

There is a moment every year  
When I experience a precious thrill  
As our counselors meet their campers  
And guide them safely down the hill

I'll tell someone who may be near  
This is when the magic starts  
When this busy week of learning  
Will expand their minds and hearts

For all are challenged uniquely  
Most out of their comfort zone  
For counselors it's an 18 hour day  
For campers it's the great unknown

Yes, there are field studies to attend  
For this is still an outdoor school  
But so much more is happening  
And it starts with the golden rule

We must pack our egos safely away  
And focus on our campers' needs  
And it seems to happen at every camp  
That the experience has planted fruitful seeds

They dissected squid and explored the woods  
And so much more of our natural world  
They will return home with brand new friends  
With new perspectives brightly unfurled

So when the Oregon citizenry  
Agreed outdoor schools should be everywhere  
To this director of 30 years  
It was an answer to many prayers

For no longer did we have to spend our time  
Searching for funding sources  
We can now provide the needed supplies  
For our counselors to teach their courses

And now there's a central clearing house  
Run by folk with a common goal  
To help us share with other programs  
And thus feel part of a greater whole

So as you read these writers' heartfelt letters

And how this experience affected them  
For thirty years it's been the same for me  
Every one of them has been a gem.

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Bob Bruce. The Fern Ridge School District developed its own outdoor school program starting in 1995. At the time, the local schools' PTAs raised the money for the outdoor school. Later on, we were able to reduce their costs through various grants and district support. The state's funding of our program has not only improved and sustained us, it has allowed our parent organizations to offer many more diverse experiences for their students.

Our outdoor school has become an integral part of our small community. The 5th graders interact with their counselors well after the camp has finished. As 6th graders, they enter the middle school with a group identity and more confidence. My poem will hopefully give you a sense of not only my passion for outdoor schools, but also speak for the thousands of folk who put their hearts and souls into making them a rewarding experience for every child who gets to sing songs around a campfire.

Thank you for your time and service.

Bob Bruce  
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