



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**SUPPORTING DIVERSITY IN THE OUTDOORS: NANTAHALA OUTDOOR CENTER
PARTNERS WITH THE WESSER FOUNDATION TO LAUNCH GUIDE
SCHOLARSHIP**

*The Founders Scholarship is a need-based fund to improve access to careers in the
whitewater rafting industry*

Bryson City, N.C. (September 20, 2022)— Nantahala Outdoor Center (NOC) is proud to partner with The Wesser Foundation Inc. to launch the Founders Scholarship, for the purpose of creating opportunities for those with limited resources to begin a career in whitewater. The scholarship is open for applicants for the 2023 season and will cover the cost of Guide School training, equipment, housing, and meal plans.

NOC, the Leaders in Outdoor Adventure Since 1972, has taught more guides than anyone in the industry. Elite river guide instructors offer hands-on experience teaching river reading, guide paddle strokes and communication, river safety and rescue, boat features and rigging, and more. Students come away from the experience with self-confidence, leadership skills, teamwork, and environmental knowledge.

“NOC has been teaching and training river guides for over fifty years,” said Kristin Kastelic, NOC Marketing Director. “With this scholarship, we hope to open up the opportunity for more careers in whitewater and a connection to the outdoors, to even more people that might not have the resources to take the leap.”

The Wesser Foundation was established by Jess Austin, who met the same challenges early in his career. Austin had to forego becoming a river guide in his twenties as he pursued law school. Now retired, he finally made his dream come true and works at NOC as a river guide, taking families down the Nantahala River every Spring through the Fall.

“My wife and I established the Founders Scholarship as a way of removing systemic barriers for anyone attempting to access a career in the outdoors,” said Jess Austin, President of the Wesser Foundation, NOC Lead River Guide, and the visionary behind the scholarship. “As someone who had to put aside outdoor aspirations due to financial barriers, I’m inspired to remove limitations and help more folks gain access to careers and training in the outdoors.”

Chosen scholarship recipients will attend NOC’s renowned [Guide School](#), where participants spend five days in the field training with experienced instructors. Along with learning guide skills, chosen recipients will also be outfitted with the essential river gear and equipment, take first aid and CPR training and certifications, and receive complimentary staff housing and meals while employed at Nantahala Outdoor Center during the River Guide season.

Those interested in the Founders Scholarship are encouraged to apply at noc.com/about/founders-scholarship. The selection and interview process for the scholarships will begin in the winter of 2022-2023 and be announced in the spring.

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About Nantahala Outdoor Center

Nantahala Outdoor Center is the nation's largest outdoor recreation company with operations spanning Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Over a million guests visit NOC annually to embark on a diverse collection of more than 120 different river and land-based itineraries, learn to kayak at NOC's world-renowned

Paddling School, travel abroad with NOC's Adventure Travel program, test the latest outdoor gear and shop at its LEED-certified flagship retail stores or enjoy NOC's resort amenities such as its three restaurants and multi-tiered lodging. NOC has been recognized by The New York Times as the "Nation's Premiere Paddling School," "The Best Place to Learn" by Outside, and as "One of the Best Outfitters on Earth" by National Geographic Adventure.

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