

Wide Open Studios

Wide Open Studios is a wilderness retreat program and project of Signal Fire, an Oregon-based nonprofit that facilitates wilderness retreats and residencies for artists and activists of all disciplines. Signal Fire locates its projects on public lands to encourage creative advocacy in defense of wild places. Activist Amy Harwood and artist Ryan Price founded Signal Fire in 2008, and since then it has brought together over 200 writers, performers, visual artists, activists, and musicians. Operating under the premise that bringing emerging artists into wild places can foster inspiration and self-sufficiency, Wide Open Studios provides direct engagement with the natural world, and engenders new work that addresses our many ongoing ecological crisis.

What follows is a small sampling of photos from Signal Fire's past two Summer Immersion Trips, month-long backpacking expeditions designed to address the cultural construction of wilderness, the ways wildness can electrify an artistic vision, and the day to day know-how of living outdoors. Coursework consists of daily readings that frame the trip through history, science, art, and philosophy, as well as individual and group projects in response to those ideas, and a host of visiting artists and advocates.

Although the trips include plenty of crystalline mountain lakes and star-filled skies, they are not always idyllic. The groups backpack across rugged terrain, camp in blistering heat and torrential storms, and forge a close community by working through the challenges such a trip provide. With any luck, students leave with a deeper understanding of natural systems and the issues facing public lands, a close camaraderie of their fellow artists, and with an experience in which the divisions between art, life, and education are dissolved—to say nothing of having heard their first coyote song, sipped spring water from an actual spring, and turned off their cell phones for perhaps the longest time in their entire lives.

www.signalfirearts.org

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