To better understand diagnostic makeup of clients referred to wilderness therapy our research questions included:

- What is the diagnostic profile of clients in wilderness therapy?
- Do young adult and adolescent clients differ diagnostically?
- Do males and females differ diagnostically?

### Methods

- Secondary analysis of discharge summaries for clients admitting to 4 wilderness therapy programs between Oct 2010 - Nov 2011.
- Distinguished between primary diagnosis and first four diagnoses.
- Coded diagnoses according to nine most common DSM diagnostic categories found in our population:
  - Substance-Related
  - Mood
  - Behavior
  - Anxiety
  - Learning
  - Pervasive Development
  - Attachment
  - Psychotic
  - V Codes

### Results

#### Prevalence of Disorders in First through Four Diagnoses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disorders</th>
<th>Adolescents</th>
<th>Young Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mood</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Adolescent boys had higher rates of Behavior Disorders, \( \chi^2(1, N = 737) = 4.73, p = .030 \), & Substance-related Disorders, \( \chi^2(1, N = 737) = 11.88, p = .001 \).
- Adolescent girls had higher rates of Anxiety Disorders, \( \chi^2(1, N = 737) = 14.41, p = .000 \).

### Discussion

- Supports and expands upon diagnostic trends in wilderness therapy – confirms pervasiveness of dual diagnosed clients and substance issues, and brings to light the impact of Mood Disorders and differences between young adults and adolescents.
- 74% of adolescents and 55% of young adults had four or more diagnoses.
- Substance issues were ubiquitous, however Mood Disorders were the most frequent primary diagnosis, appearing nearly two times more than any other category.
- Mood and/or Anxiety Disorders together affected 85% of young adults and 81% of adolescents; 65% of young adults and 54% of adolescents had Mood or Anxiety as a primary diagnosis.
- Behavior Disorders - not a major diagnostic category for young adults as it was for adolescents. The types of Behavior diagnoses also differed: young adults primarily had Attention Deficit Disorders, while adolescents had more Oppositional Defiant and Conduct Disorders.

### Implications

- Approach to therapy - complex profiles demand an array of interventions, treatment modalities, and a well-trained clinical team.
- Staff training and support – wilderness is no longer just outdoor staff providing a structured, sober experience. Staff must be equipped to deal with multiple clinical issues and managers must be attuned to staff well-being, competency, and time-off.
- Admissions screening – as wilderness programs become more clinically oriented, clients may be referred that are not appropriate. Admissions staff must be trained to identify this to assure proper placement.

Wilderness field instructors and therapists are no longer just providing a sober experience; rather, they are providing intensive mental health treatment in the setting of the wilderness.