

Valentine Eastern Sierra Reserves

COVID Safety Information



SNARL and Valentine Reserves

<https://vesr.nrs.ucsb.edu/>

1016 MOUNT MORRISON ROAD, MAMMOTH LAKES, CA 93546 | LAST UPDATED JULY 27, 2020

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Introduction and Overview

In the face of the COVID-19 situation, the UCSB Office of Research has developed a [UCSB Research Ramp-Up plan](#) that will allow for Limited Research at UCSB campus and field stations. Additionally, the UCSB Natural Reserve System has developed a [UCSB NRS Research Ramp Up Plan](#) for the seven Reserves administered by the UCSB Natural Reserve System - including SNARL and Valentine Reserves (VESR). This document summarizes the relevant information in those plans that is specific to VESR and is designed to protect the health of VESR researchers, staff and the local community.

IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH OPERATIONS AT VESR

Research operations at VESR, even on a limited basis, are of great scientific importance. The loss of field seasons because of the virus threatens to significantly set back important scientific advances for years to come. As the virus outbreak demonstrates, the quality of our lives and economic vitality depend upon the interface between humans and the environment. Policy and management are ideally based upon a foundation of scientific understanding. Field stations serve as critical infrastructure at the interface between scientists, society, and the environment. Additionally, we have researchers at vulnerable career stages for whom loss of a field season could be devastating.

DEVELOPMENT AND MODIFICATION OF OPERATING PROCEDURES

VESR's strategies for operating during COVID-19 have been reviewed and approved by the UCSB Office of Research, and Mono County. As we learn more about how to operate safely and effectively during the COVID pandemic, we will improve these operating procedures. The strategies for research to proceed are based in 3 general areas: Reducing Introduction of Virus by VESR to Larger Community, Reducing Transmission/Contacts Between VESR and Larger Community, and Reducing Transmission/Contacts Within VESR Community. As such, activities at SNARL and Valentine in summer 2020 will be limited to research use only. There will be no class use, public use or K-12 programs. All group gatherings including public seminars and tours are cancelled until further notice. We will discourage non-essential travel between the reserves and local communities.

Guidelines for Research Use at VESR

DESIGNATED FAMILY RESEARCH GROUPS

Your home institution must approve your research safety plan and determine if your group can be treated as a designated family research group. If that is not the case, all individuals in your group must practice physical distancing and mask-use when in each other's presence. One convention for designation as a family research group is - Researchers in the same research group who have tested negative for COVID-19 immediately prior to start of field research and arrival at VESR, have avoided non-masked and non-socially distanced interactions with people outside the research group, have no COVID-19 symptoms, have agreed to interact with each in the manner that a family in shared home (i.e. without masks and physical distancing), and have been approved to interact in this manner by their home institution may be designated as a family research group. Again, please make sure your home institution has approved your plan and designation as a family research group. VESR cannot assume this

responsibility. If you have been designated a family research group by your home institution please inform VESR Staff and provide documentation.

FACE MASKS AND PPE

Masks must be worn in all indoor common areas and outdoors if there is a reasonable expectation of passing within 6 feet of other individuals not in your own designated family research unit. Non-medical masks are acceptable, ideally double layered, tightly woven, and washable fabric. You may want to use disposable gloves if you are disinfecting surfaces, equipment or utensils. VESR will provide masks and gloves for VESR staff only. All other individuals must provide their own masks, gloves and any other PPE.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING EXPECTATIONS

- Maintain at least a six-foot distance from other individuals outside a family research group, unless research protocols require closer contact and include procedures in which additional appropriate measures for safety are used (e.g. PPE);
- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer after (and if possible before) contact with common use items (e.g., door knobs);
- Cover coughs or sneezes into the sleeve or elbow, not hands;
- Do not shake hands or otherwise make physical contact.

PERSONAL HYGIENE AND CLEANING

VESR will offer hand sanitizer at several sites at SNARL and Valentine. Visitors are strongly encouraged to bring their own hand sanitizer. Hand soap will be provided at all sinks and individuals should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water (or use hand sanitizer) frequently throughout the day. CDC-approved disinfectants will be provided for disinfecting assigned spaces before and after use. You must disinfect your room, bathroom, kitchen, lab and any other spaces assigned to you upon arrival AND prior to departure.

GROUP SIZE AND GATHERINGS

Research group size will be limited to 8 people or less. This includes group size for hikes and other outdoor activities. VESR reserves the right to further limit your group size or deny a reservation based upon our capacity at the time of your planned visit. Please plan for the smallest group size needed to conduct your research. Indoor gatherings at VESR and in the local community should generally be limited to small groups who otherwise have regular contact and are considered a family research unit. Limiting contact with individuals outside your family research unit is an effective strategy to limit and contain virus transmission. Nonessential back and forth travel between VESR and local communities is discouraged.

AGREEMENT OF PROTOCOLS AND ENFORCEMENT

All staff and VESR visitors are expected to comply with these protocols. Researchers and students who choose to disregard these protocols may be asked to leave. The VESR Director will make final decisions if an individual or group is asked to leave. While in most circumstances we will provide a warning and an opportunity for an individual or group to correct their behavior, we reserve the right to immediately dismiss an individual or group if they put others at risk, or their behavior seriously threatens the health and integrity

of the community. VESR will not reimburse researchers for any expenses incurred because they have been told to leave VESR due to non-compliance with COVID-19 policies.

INHERENT RISKS

Please be aware of the risks of working at VESR and the risks of traveling. One of the most common serious complications associated with Covid-19 is a struggle to breathe. VESR and surrounding environs are at high elevation and low oxygen levels only make this worse. Furthermore, Mammoth has one hospital with a limited number of beds and intensive care facilities available. Finally, both the Inyo County and the Mono County emergency rescue teams may not be able to provide the same degree of help as in previous years if you need assistance in a wilderness location. Because of these risks, we will require all individuals to provide an evacuation plan with their research safety plan and emergency contacts.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR ALL USERS

1. All users must adhere to all [existing VESR use guidelines](#) as well as the additional COVID-use protocols and procedures in this document.
2. All users must watch this [COVID-19 Safety Presentation](#)
3. All users must maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet, whenever feasible, and follow provided procedures for handling and disinfection of shared equipment.
4. All users must plan and pack gear for self-sufficiency, including hand sanitizer, face coverings, tissues, and first aid kit.
5. [Daily symptom tracking](#) should be performed by VESR users and on-site staff. Those with positive symptoms should be referred for diagnostic testing.
6. All users must follow [CDC guidance to Prevent Getting Sick](#), which includes the following:
 - a. Minimize touching of the face (specifically eyes, mouth and nose);
 - b. Wear a face cover in common areas, while in proximity to others; follow local public health requirements;
 - c. Wash hands with soap and water frequently for at least 20 seconds;
 - d. Use hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available;
 - e. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and immediately wash your hands;
 - f. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
7. Researchers should be asymptomatic for at least two weeks prior to fieldwork and will not participate should they feel ill or have reasonable cause to believe they have been exposed to COVID-19.
8. Researchers need to remain aware of local public health requirements and VESR policies regarding [COVID-19 for Mono County](#)
9. Minimize contact with the public, and limit time spent in local communities during COVID.
10. Maintain flexibility to alter plans at any time, self-isolate, or return home; plans for isolation or location for quarantine should be included in user COVID-19 plans.
11. Follow [local public health guidelines](#) to report possible infection and self-isolate if you or someone you have been in close contact with in the previous 2 weeks tests positive.

Procedures to Approve Research at VESR

RESEARCH REQUESTS AND PRIORITY

All research applications and reservations must be logged into RAMS. An ad-hoc committee composed of UCSB Reserve Directors will meet weekly to review research requests. This committee will provide input on the ability for the work to be safely conducted at each reserve, priority of research requests at reserves, and feedback on user COVID-19 safety proposals. The ad-hoc committee will review research requests weekly once the information outlined in the steps below are received.

During implementation of UCSB Stage 3-5, VESR use will be limited. Initial access will be limited to research groups only and reassessed based on state, county, and UCSB policies. Research priority will be given to critical and time-sensitive research as defined in the [UCSB Office of Research Stage 3](#) (long term data sets, graduate students, expiring grants, and research infrastructure maintenance). The ad-hoc committee will also address three factors to prioritize use requests: 1) Regional Conditions, 2) On-Site Feasibility, and 3) Evaluation of Risk.

STEPS TO APPROVE RESEARCH

1. Make advanced reservation using [RAMS](#)
2. Ensure that everyone listed in reservation has [filled out a VESR liability waiver](#)
3. All researchers must watch this [COVID-19 Safety Presentation](#)
4. Establish a COVID-19 safety plan that outlines:
 - a. Physical distancing protocols and PPE use,
 - b. Field safety techniques (dependent on research projects),
 - c. Statement of how research is affected should UCSB OR policy revert to Stage 1 or 2,
 - d. Plans for local facilities should any team member need to self-isolate
 - e. Acknowledgment of VESR COVID-19 protocols and procedures.

Summary of Summer 2020 Operations and Facilities

DAY USE OF VESR

During Mono County Stage 2-3, and UCSB Stage 3-5, day use will be granted once proper RAMS applications and reservations are approved. Small groups are recommended and safety plans for physical distancing, PPE use, and field safety techniques will be collected, discussed, and confirmed. All day use of facilities will follow guidelines outlined in this document.

OVERNIGHT USE OF VESR

Limited overnight use at VESR will be allowed under Mono County Stage 2-3, and UCSB Stage 3-5. VESR overnight users will be assigned their own bedroom. The maximum capacity at VESR allowing each person to have their own bedroom is 17 users (SNARL 11, Valentine 6), which is 25% of total capacity (67 users). We will maintain one unoccupied cabin at SNARL to be used for isolation and quarantine any COVID positive cases. Field Station facilities and common areas will follow strict physical distancing and cleaning standards.

VESR FACILITIES USE GUIDELINES

Lodging Units

Each of the lodging units at SNARL and Valentine has its own kitchen space and bathrooms. Individual researchers will be assigned to the smallest cabins and have their own bedroom, bathroom and kitchen. Research teams will be assigned to larger spaces where they will each have their own bedroom, and will share the kitchen and bathroom with their team members only. All team members in these lodging units must follow the use guidelines for individual researchers and research teams outlined above. Users must supply their own top sheet and other bedding (sheets, blankets, or sleeping bag) and take this bedding back with them at departure. Users will clean/disinfect any utilized surface following every use and upon arrival at the facility following the protocols in the Cleaning/Disinfecting section. Users must adhere to all guidelines established above.

Indoor communal spaces

SNARL has some communal space and conference areas in the Headquarters and the Page center. Valentine has some communal space in the Education Center. No use of communal spaces will be allowed during Mono County Stage 2-3 and UCSB Stage 3-5. Users will be allowed to pick up mail and packages outdoors on the front porch of the Headquarters building at SNARL.

Outdoor Communal Spaces

VESR has outdoor areas at both sites that may be utilized for eating and socializing and physical distancing must be safely practiced at all times. Users must clean/disinfect any utilized surface following every use and upon arrival at the facility following the protocols in the Cleaning/Disinfecting section.

SNARL Laboratory Use

The SNARL laboratory has 5 separate research spaces for laboratory use by individuals and 3 larger spaces for use by research teams. Individuals and research teams will be assigned to laboratory spaces based on their research needs and space availability. All laboratory users must adhere to general use guidelines outlined above, and must adhere to physical distancing guidelines, and mask wearing in any common spaces. Laboratory users will also be required to clean and disinfect laboratory spaces before and after use.

Supplies Required for all Overnight Users

BEDDING

IMPORTANT - Users must bring their own sheet (to serve as a topsheet for the mattress) and take it with them when they leave. All units have beds with mattresses. We do not provide linens, pillows, towels, etc. We do not have the ability to do laundry.

FOOD

All units have a cooking area with sink, refrigerator, stove, pots, pans, dishes, utensils and variety of small appliances. There is a propane grill at SNARL that users can use for a minimal donation for propane. Users need to bring their own food. All the water at SNARL comes from a well and is safe and good to drink. Water

at Valentine Camp comes from a spring, and there are filters in each unit for drinking water. Dish soap, dish towels and sponges are provided, but we ask longer term users to purchase replacement soap and sponges.

PAPER PRODUCTS

We will supply a limited quantity of toilet paper and paper towels, and we ask that users either bring or purchase replacement paper products. Please purchase septic safe toilet paper.

TOWEL AND TOILETRIES

All units have a bathroom with a tub or shower, and sink. Users must bring their own towels and toiletries.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

All users must bring their own PPE including masks and face coverings, disposable gloves, thermometer for daily symptom monitoring, hand sanitizer and disinfectant for disinfecting gear and supplies.

CLEANING SUPPLIES

VESR will provide supplies for cleaning and disinfecting cabins before and after use. We recommend that users bring any additional cleaning supplies and disinfectants to clean and disinfect their research gear and equipment.

Daily Health Checks and Symptom Monitoring

DAILY SYMPTOM TRACKING

Daily symptom tracking is required. Users with UCSB Net IDs are required to use the [UCSB Daily Wellness Test](#). Users unaffiliated with UCSB should utilize their home institution's daily symptom tracker. If the user's home institution has not developed a daily symptom tracker, then the user should indicate to the Reserve Director what daily symptom tracker they will be utilizing. Some examples of daily symptom trackers include: [Stanford Medicine National Daily Health Survey](#), [Johns Hopkins Medicine Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Self Checker](#), and the [UC San Francisco COVID-19 Citizen Science Study](#). All VESR visiting researchers must complete a daily symptom check, including taking their temperature. If you are not using a symptom tracking application, your symptom data may be recorded in your field book or similar small notebook so that you can determine the onset of symptoms if contact tracing is required. If you have symptoms consistent with COVID-19, or have tested positive, or have had prolonged exposure to an individual who has posted positive you must report this to VESR staff immediately and begin isolation and evacuation.

COVID-RELATED SYMPTOMS

[COVID-related symptoms](#) to be reported include: cough, fever, difficulty breathing, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, loss of taste and/or smell, chills, excessive fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or abdominal pain. If any user is experiencing any of these above-listed symptoms, it is required that they report this to Reserve staff and immediately make plans to leave the Reserve site, or refrain from coming on site.

Field and Laboratory Safety

SAFETY PLANS

Each research group must develop their own coronavirus safety and evacuation plan with their home institution. The plan must have an evacuation component for individuals or research teams who have tested positive, or are symptomatic, or have been in contact with positive or symptomatic individuals. The outline of the plan must be provided to VESR, along with a research permission document from their home institution as early as possible prior to arrival. Please provide an emergency contact phone number and email for a responsible party outside of your field research party. Transportation to and from field sites is the responsibility of the researchers and must follow protocols approved in their research plan. VESR will not provide any transportation or access to vehicles to researchers.

FIELD SAFETY

Items to be addressed in each research groups safety plan include the following:

- Daily symptom monitoring protocols
- Travel to field sites: How will lab team members travel to field sites? If vehicles are used, who will share a vehicle and who will drive separately?
- Physical Distancing and research activities: How will Physical Distancing be achieved during field work? If Physical Distancing is impossible for limited periods of time, please explain the situation and how PPE will be used.
- Supplies: How will your team get research and personal supplies that they do not already have?
- Evacuation plan in event of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection in individual or group.

LAB SAFETY

If your research requires the use of the laboratory at SNARL, make sure that your safety plan includes any safety procedures for the use of the laboratory. Use of the lab will be limited and we will require users to follow all requirements for PPE and distancing while in the lab.

Isolation and Evacuation Procedures

ISOLATION

VESR will require any visitor who has come into contact (more than 10 minutes within six feet) with symptomatic individuals, or has symptoms consistent with COVID-19, or those who have tested positive for COVID-19 to alert VESR and their research team immediately, isolate in a space as directed to by VESR staff, avoid any physical contact with any others by practicing complete physical distancing, wear a mask and depart VESR for medical care, their home or home institution immediately if safe for them to do so. They should alert VESR staff of their departure and list all individuals at VESR they have had contact with and rooms they have been in. They should be tested as soon as is feasible and are asked to contact VESR with results as soon as possible. It is the responsibility of the researcher, research team and their home institution to evacuate such individuals safely - avoiding contact with others at VESR or in the local community. All members of any designated research group will follow the procedures outlined above if one member of the group is

symptomatic, tested positive for COVID-19 or found to have been in contact with a symptomatic or positive individual.

VESR will isolate individuals who have tested positive, or are symptomatic, or have been in contact with positive or symptomatic individuals in their rooms. If for some reason that is not possible, VESR will keep one empty cabin for isolation purposes. VESR can allow such individuals to stay at VESR for only a very short time while they await evacuation. Such individuals are to remain in strict isolation in the space designated by VESR staff until evacuation. VESR staff cannot care for such individuals, provide meals, or provide other services.

VESR cannot care for sick individuals and they and their research group must evacuate to home, home institution or medical facility. If you cannot evacuate immediately, VESR would like you to practice strict isolation in your room until evacuation. Guidance from the CDC confirms that a person's residence is the preferred place of isolation for symptomatic individuals. If isolation in your room is not possible, VESR will assign a space for isolation while you await evacuation.

EVACUATION

VESR cannot transport individuals for evacuation or medical treatment. If in need of immediate medical attention call 911 and alert the operator of your condition. To seek non-urgent medical help contact the local hospital ([Mammoth Hospital](#)) or dial 211 and alert them of your condition and seek care or admission.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

In order to keep our housing rates low, we cannot provide custodial services, and rely on all the users to keep units clean, and to thoroughly clean at the end of their stay. Please follow the cleaning checklist before checking out and sign, date and turn in the checklist before leaving. There are cleaning supplies (rags, wipes, vacuums, mops, brooms, etc.) in each unit. There are spaces on the checkout form to let us know if anything is broken, or needs attention, or if supplies are needed. If we find that you have not completed all the cleaning tasks on the sheet, or if your cleaning efforts were insufficient, we reserve the right to charge your account for the additional time that it will take our stewards to complete the cleaning. These rates (Steward Assistance) are listed in the reserve information section of [RAMS](#) and on our [Rates Page](#)

DAILY CLEANING

- Keep all food put away and stored in refrigerator or sealed bins
- Wash dishes after use
- Wipe all countertops, stove and other surfaces to remove crumbs
- Keep all sporting equipment, field gear and muddy or dirty shoes outside

FINAL CHECKOUT CLEANING

- wash, dry and put away all your dishes
- scrub the kitchen sink with comet or other cleaner
- wipe down counters, stove and table top using rags and cleaning products
- remove your food from the refrigerator and freezer
- wipe down the refrigerator inside and out with all-purpose cleaning product

- scrub the bathroom sinks, counters and showers with comet or other cleaner
- scrub the inside of toilets with toilet brush and cleaner, wipe toilet outsides, seats and rims with disposable cleaning wipes – DO NOT FLUSH THE WIPES
- turn all the chairs upside down on the tables
- sweep and mop non-carpeted floors, and vacuum carpeted floors
- empty all trash and take to the dumpster by the garage at SNARL or Kohler shed at Valentine
- take all recycling to the recycling area and sort and dump following instructions
- If the heat is on, turn it to low
- close all the windows
- turn off all the lights
- Put all used cleaning rags, dish towels in the blue bin in the laundry area in the dorm at SNARL

DISINFECTING

All rooms (bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, lab) and surfaces (lab benches, picnic tables etc) should be disinfected before and after use. When you enter your assigned bedroom and bathroom for the first time upon arrival use one of the disinfectant agents provided to wipe down all surfaces such as bed frames, tables, chairs, counters, bathroom sinks and toilets which may have been touched by the previous occupant. You should be the only person entering your assigned room and bathroom and should not need to disinfect these areas again until your departure. Disinfect lab and kitchen surfaces, equipment and utensils in the same careful manner using the products supplied. Remember to disinfect door handles, cupboard handles, switches and anything else that could be touched by an individual. Wear your mask, wash your hands immediately and do not touch your face when disinfecting a room. Do not use a broom or stir up dust. Use a damp mop if you need to clean a floor. You may wish to wear disposable gloves and discard immediately upon finishing the disinfection procedure.