

Outdoor School funding initiative pre-qualifies for ballot

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An initiative to create a statewide Outdoor School Education Fund has been filed with the Oregon Secretary of State and could appear on the November 2016 ballot, if it gets enough signatures.

Outdoor School for All, which is trying to permanently fund outdoor school programs for every fifth- and sixth-grader in Oregon, formed a political action committee in October and has raised more than \$44,000 in cash contributions, according to the Secretary of State.

The Oregon Legislature already passed a bill earlier this year creating an outdoor school fund to be administered by the Oregon State University Extension Service, but no money was attached to the policy. Initiative 56 would allocate lottery dollars for outdoor school, along with accepting donations.

The Oregon Constitution sets aside lottery dollars for public education, along with parks, beaches, watersheds and wildlife. Outdoor School for All estimates it would cost \$22 million per year to send 55,000 Oregon students to a full week of outdoor school.

Supporting outdoor school would create jobs and bolster economic development in rural communities, the organization states in its findings.

The initiative has already received the 1,000 sponsorship signatures needed to pre-qualify for the November ballot. As a statutory initiative, Outdoor School for All now needs 88,184 signatures to fully qualify for the ballot. Signatures need to be verified by the Elections Division four months before the general election.