

Reciprocal, Not Transactional

Emerald LaFortune, Montana Afoot and Afloat '10



“When it comes to outdoor recreation and appreciating the outdoors, we have a responsibility to the landscape and the people there. Dominant culture wants us to see ourselves as separate, but WRFI helped me realize my duty to respect the places we live and recreate. I wouldn’t have seen it the same way without taking a course.”

You’d have a hard time finding someone who believes in the power of networking more than Emerald LaFortune. In fact, she believes in it so much that she does it professionally, helping those in the outdoor recreation and conservation fields find meaningful work with organizations whose missions and values align with their professional goals. She credits her WRFI course and those who introduced her to it for helping her deepen her understanding of the importance of relationships and the far-reaching, life-changing impacts they can have. Fifteen years out from that semester on Montana Afoot and Afloat, she recalls how Bethany Applegate and Dan Spencer, two vital and longtime members of the WRFI community, influenced the trajectory of both her college and professional careers by introducing her to experiential education. She also fondly remembers her classmates and the two months they spent immersed in Montanan landscapes and cultures they otherwise may have never experienced. Together, they helped each other recognize the inherent value in the places they were exploring, and built lasting connections based on the experiences they shared.

As Emerald sees the cultures of college and professional worlds shift, she encourages students to take the leap on experiential education and “just go”, citing the incomparable value provided by immersive, on-the-ground experiences and the relationships forged during that time.

“[Networking] is reciprocal; it’s learning from one another rather than being transactional. This relationship was modeled by WRFI’s community. Networking doesn’t always have to be looking up, it can also be looking laterally and supporting one another as you grow.”



Emerald LaFortune has held many roles in the outdoor industry during her professional career, and now focuses that diverse experience on consulting seasonal workers as they transition into more full-time roles, in addition to managing projects for a wide range of outdoor organizations. Building relationships is at the heart of everything she does.