

Meeting Date: February 11, 2026

To: House Committee on Education Joint Committee on Ways and Means

From: Susan Duncan, EdD, Portland, OR

RE: Support for measure HB 4112 which raises the amount allocated to the Outdoor School Education Fund for the 2025-2027 biennium from \$48 million to \$54 million. It declares an emergency and takes effect on passage.

Dear Chair Hudson, Vice-chair McIntire, and Members of the Committee:

My life's work in Outdoor School, Science and Engineering Education over the past 35 years has been lifted by experiences with people outdoors. As a volunteer teacher/educator for Oregon State University's College of Forestry Oregon Natural Resources Education Program, I witnessed teachers and educators open the doors of their classroom to forest like the Hopkins Memorial Tree Farm and Forest Learning Center and Arboretum as well as the local, county, regional and state and national parks. As the Assistant Environmental Education Director for the Washington Forest Protection Association, I witnessed the research necessary to bring science inquiry, communities and natural resources together through focusing on particular species of concern. A powerful alliance between indigenous nations, those agencies managing state resources, and private industry acknowledged long-standing beliefs, traditions, habits, and policies representing a deep understanding and knowledge of the natural systems on which we all depend.

I've given cultural and personal meaning to experiences outdoors through instructional relationships. Outdoor School gives voice to those young people who fish with their uncles on weekends, and those whose fathers work to protect salmon at the dam, but for all the talk, there is no voice louder than the drop of rain as it sings its way to the sea and the Mason Bees ready to leave their mud home to pollinate the foods grown of sun on which we all depend. It is rich in the stories from which we generally learn best. After 8 years of research regarding the systems thinking strand of the Oregon Environmental Literacy Plan, students, teachers, and Outdoor School educators reached a high level of consensus (80%) on these top five skills:

1. Identifying long and short-term consequences.
2. Showing how a system's structure generates its behavior.

3. Identifying the problems of the situation.
4. Displaying proposed changes and outcomes via easily understood diagrams, and using visual graphic skills to clearly present how changes affected the environment.
5. Analyzing data. Showing evidence of collaboration, and using the design cycle to explore multiple solutions for the same problem by using a +/- chart for each solution.

Each time, I visit the Oregon Capital. I ask the man on top with the golden ax what the short and long-term consequences of our collective actions will be. My hope is that the collective long-term funding for Outdoor School Education will be renewed in the short term. The balancing of the budget at the end of last session with a reduction in funding was a short-term consequence that was based on limited time for identifying the problems of ongoing levels of voter approved funding for Outdoor School with data confused by the pandemic. Today, I affirm the need to “restore” the ODS funding system to its previous levels as indicated in HB 4112. It is important to note that the amount does not “raise” levels of funding from those original levels that were collectively agreed upon when citizens collaborated to establish the funding for the Outdoor School system. It **restores** them.

Natural systems that depend on renewable resources continue to speak to us through their regeneration rates while technologies give us a competitive advantage for securing the remaining resources. Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer writes that “reciprocity” heals. As the man with the golden ax on top of the state capitol surveys the land with all its needs for healing, I suspect he hears the buzz of *respair* - the period of hope after a time of despair. It’s difficult for ODS to demonstrate what it means to flourish without dependable funding. The golden man is yet to hear the stories of children this Spring and the next, who grow to live sustainably with one another and sing along with natural systems that thrive beyond boundaries. Restoring ODS funding lifts the spirits of children outdoors and demonstrates a commitment to a collaborative future that had been the legacy of those before us.

My hope is that you will mutually agree to approve HB 4112.

Sincerely,

Susan Duncan, EdD