp Manito-wish YMCA, Property Manager*

As Property Manager at Camp Manito-wish, Tim leads the property team in caring for and improving camp's properties, facilities, and grounds, ensuring a safe, functional and sustainable experience to all who come to Manito-wish. Tim began with Camp Manito-wish in the late 1980s holding positions from "Boatman" to Assistant Property Manager until 2001. After leaving Manito-wish, Tim embarked on a career path as a Paramedic, which evolved into a full time faculty position at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College. Tim currently remains an adjunct faculty member there. Tim holds a Bachelor of Science in Outdoor Education/Earth Science from Northland College. He teaches for Wilderness Medical Associates and continues to practice as a part time Critical Care Paramedic. Tim's also volunteers for the American Camping Association as an Accreditation Standards Lead Visitor.

Fred Sproat: *YMCA Camp Menogyn, Program Director*

Fred currently serves as the Program Director for YMCA Camp Menogyn near Grand Marais MN where he oversees the Camp's wilderness based multi-day trips. Prior to this gig Sproat attended the University of Oregon where he got his start in the outdoor industry by guiding trips for the school's outdoor program. After graduating with degrees in environmental studies and journalism Sproat lived and worked for a number of non-profit organizations throughout the country focusing on youth outdoor recreation. He led afterschool rock climbing and bike riding classes in Oregon, coached Nordic skiing in Colorado, and lead backcountry canoeing, backpacking, and climbing trip for Camp Menogyn. Sproat has twice launched bike supported backcountry ski trips in California and the Pacific Northwest. Earning his turns right from the doorstep Sproat and his compatriots and dedicated themselves to direct in response to the effects and concerns of climate change. Fred also serves on the MRMS steering committee.

Poppy Potter: *Voyageur Outward Bound School, Twin Cities Center Director of Operations*

Elizabeth "Poppy" has more than 25 years' experience working at experiential education organizations, charter schools, and non-profit organizations, such as Skills for Tomorrow Charter High School, YMCA, Girl Scouts of America and the American Youth Foundation. She also holds a Minnesota Special Education Teaching License in Emotional Behavior Disorders and a MS in Experiential Education.

Suellen Sack: *Voyageur Outward Bound School, Program and Safety Director*

Suellen has served VOBS for 21 years in many capacities. She first came to the Voyageur Outward Bound School as a student and learned on her course that she wanted to change the world and realized working with youth was an incredible way to do so. Suellen also spent two years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Nepal and currently serves on the food shelf board in Ely, Minnesota. She holds a MS in Chemistry from Cornell University.

Jack Lee: *Voyageur Outward Bound School, Executive Director*

Jack joined VOBS in May of 2012. He brings over a decade of experience leading Youth Frontiers, a nonprofit youth-serving organization, along with nine years of experience with Intel Corporation and an MBA from the University of Michigan.

Greg Fleming: *NOLS Wilderness Medicine, Instructor*

Greg has worked for NOLS since 2003 in a variety of capacities, including Admission Officer and Evacuation Supervisor. He has been a NOLS Wilderness Medicine instructor since 2009, and teaches Wilderness First Aid, Wilderness First Responder, and Wilderness EMT courses. Greg has also worked as an EMT on ambulances, in hospitals, and on search & rescue teams in Wyoming and Colorado. When not teaching, he works for REI, and enjoys climbing, cycling, and exploring the fun properties of frozen precipitation. Greg currently resides in Minnesota with his better half and their two canine companions.

Abigail Lucas: *Wilderness Inquiry, Sea Kayak Program Manager*

Abigail has made Minneapolis, MN home after growing up in Roscoe, IL. She studied Recreational Management and Recreational Therapy at Carroll University in Waukesha, WI where she obtained a Certified Recreational Therapy Specialist (CTRS) license. Most recently she worked under Mayor Andy Berke in the Youth and Family Development Department developing accessible recreation programming before coming to Wilderness Inquiry. She has been with the organization since May 2015 and is currently the Sea Kayak Program Manager. In her free time Abigail enjoys backpacking, running triathlons, and being a coffee connoisseur.

Kathleen Floberg: *YMCA Camp Widjiwagan, Wilderness Program Director*

Kathleen works for YMCA Camp Widjiwagan as their Wilderness Program Director. Part of her duties include working with the camp board and staff to develop effective risk management practices for Widjiwagan's canoe and backpacking programs. Kathleen grew up paddling in the Boundary Waters of Minnesota and swimming in Lake Superior on family vacations. She spent six summers leading backcountry canoe trips for Y camps and also worked as a naturalist for Widjiwagan's Outdoor Learning Program. These experiences gave her a new perspective on the role of the outdoors in a child's education and development and led her to pursue a Master's of Environmental Education degree from the University of MN, Duluth. Even though her current role keeps her at a desk most days, the wilderness still plays a significant role in her life. She serves as the Chair of the MRMS Steering Committee.

Kurt Simer: *BOLD & GOLD, Program Director*

Kurt is the Director of BOLD & GOLD for the YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities, a program which is focused on teaching multi-cultural leadership skills through wilderness adventure. As a member of the BOLD & GOLD Leadership Team, he has the opportunity to help YMCAs around the country develop tripping programs – it's a lot of fun! Prior to this position, Kurt worked for a variety of organizations as a course leader, program director, logistics coordinator, and director of risk management. Kurt helped start the Midwest Risk Management Symposium in the fall of 2012 and currently serves on the MRMS Steering Committee.

Dean Witman: *Madison Area Technical College, Adjunct Instructor*

Dean is an instructor with Madison College and Madison School & Community Recreation. Besides his teaching experience, he has worked for twenty-plus years in operations management. Dean holds an MS in Experiential Education from Minnesota State University, Mankato and an MBA from Columbia University.

Carla Hacker, *University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, Adjunct Professor*

Carla is graduate faculty for the Institute for Professional Studies at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. In this role, she facilitates for cohort groups of educators seeking a Master of Education in Professional Development with an emphasis in Experiential Education. She has been an educator in the Madison, Wisconsin schools for 35 years. During that time, she has taught and facilitated for a wide variety of groups from an extensive range of cultural, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds. Carla was also program coordinator and teacher for an adventure-based experiential education program in the public school system in metropolitan Madison, Wisconsin for the past 20 years. She holds an MS in Experiential and Environmental Education from Radford University in Virginia and a BS in Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Ben Koch: *New Vision Wilderness Therapy, Field Director*

Ben's interest in working and teaching in outdoor environments began while completing a BS in Civil Engineering at the University of Wisconsin Madison, where he was first immersed in connecting environmental education with nature connection experiences. During this period, Ben spent three summers working as a camp counselor in Wisconsin and three summers leading international trips for Wilderness Ventures in Fiji, Switzerland, and Tanzania. Through these informative experiences, Ben decided to continue his work in the outdoor field permanently, working two seasons as an Outdoor Educator for YMCA Camp Orkila and returning to University to get a MS in Outdoor Education. Ben's current position is Field Director for New Vision Wilderness, managing a team of 20+ wilderness instructors providing therapeutic care to traumatized teenagers in a wilderness setting. In his free time, he enjoys hiking, playing board games, and exploring how to cook with the unknown vegetables included in his CSA.

Eli Jackson: *Coulee Connections, Program Director*

Coming soon

Rob Van Nuland: *Coulee Connections, Executive Director*

Coming soon

Bud Ahrens: *Voyageur Outward Bound School, Winter Program Director*

Bud was born and raised in Cincinnati, OH; WHO-DEY! HE obtained his B.S. in Recreation Studies, majoring in Adventure Recreation from Ohio University in 2002. HE then went on to manage a gear store for 2 years before fighting wildfires in Northern California. Bud attended an Outward Bound 8-day dogsled course in 2010 and was back 3 months later starting his Internship with VOBS. He hasn't left since. Bud has gone from Intern, Instructor and Dog Trainer to Winter Program Director. He loves living in the North Woods!

Josh Epstein: *BOLD & GOLD, National Expansion Coordinator*

Josh is dedicated to inspiring teens to become multi-cultural leaders through the exploration of the natural world. Josh has worked in the youth development field for 15 years doing everything from 30-day canoe trips for adjudicated youth in the swamps of Alabama to leading games for over 300 students at a time on the beaches of Southern California. He has worked for the YMCA Boys Outdoor Leadership Development and Girls Outdoor Leadership Development (BOLD & GOLD) for the past 8 years in every role from instructor to his current role as National Expansion Coordinator for BOLD&GOLD.

Amy Hadow: *YMCA Camp Widjiwagan, Summer Program Director*

Amy is the Summer Program Director at YMCA Camp Widjiwagan. She grew up spending her summers in the North Woods with her family where she developed a love for canoeing and the smell of pine trees that led her to Widji and a career in Outdoor Education. Amy spent five summers as a trail guide at Widji. She also has worked in environmental education, conservation and land management and she has a Masters of Arts in Higher Education and Student Affairs from the University of Iowa. Amy loves to laugh, paddle and spend time with friends.