



YELLOWSTONE FOREVER

WILLOWS AND WOLVES

Itinerary & Details

FIELD SEMINAR - SUMMER 2023

INSTRUCTOR: Brenna Cassidy, Ph.D. Candidate

INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHY: Brenna Cassidy was born and raised in northern Illinois where her curiosity for the natural world grew in the forests and tall grass prairies. She completed a degree in Wildlife Ecology at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and spent summers during her undergraduate degree in northern Wisconsin and Yellowstone National Park. After graduating in 2012, she moved back to Yellowstone and worked on multiple projects studying birds, cougars, and wolves and spent five years seasonally migrating between the Bird Program and Wolf Project. Her PhD research focuses on the survival and reproduction of gray wolves in Yellowstone National Park. While not working, she can be found in the pottery studio and following her dog around the mountains.

ACTIVITY LEVEL: This course is an activity **level 2** and students enrolled in this course are expected to be active participants. Be prepared to hike up to 3 miles per day, comfortably, with elevation gains up to 600 feet. Some off trail hiking possible.

*All field activities will be conducted as a group. If you cannot meet the activity level expectations during your program, you may be restricted from participation in daily outings. We will not alter program itineraries or activities to accommodate participants who cannot meet the expectations of the stated activity level.

LOCATION: Lamar Buffalo Ranch – Yellowstone National Park, WY

PROGRAM DATES & TIMES: The program begins at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 3, 2023, and ends on Saturday, August 5, 2023, at 4:00 p.m.

LODGING CHECK-IN & CHECK-OUT: Lodging check-in begins at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 3, 2022, and lodging check-out is at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday, August 6, 2022.

MEALS: You will need to bring your own food; lunch should be able to travel in the field with you.

For general information about the facilities, preparing for classes, what to expect, cancellation policies, and more, please see the [Lamar Buffalo Ranch - Summer General Information](#) document.

FROM THE INSTRUCTOR

Welcome to Yellowstone Forever's, *Willows and Wolves*, Field Seminar! Many visitors in Yellowstone National Park appreciate the animals and landscape but never get to explore how they can affect one another in often surprising ways.

The entire course will take place on the Northern Range, minimizing our travel time and maximizing our time in the field. This area is known for historically high densities of wolves, bears, beavers, and herbivores like elk and bison. This combination sets up a wonderful ecological laboratory for our discussions of how wolves affect their environment, what trophic cascades are, and why this idea is so fiercely debated in Yellowstone.

The first evening we will meet at the Lamar Buffalo Ranch in the "Serengeti of America," Lamar Valley. We will use this time to introduce ourselves, the course, and lay the groundwork to build upon for the remaining days. Most of our time will be spent in the field investigating how animals affect their environment, how researchers are investigating these changes, and how the ecosystem has changed in the Northern Range with fluctuating wolf, elk, and beaver populations. We will also have short classroom discussions to emphasize important concepts. Please come prepared for warm, sunny days with a chance of afternoon storms and with an extra layer for chilly (optional) early-morning wildlife watching. We will look for wolf pups taking their first journeys away from the den and the always dramatic bison rut at sunrise!

Please don't hesitate to email with questions or concerns, I look forward to sharing the stories of Yellowstone with you!

- Brenna Cassidy, Ph.D. Candidate
brenna.cassidy@umconnect.umt.edu

PROGRAM ITINERARY

The itinerary is designed to take advantage of the best opportunities in the park, but may be adjusted to adapt to weather conditions, wildlife activity, holidays, and road construction. *The details and timing of the agenda are subject to change.*

- Day 1** Participants are welcome to check into the Lamar Buffalo Ranch starting at 4:00 p.m.
- 7:00 p.m.** The program starts with evening introductions and orientation where participants will be introduced to the Lamar Buffalo Ranch and a general overview. This is also an opportunity to go over any questions you might have about the course and itinerary.
- Day 2** Start the early morning with an optional wildlife-watching opportunity. Following, in the morning, there will be a classroom discussion on the following topics:
- History of wildlife in YNP (1872-present)
 - What are trophic cascades?
 - “How Wolves Change Rivers”: A social media sensation
- In the afternoon there will be a field trip to Crystal Creek. This will be a meandering hike, about a 1.5-mile round trip and minimal elevation gain, mostly on-trail where we will discuss:
- Hydrology & beaver ecology
 - Songbird ecology
 - Wolf reintroduction
- The evening will end with an optional wildlife-watching trip.
- Day 3** Start the early morning with an optional wildlife-watching opportunity. In the afternoon there will be a field trip to Elk Creek. This will be a short distance hike, about a one-mile round trip and 250 feet of elevation gain, mostly on-trail, where we will discuss:
- Wolf reintroduction continued
 - Elk and bison: changes through time
 - How can ecologists act like beavers?
- We will spend the afternoon discussing the future of Yellowstone ecology.
- There will be an optional evening hike to the Rose Creek wolf acclimation pens. The hike is ~3 miles, 500' of elevation gain, and partially on-trail, partially off-trail on some uneven terrain.
- Day 4** Check out by 9:00 a.m.

PROGRAM EQUIPMENT

For a full list of recommended equipment for all courses see the [Lamar Buffalo Ranch - Summer General Information](#) document.

There are no items specific to this course.

RECOMMENDED READING

No prior reading is required, but participants might enjoy the following publications, that complement the program. Most publications are available at Yellowstone Forever's online store at shop.yellowstone.org Yellowstone Forever supporters receive a 15% discount and proceeds directly support the park.

- *Decade of the Wolf (revised and updated second edition)*. Smith, D. W. and G. Ferguson. 2012. Lyons Press.
 - An incredible recounting of the journey of wolves coming back to Yellowstone National Park and the people that precipitated the journey.
- *Yellowstone Wolves: Science and Discovery in the World's First National Park*. Smith, D. W., D. R. Stahler, and D. R. MacNulty. 2020. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
 - This is a treasure trove of scientific findings from the Yellowstone Wolf Project. Covering many topics, this book will answer many questions about wolves!
- *Where the Wild Things Were: Life, Death, and Ecological Wreckage in a Land of Vanishing Predators*. Stolzenburg, W. 2009. Bloomsbury Publishing.
 - This is a great overview of how ecosystems are affected by vanishing predators.

WHOM TO CONTACT

For any questions, concerns, or additional information please contact the following:

- Program itinerary, health forms, payment, and activity questions please contact Yellowstone Forever at institute@yellowstone.org or 406-848-2400
- Road updates, park conditions, and general park information please contact Yellowstone National Park Service at <https://www.nps.gov/yell/contacts.htm>
- If running late for a program, please contact 406-8478-2400