

The Board of Directors of the Joshua Tree National Park Association has determined to suspend the Desert Institute's programs for the Spring 2021 season. The Desert Institute is a significant component of the charitable and educational activities of JTNPA, and is and will continue to be an important part of what we do. Because of that, the decision was not made lightly.

Three developments have driven this decision.

First and foremost, we are concerned about the coronavirus pandemic and its recent surge and resulting uncertainty. While the Desert Institute staff has wisely and competently imposed limitations on the numbers of participants in the course offerings and the conduct of participants and volunteers during course presentation, those actions may not be sufficient under the current circumstances to limit the risk of community spread.

Second, the pandemic limitations and actions are negatively impacting the financial ability of JTNPA to continue to develop and deliver quality course work. We have experienced instructor, participant and volunteer withdrawals due to COVID risks. Some of our venue sites have temporarily closed. We can no longer carpool our participants, which impacts our use of resources in the Park and other sites. We have operated the Desert Institute at substantial financial losses for years; however, JTNPA has subsidized those financial losses through our other operations. Those losses have increased over the last several months and are projected to increase even more over the ensuing months. While we recognize that the Desert Institute is an important addition to JTNP Interpretation and Education programming, and are happy to provide DI services, we are unable to continue subsidizing programming at current increased levels. The negative financial impacts to JTNPA during the recent COVID closures simply prohibit us from doing so.

Third, the National Park Service is considering changes to the contractual relationships it has with non-profit partners across the country, including JTNPA, which, unless resolved favorably, might impose further difficult burdens on the operations of the Desert Institute. These potential burdens require further analysis, and we are working with our partners and affiliates nationally to address these issues.

In the meantime, JTNPA is fully committed to the Desert Institute and what it does. The Board has established a Committee to review the Desert Institute and to make recommendations to improve its operations, its portfolio of course offerings, its community engagement, and its relationship with the volunteers of JTNPA. The increase in the use of online media and remote instruction is also under review, along with other actions that are intended to allow the Desert Institute to do what it does in a better and more visible way.

Once JTNPA is prepared to end the suspension and resume operations, we will let you know. We hope to see you soon, again.

