

Submitter: Paul SHELDON  
On Behalf Of: The CREST at Willow-Witt Ranch  
Committee: House Committee On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4112

Dear Representative :

We represent a collective of camps from all over the state of Oregon. We urge you to support Representative Hudson's legislation to restore \$6 million in funding for Outdoor School for the rest of the 25-26 biennium.

Oregon camps are in danger. The recent deep and unexpected cuts to funding for Oregon's Outdoor School (ODS) are a threat to the very survival of camps in Oregon and have already had negative financial and human impacts. You must understand the impacts these cuts are already having on Oregon youth camps and our communities.

Outdoor School has been an important part of Oregon's education for decades. When asked what the "best part" of their school years was, many will tell you about their time at Outdoor School. While they may not remember the name of their teacher, they can definitely tell you the name of their Outdoor School site!

Most Outdoor School experiences take place at a site that is used as a summer camp and then rented to an Outdoor School provider. As a result of these rentals, many camps can then provide year-round employment for foodservice, maintenance, and administrative staff. Something they would not have been able to do if not for their relationship with ODS.

A desire to maintain employment for their staff and a belief in the value of Outdoor School have meant Oregon camps have historically agreed to rental rates for ODS far below their regular camp rates. These reduced rates do not adequately cover the cost of hosting a large rental group like ODS, and often, their non-ODS camps and retreat groups were charged higher rates, essentially subsidizing ODS.

With the passage of Measure 99 in 2016, the relationship between Oregon camps and Outdoor School entered a new era of stability. With consistent funding, Outdoor School providers were able to pay fair, if discounted, rates to camps and even enter into long-term contracts. For camps that were used to being hand-to-mouth year after year, this dependable and regular funding was transformative.

Though closures during the COVID-19 pandemic hurt the camp industry tremendously, those Oregon camps that emerged intact were able to remain in business partially due to their income from Outdoor School rentals. However, the

current and possible future reductions in funding for Oregon Outdoor School may finish the devastation that COVID started!

Outdoor School providers are reducing the number of days or weeks they can afford to rent from camps. Some school districts are cancelling Outdoor School altogether. Many camps are evaluating if it's possible to maintain their operations with such an income shortfall. They are cutting staff and stopping work on much-needed repairs and maintenance.

The 20% cut to Outdoor School funding approved by the legislature in 2025 is causing terrible damage in the rural communities where Oregon camps are located. Various impact studies conclude that camps cannot offer full-time positions without the full rental seasons Outdoor School requires from camps. The financial ripples of this shortfall flow out into decisions about repairs, staffing, and other factors that ultimately affect safety and program quality at camps.

Once again, we urge you to support Representative Hudson's legislation to restore \$6 million in funding for Outdoor School for the rest of the 25-26 biennium. The people of Oregon overwhelmingly voted for Measure 99 in 2016. They value Outdoor School and expect that it will be funded to the full extent possible.

The sites where this magic happens may not recover from these cuts. Stand with us, and we will stand with you.

Paul Sheldon  
Executive Director  
The CREST at Willow-Witt Ranch  
Ashland