

Statement

The Organization of Biological Field Stations (OBFS) stands with women who have come forward about their sexual harassment and assault, and commends you for your bravery to shine light on these injustices. Moreover, we want to support all those who have suffered similar experiences and to acknowledge the harm caused. The OBFS leadership and community are appalled and deeply disturbed by [the recent reports](#) of sexual harassment and abuses at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) Barro Colorado Island field station. We also recognize this is not unique to STRI, as 75% of field scientists and trainees have experienced harassment and assault¹. As an organization, OBFS is committed to illuminating and supporting marginalized and often silenced voices, and is striving to end sexual harassment, assault, and discrimination in affiliated field stations and marine labs.

OBFS acknowledges our own shortcomings in taking responsibility for allowing this culture to persist, and recognizes the need to look at our internal policies and practices that enable sexual harassment and assault. As stated in our [mission](#), OBFS is working with community members around the world to enhance inclusivity, equity, diversity, and accessibility of field stations and marine laboratories. We seek to continually reflect on and prioritize these issues, as we begin implementing our [OBFS Strategic Plan \(2021-2026\)](#).

For far too long, victims of sexual harassment have been silenced while harmful behaviors by perpetrators have been ignored. Field stations and marine laboratories should not be spaces where sexual harassment and assault are allowed to occur. However, OBFS recognizes that the culture of field stations has enabled sexual harassment and assault.

¹ Clancy, K. B., Nelson, R. G., Rutherford, J. N., & Hinde, K. (2014). Survey of academic field experiences (SAFE): Trainees report harassment and assault. PLoS ONE, 9(7), e102172. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0102172>

We recognize that OBFS needs to take a proactive leadership role in ending sexual harassment and assault. We commit to the following steps going forward:

Action item 1: These reports have catalyzed our efforts to critically review our current policies and bylaws. We are reviewing our harassment prevention and response and membership policies to identify appropriate mechanisms for sanctions as well as criteria for station membership.

Action item 2: We continue to promote our community's expertise in harassment prevention and response. We strongly recommend all stations develop robust anti-harassment policies, reporting structures, and support for targets of harassment and assault. Stations are encouraged to read the [Report of the Workshop to Promote Safety in Field Stations](#) to understand current best practices in harassment prevention and response. We encourage stations and field facilities to ensure that all employees and visitors are fully aware of station policies, reporting mechanisms, and avenues for support.

Action item 3: We will prioritize increasing our offerings of resources and trainings surrounding diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion, as well as best practices for harassment prevention and response.

Action item 4: While STRI is not currently an OBFS station member, we nevertheless feel that OBFS should take a leadership role regarding all reports of harassment and assault at field stations. We are therefore reviewing all of our options for how to hold STRI and other stations accountable, and how to best support targets of sexual harassment and assault.

We lean on the powerful statements of support and recommendations distributed by colleagues including (the [Association of Tropical Biology and Conservation](#), [STRI Staff Scientists](#), and the [Ecological Society of America](#)) condemning the behavior allowed and perpetuated at STRI.

December 31, 2021 is the deadline for adding your signature to an [open letter](#) to the White House Gender Policy Council on Reforms at STRI, Smithsonian Institution, and in the Sciences in General. OBFS welcomes suggestions to continue to improve the culture and climate of the field station community. To offer feedback or for assistance with sexual harassment policies and related areas, please reach out to members of the [OBFS Board](#) and IDEA+ (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility) Committee.

- Chris Lorentz OBFS Board President Lorentc@thomasmore.edu
- Tori McDermott IDEA+ Committee co-chair vmmcdermott@alaska.edu
- Phoebe Jekielek IDEA+ Committee co-chair phoebe@hurricaneisland.net

In conclusion, OBFS strongly condemns the behavior, policies, and culture that led to decades of sexual abuse and harassment on BCI and is striving to create safe, accessible, and welcoming field stations and marine labs for our entire community.

Sincerely,

Members of the OBFS Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA+) Committee and the
OBFS Board of Directors