

Dear Westerners:

The Board of Directors established a COVID-19 committee to review the hike rules and requirements in light of the current pandemic. When this committee began, Arizona was in the process of reopening and case rates across the state were declining, but now Arizona is faced with dramatic increases in infections, and organizations such as ours are doing their best to adapt. Sedona is now requiring face masks to be worn in most indoor settings, and in outdoor public spaces if social distancing cannot be maintained. Why do I bring this up? Because, just like the rest of society, the Westerners are going to have to adapt as we learn more about COVID-19.

What we know now is that it spreads most frequently through the air, and more easily indoors where it can stay airborne longer. Hiking, while maintaining social distancing, is one of the lower risk activities we can engage in.

The committee met and drafted necessary changes to the Westerners' hike rules. To summarize the major changes:

- Westerner hikes will be broken up into groups of no more than 10 people, and will not intermingle with other groups.
- Do not hike if you have risk factors or feel ill.
- Face masks will be required at sign-in, but typically not while hiking.
- Hikers must bring their own pen for sign-in.
- Hikers will hike in single-file, and keep physical distance of at least 6 feet between hikers.
- There will be no sharing of treats or other food on hikes.
- If a hiker tests positive for COVID-19 during the hiking season they must notify the Trail Boss, who will keep their identity confidential, if desired, and will, in turn, notify members of the potential COVID-19 exposure.

The Board realizes that these requirements may need to be modified as the pandemic situation evolves. We will stay flexible and inform you of any changes.

The Board has determined that, with the increased case counts in Yavapai and Coconino counties, we will delay the start of the hiking season until October 1. This will allow for temperatures to cool a bit and avoid having long commutes to Flagstaff for early-season hikes. September hikes typically have a much smaller turnout, so we hope this change will not have a huge impact. We anticipate opening Club registration in August.

At this time, we plan a September meeting via Zoom, with our Wagon Boss Dave Minott providing a speaker. More details to come. We have cancelled the October picnic due to current state restrictions on gatherings and in-person meetings, but we hope to have picnics sometime this season.

The Board-approved documents regarding how we will approach this Westerner season are posted on the website. In late August we plan to hold a Zoom meeting for the membership to go over our recommendations and try to answer any questions.

Our goal is to offer our members the safest possible conditions in which to enjoy hiking our beautiful trails, and to enjoy each-others company.