



ECOLOGY PROJECT
INTERNATIONAL

EPI

POLICIES &
LOGISTICS

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REMINDERS

- Read this guide & review the **Student Handbook** well in advance of the course.
- Get travel insurance that will reimburse you in the event of a cancellation.
- Give us a call anytime you have questions!



Introduction

Welcome to EPI! We're looking forward to having you join us for an unforgettable time in the field, and we hope this Policies & Logistics guide will help prepare you for your upcoming experience. In both this guide and the Student Handbook, you can find answers to commonly asked questions and details about our policies and expectations, so please make some time to review these materials in full. Your help in this important stage of preparation goes a long way to ensuring a fun and safe adventure on course!

Who We Are

Our Vision

Each year thousands of students, both local to the program sites and visiting from around the world, join EPI on multi-day field courses. Our courses combine hands-on field science and conservation, inquiry-based learning, and authentic cultural exchange that inspire and empower youth to take an active role in conservation.

We envision a diverse movement building communities that cherish and restore the ecosystems that sustain them. To learn more about our mission, vision, and goals, please visit our [website](#).

Academic Programming

At each of our program sites and throughout all our courses, our programming focus is scientific. Every EPI program provides a hands-on field experience and engages students in local environmental issues. Our experiential and academically rigorous curriculum was designed using US and international education standards.

Though we structure our courses through a field research lens, science education is just the beginning. In addition to teaching research techniques and local ecology, we devote time to writing exercises, team-building activities, the arts, and leadership training.

While on course, participants complete between 20 and 40 hours of academic coursework and related activities, 5-20 hours of field research, and 1-5 hours of service learning. For specifics on your program, please see your Student Handbook.



Partnerships & Local Students

From students to schools, scientists to local business owners, our partnerships form the solid foundation imperative to lifelong stewardship. We believe that this commitment to stewardship must cross cultural and national borders, so we involve people local to each of our program sites in every aspect of what we do.

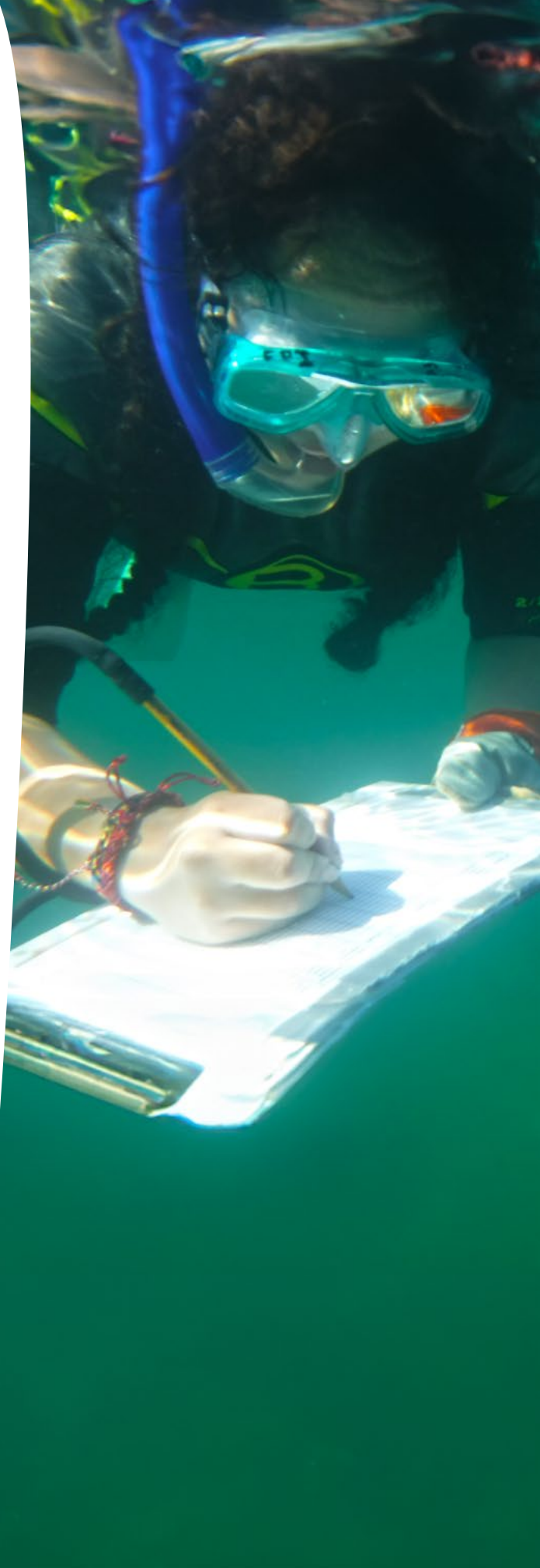
We also believe that every student deserves the opportunity to learn and engage with science in their own backyards. Each year, we provide scholarships to students from the communities adjacent to our program sites so that they can also participate in our courses and continue conservation efforts throughout the year.

More than 110,000 students have participated in our programs since EPI was established in 2000. On average, more than 70% of those participants are local teens, many of whom have never engaged with the dynamic and important ecosystems close by.

**ON AVERAGE,
MORE THAN 70% OF
OUR PARTICIPANTS ARE
LOCAL STUDENTS!**

Want to know more about our local programs and how you can support local youth in the U.S. and Latin America?

Learn more on our [website](http://www.ecologyproject.org).



Health & Safety Policies

The Big 5

Perhaps our most important Health & Safety Policy is the “Big 5.” Participants can familiarize themselves with the Big 5 in their Student Handbook prior to departure, and it will be the first thing they review with instructors once on course. If participants break one of the Big 5, we reserve the right to send them home at the expense of the participant or their parents or guardians. The Big 5 are:

- **No tobacco products:** The use and/or possession of cigarettes or tobacco products of any kind are not allowed on course.
- **No alcohol:** The use and/or possession of alcohol is not allowed on course.
- **No sexual behavior or coupling:** Sexual activity or exclusive behavior of any kind is prohibited on course.
- **No illegal drugs:** The use and/or possession of illegal drugs is not allowed on course.
- **No disruptive behavior:** While admittedly a broad category, we define disruptive behavior as any action or activity that jeopardizes the safety of other participants or our instructors, or that negatively affects the group’s learning while on course.

100% Unplugged

Educator and student lives are often filled with noise and distraction. One of our program goals is to help people slow down, listen, tune-in, and connect with each other and the environment. We recognize the importance of using technology in field science, and if appropriate, our instructors will use necessary tools in the field (e.g. GPS). However, we ask students and chaperones to completely unplug so that they can immerse themselves in the experience and take advantage of extra time to journal, talk with each other, interact with instructors, listen to the birds, or to just sit and soak in the incredible ecosystem around them.

For these reasons, **no electronic devices are allowed on course**. If students bring them for the plane ride, **EPI instructors will collect them upon arrival at the program site**. They will be kept in a secure place until the end of the course, at which time they will be returned.



EPI Staff Qualifications

Risk management and student safety always come first on an EPI course. Our field staff are trained and certified in advanced first aid, and many of them are [Wilderness First Responders](#). Additionally, we train field staff in risk management on-site, with program-specific training prior to each season.

Our medical protocols, first aid kits, and emergency action plans are developed in consultation with a U.S. based physician, a wilderness medical advisor, and our local partners, and they are evaluated and revised every year.

24 Hour Contact Phone

Though we do not allow participants to take cell phones on course, EPI instructors in the field and staff in the U.S. carry emergency cell phones with them 24 hours a day while students are on course. If there is an emergency in the field, EPI contacts the parents. If there is an emergency at home, parents can call our U.S. office, and we contact the instructors in the field immediately. Otherwise, remember: No news is good news!

Health Insurance

All participants must be covered by medical insurance while on course. When traveling abroad, we recommend that you check with your insurance carrier to confirm that your coverage is valid in the host country. If not, we request that participants purchase medical insurance specifically for this course.

Medical Forms

Five months prior to your EPI course (one month prior for local Yellowstone courses), we review your health forms and may call and/or email to clarify questions. If you have questions about medical concerns during travel time to and from the EPI site, please contact your course chaperone.*

There are two sections to our Medical Form: **Participant Medical History** and the **Physician Form**. The Participant Medical History is completed online and can be accessed through your student login. This information helps us understand and assess your medical needs in order to create the safest and best experience possible for you while on course. Please fill out this section with as much detail as possible.

Even if you have a current physical form, you must complete the EPI Medical Form. This helps ensure that students receive clearance specifically for the course and that medical information is consistent for every participant.

The Physician Form must be completed and signed by a licensed medical professional (EPI only accepts MDs, PAs, NPs, and DOs). Please check with your doctor to see if you will need a check-up prior to completing the form – they will need to review the Participant Medical History form (you can print or download it once complete) and confirm its accuracy and/or make changes. To prevent delays you should also review the Physician Form, once completed by your doctor, to ensure it is filled out completely. Medical forms can be accessed electronically from your account [login page](#). In an effort to conserve resources, we use a paperless enrollment process. Materials must be submitted electronically via your participant portal. In special cases where a participant experiences technological difficulties, materials may be submitted by email or fax.

Our thorough medical review process begins 5 months prior to course departure. However, if there are any medical conditions that you suspect may jeopardize your ability to participate in the course (severe food allergies, disabilities, life-threatening illnesses or other major medical conditions), please notify our staff as soon as possible.

Health Status & Medication Changes

If there is a change in your medical status after submitting the Medical Form—including recent hospitalizations or ER visits, EPI must be notified immediately so we can update our records and inform the program staff of changes prior to the course. Changes must be reviewed by our Medical Reviewer and/or our Chief Medical Screener in order for you to be cleared to participate.

Any cost incurred as a result of not communicating medical changes will be the sole responsibility of the participant.

Medications

All medications taken by minors (under 18) will be collected by EPI instructors within the first 24 hours of arrival in the host country. The only exceptions to this policy are asthma bronchodilator inhalers, epinephrine, and injectable insulin (see below for more information).

On course, EPI instructors will confidentially dispense and document each individual's medication usage (*this includes all prescribed oral contraceptives*). This ensures that medications are taken as prescribed and that they are stored safely throughout all activities. Participants carrying inhalers, epinephrine, and insulin work directly with our instructors to document their medication usage. It is important that our trained and certified instructors are able to monitor the entire picture of our participants' health so they can help make the course experience safe and fun.

Participants over 18 are responsible for their own medications, but instructors will check in with them at the beginning of the course and are happy to help safely store all medications.

Important Medication Reminders

- Record all medications on your Medical Form.
- Prescribed medications must come in a pharmacy container with a legible label that includes the participant's name, the physician's name, the medication name, and the dosage and frequency requirements.
- Keep all medications, vitamins, supplements, etc. in their original and appropriately labeled bottles or containers.
- Bring enough for the entire length of the stay, as well as an extra night in case of travel delays.
- Do **not** mix medications.

Asthma Inhalers

If you have a prescription for an inhaler, you are required to bring two inhalers on your course. You will carry one inhaler, and the EPI instructors will carry the other. If you do not have two inhalers when the instructors check with you at the beginning of the course, you will not be allowed to go into the field until a second inhaler is obtained.

Epinephrine

If you are prescribed an epinephrine injection, you are required to bring at least one dose. You will carry it with you on course and should know how to use it. EPI staff is trained and will help you administer it if needed. We recommend injections in the form of an EpiPen® or Twinject®, which are easier to self-administer during a reaction.

*An EPI Chaperone is the teacher(s) or group leader(s) accompanying students on the EPI course.

Insulin and Other Injections

EPI must be notified at least two months in advance of the course start date if a participant will be injecting medication while on course. We expect participants who use injections (e.g. – insulin, growth hormone shots, anti-allergy shots, etc.) to be able to self-administer. If your medication needs to be kept cool, please note this on your Medical Form, and the instructors will store the injections for you throughout the course.

Diabetes

If you have diabetes, please contact EPI's office directly to provide more information. Diabetic participants using injectable insulin will be allowed to keep their insulin and supplies on their person for easy access, but they must assist EPI instructors in documenting its usage (as per all medications on course).

Preventative and "Just in Case" Medications

Please do not bring preventative or "just in case" medications that you do not take on a regular basis (e.g. – aspirin, antacids, antibiotics, anti-diarrheals, etc.). EPI instructors have a first aid kit stocked with over-the-counter medications, which can be dispensed as needed. Any preventative or "just in case" medicines brought on course will be collected and held for the length of the course, unless otherwise instructed by a doctor and then returned to you upon departure for home.

If a participant gets sick on course, EPI staff will take the participant to a local licensed medical professional. Our protocol is to have licensed medical professionals diagnose and treat illness, not EPI instructors.

Immunizations

We do not require vaccinations in order to participate on course. We do recommend, however, checking with [CDC recommendations](#) and consulting your physician on this matter. EPI adheres to the laws and requirements of the governments where we operate. Though it is not typical, if any vaccination is required for entry or travel at a program location, we will communicate that requirement to you.



Health & Wellness Policies

EPI operates courses with the understanding that illnesses (including COVID-19, RSV, Influenza, Norovirus, and other communicable diseases) are a challenge on course for participants and staff.

EPI's Commitment

We take risk management seriously and monitor risks in our operating areas, including those related to illnesses. EPI follows best practices guidance from governmental and non-governmental health organizations; this includes directions of local and national governments and on-the-ground updates from our own staff and advisors. We reserve the right to cancel a course at any time if we do not feel we can manage the risks to participants and staff appropriately. Our cancellation policy applies in a situation in which EPI chooses to cancel a course.

Managing Risk Before Course

We ask that you take precautionary measures to stay healthy in the days leading up to your course. Beginning 14 days prior to your departure date, consider practicing physical distancing or using face masks when in crowded public places. Follow the CDC's guidelines to stay healthy by: staying up to date with vaccinations; practicing good hygiene by covering coughs and sneezes, washing or sanitizing your hands often, and cleaning frequently touched surfaces; and taking steps for cleaner air such as bringing in more fresh outdoor air, purifying indoor air, or gathering outdoors.

All participants should self-monitor for symptoms of illness. If you feel unwell, consider being tested for respiratory or other illnesses so that you can receive available treatments that may lessen symptoms or lower the risk of severe illness. You should not travel if you have been vomiting or have a fever within 24 hours of departure. If you have been ill prior to course, you must be fever free without the use of fever-reducing medication for at least 24 hours and have symptoms that are improving overall. You should also plan to take additional precautions (such as masking, distancing, practicing good hygiene, and) for another five days to prevent the spread of illness to other travelers.

What if someone on course gets sick?

While we focus on wellness and prevention during courses, sometimes participants get sick. If you do not feel well on course, please notify your instructors immediately. Instructors carry an extensive first aid kit with over-the-counter medications and will arrange clinic visits for participants who do not improve quickly. If individual(s) show symptoms of a communicable disease while on course EPI will support the participant and group by taking steps to reduce spread, provide treatment and access to medical care, support the health and well-being of all participants, and provide necessary logistical support until the individual(s) feel well enough to continue the program or return home. All clinic visits, treatments, or quarantines may incur additional program costs which will be passed on to the participant.

Logistics

Forms

All forms are due 5 months prior to course. Timely submission of payments and paperwork helps ensure that you get cleared to participate and that the course runs smoothly.

EPI does not grant refunds for cancellations based on complications with paperwork.

Students with outstanding paperwork and payments after the final due date are at risk of cancellation from the course.

Medical Forms (Participant Medical History and Physician Form)

- Please ensure you have completed every section, that you or your parents have signed the first section, and your physician has completely filled out and signed the second section. No need to send proof of vaccinations.

Consent Forms

- EPI consent forms
- Course activity forms

Minor International Travel Letter

- Required for a U.S. minor to travel outside the U.S. without parents or guardians.
- Must be signed and notarized by both parents (even if one parent is traveling with the group) if you will be under 18 as of your course start date. If second parent is unavailable, one parent may sign the letter, but additional document proving sole custody is required. (*Documentation may include: certified copy of divorce papers stating full legal custody of minor, birth certificate with one parent listed, death certificate, or adoption papers with one parent listed.*)

Passports

- Must be a clear and legible color copy – a smartphone photo of the passport lying flat works well.
- For U.S. citizens traveling with a U.S. passport, passports must be valid for the length of your stay in Mexico, Costa Rica, or Belize. Passports must be valid for 6 months after arrival for travel to Ecuador.
- If you do not currently have a valid passport, please start the process immediately to ensure you receive it in time for the course.

Visas

- U.S. citizens do not require a visa. If you are not a U.S. citizen, it is your responsibility to check with the host country's embassy and find out whether you will need a visa for the trip.

Note: If you withdraw due to passport/visa complications within 30 days of departure, or if you are not allowed into the destination country, you will not be eligible for a full or partial refund. EPI is not legally or financially responsible for issues that arise due to passport/visa difficulties.

All medical, consent, and course activity forms can be accessed electronically from your account login page (ecologyproject.org/student-area).

In an effort to conserve resources, we use a paperless enrollment process. Materials must be submitted electronically.

Payments

Unless it was prearranged for the tuition payments to be collected by the school or institution organizing the group, payments may be made by Visa or MasterCard, check, money order, or cashier's check. All credit card and debit card transactions incur a 3.5% processing fee. Payments should post to the participant account by 10AM MST the following day. Please mail checks to the EPI office with the participant name on the memo line. Bounced checks will incur a \$35 NSF charge.

Payment Schedule

- Both the **\$350 enrollment deposit** and the **\$1,000 tuition deposit** are due no later than six months prior to your course.
- Final payment for the remaining tuition balance is due no later than two months prior to the course.
- A \$50 surcharge will automatically be applied to the participant account if the **tuition deposit** and/or **final payment** are past due. To avoid this surcharge, please pay prior to the deadline or contact our office to discuss an alternate payment arrangement.

Check the status of your paperwork and outstanding tuition balance anytime by logging into your account at www.ecologyproject.org/login (using your name and the 4-digit PIN you chose when enrolling). Please note that account updates may not be posted until the following business day.

Withdrawal & Refund Policies

If a participant withdraws and cancels their participation from a course, the following refund terms apply:

- Cancellation within 24 hours: **full refund** of payment
- Cancellation up to eight months (240 days) prior to course start date: **full refund minus \$150 fee***
- Cancellation between eight months (240 days) and six months (180 days) prior to course start date: **full refund minus \$250 fee***
- Cancellation between six months (180 days) and two months (60 days) prior to course start date: **full refund minus \$750 fee***
- Cancellation within two months (59 days) of course start date: **No refund**

**Does not include any non-refundable airfare costs. Airline vouchers or refunds may be provided if possible.*

For an unexpected cancellation of an entire course due to airline related delays or cancellations, civil unrest, weather, pandemics, and other unforeseen circumstances, EPI will work to recover funds as possible (to be issued as tuition vouchers or airline vouchers) and reduce additional expenses associated with rescheduling. Recoverable funds will vary based on the proximity of the canceled course's scheduled start date.



Travel

Airline Arrangements

If your course tuition includes airfare, EPI will arrange and purchase round trip air travel from your closest major airport to the host country. We make every effort to arrange the quickest and most direct flight route for all participants; however, we reserve the right to choose the carrier, routing, and departure city airports. Once finalized, EPI will send a flight itinerary and confirmation codes to the group's chaperone prior to the departure date.

In order to ensure that everyone is on the same flight, we purchase group airfare. If we receive your second deposit after the group flight arrangements have been made, we will try to ticket you at the best available fare and time, but you will be responsible for paying any increase in fare.

Additionally, if you sign up late or do not pay tuition by the indicated deadlines, airfare costs may increase. This will result in a \$50 late fee charge in addition to paying any increases in fare. Because we generally purchase blocks of tickets, it is not possible to use frequent flier miles to cover the cost of your airfare.

EPI does not purchase airfare for individual participants desiring alternate itineraries. In the event that you desire an itinerary different from your group, you must:

- Confirm the deviation with the chaperone and/or school.
- Pay the tuition rate that does not include airfare (call us for details).
- Wait to hear from EPI that the group airfare is purchased.
- Purchase a ticket within predetermined windows of arrival and departure.
- Provide the itinerary to EPI.

Due to market volatility, EPI cannot guarantee airfare costs, and any expenses associated with increased airfare costs may be passed on to the participant.

Please Note:

- EPI is not responsible for paying baggage fees that may apply to your air travel, so please check with the airline prior to travel for fees you may incur.
- All flight arrangements are subject to change at any time for many reasons beyond EPI's control.
- EPI staff generally do not fly with participants, but will meet them upon arrival at the destination airport.
- If a student traveling alone to a program site is required to arrange unaccompanied minor services by the airline, the family is responsible for purchasing that service and gathering all the necessary information to submit to the airline and EPI prior to the departure day.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance can provide coverage for medical expenses, trip interruption/cancellation, baggage damage, medical evacuation, and much more. Cancel for Any Reason policies require that offer the most cancellation flexibility must be purchased within 10-21 days of making your initial course deposit.

We strongly encourage you to purchase travel insurance.

EPI does not cover the theft, loss, or damage of your personal property or equipment, so be sure to confirm that your insurance coverage includes these risks. For additional information and compare plan options visit: Insuremytrip: <https://www.insuremytrip.com/> or SquareMouth Travel Insurance: <https://www.squaremouth.com/>.

Packing

Check out your course packing list from your account [login page](#). You can also read about helpful packing tips from your Student Handbook. Remember: You're responsible for any baggage fees at the airport, so review your airline's fee system and pack smartly if you want to avoid additional fees!

Lodging

Cabins, tents, and other sleeping accommodations are single-gender at all times for participants. EPI is an inclusive organization that welcomes participants of all gender identities and sexual orientations. The gender identity of each student will be honored in all lodging decisions and will be handled with discretion by EPI. If EPI's lodging policy is not compatible with school policies or personal preferences, please contact our office immediately to discuss alternative lodging options with EPI.

Document Control

For international courses, do not forget to bring your passport and original [Minor International Travel Letter](#) (plus supplementary documents, if needed) with you to the airport. Students cannot travel without these items. Upon arrival in the host country, our EPI instructors will collect your documents and store them in a safe location until the end of the course.

If you plan on bringing a credit card, you should make a copy of the steps to take and numbers to call if it is lost or stolen. You should also write down phone numbers for travel insurance, medical insurance, phone cards, and emergency contact numbers and store these copies separate from the originals.

Extra Expenses

In most circumstances, participants will not have any additional expenses while on course. Occasionally, however, an additional expense might be incurred to cover unexpected transportation costs or visits to a clinic or hospital. Generally, EPI will ask the participants to cover the cost of any unforeseen expenses. In the event that circumstances make it impossible for a student to pay for needed services, EPI will cover the cost and then contact the family for reimbursement. Payment to EPI will be due upon receipt of the invoice.

Students may want to travel with up to \$100 to cover some expenses on course that are not included (e.g. – baggage fees, snacks at the airport, or souvenirs on course).





CONTACT EPI ANY TIME, ANY REASON

Have questions? Contact us – we're real people, and we want to hear from you!

US Phone (M–F, 9am–5pm MST): 1.406.721.8784
Email: info@ecologyproject.org
Website: www.ecologyproject.org
Mailing Address: 315 S 4th St E, Missoula, MT 59801

CHECK OUT OUR STORE!

[EPI Gear](#) will help you prepare for life in the field and show your EPI pride in style. Every purchase helps bring science, cultural exchange, and conservation education to students and educators.

STAY IN TOUCH!

Share photos, find photos from your course, and get awesome EPI updates on our social media channels!

