

## Coalition forms Outdoor School for All PAC

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**The Oregon Outdoor Education Coalition has formed a political action committee to help seek funding for statewide outdoor school.**

A new political action committee has begun to develop a ballot measure that would fund outdoor school for every fifth- and sixth-grader across the state.

Outdoor School for All PAC was established in early October by the Oregon Outdoor Education Coalition and has already raised \$5,000 toward writing an initiative that could appear on the 2016 ballot.

The Oregon Legislature overwhelmingly passed a bill before the end of the 2015 session that creates a statewide outdoor school fund, administered by the Oregon State University Extension Service. However, no funding was attached to the policy.

It would cost an estimated \$22 million per year to send 55,000 Oregon students to a full week of outdoor school. Local programs are currently paid for by school districts, and often supported by parents and the community.

Caroline Fitchett, statewide coordinator for the outdoor education coalition, said they prefer to have funding for the program approved by the legislature during the 2016 short session. If not, they will be ready to bring a ballot measure directly to the voters.

The coalition is already gathering the 1,000 signatures needed to file their petition with the Secretary of State's Office. They hope to have that work finished by early November, Fitchett said.

The PAC is also exploring other funding options, such as a private endowment for the program. Money from the legislature could come from any number of sources including the general fund, though competing interests could make for a complicated situation in Salem, Fitchett said.

Fitchett is confident outdoor school has enough support to pass funding at the ballot box. She said the creation of statewide outdoor school could add as many as 1,000 full-time jobs to rural Oregon, including Eastern Oregon. New positions would include camp nurses, cooks, counselors and site managers.

Anyone interested in helping to gather signatures for the petition should contact Laura Jean at [laurajlargent@gmail.com](mailto:laurajlargent@gmail.com).