

# Cherry Park Sixth Graders at Outdoor School

*By Roger Jensen, Oregon Journal Collection*

This photograph depicts a group of Portland sixth graders from Cherry Park Elementary as they hiked through a forest during a week of 1977 Outdoor School. *Oregon Journal* staff photographer Roger Jensen took the photo, which accompanied an article in the “Living” section on April 22, 1977.

Multnomah County’s Outdoor School opened in 1965 as a regional program that also included Clackamas, Columbia, and Washington counties. A federal grant from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act funded the initial three-year project. Afterward, the program required local sources of funding to continue. Over time—particularly after Measure 5 passed in 1990 capping local property taxes and shifting school funding responsibility to the state—the outdoor school program in other counties of the region suffered from cut-backs or closures.

Outdoor School participants were sixth graders who traveled with their teachers to one of several participating youth camps throughout the area, where they stayed a full week. Each day a specialist talked to the students about soil, water, animals, and plants at field study stations. Students conducted experiments and other hands-on science activities. Lessons also integrated disciplines such as social studies, mathematics, writing, art, and health.

To express the purpose of the program, a 1970 *Oregon Journal* article quoted at length the comments of Warren G. Gilfillan, director of outdoor education for Multnomah County Intermediate Education District. He stated, “The overwhelming share of Oregon economy comes from forest products, farming, touring and fishing, and the state relies heavily on its natural resources.” For Gilfillan, the goal of the program was to give students an appreciation for natural science and conservation.

Oregon was one of the first states to experiment with this sort of outdoor curriculum. In 1970, only Washington, California, and Michigan conducted programs similar to the one operating in Multnomah County. However, owing to a burgeoning national awareness of environmental issues such as ecology and pollution, other states were taking interest. A 1970 *Oregon Journal* article estimated that over half of Oregon school children had some sort of outdoor education, although unlike the weeklong program then operating in Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties, other outdoor education experiences ranged from one to several days.

**Further Reading:** Reed, Watford. “Sixth Graders Learn How Nature Supports Life.” *Oregon Journal*. January 1, 1970.

Ulrich, Roberta. “Outdoors Studied at Camp.” *Oregon Journal*. May 4, 1970.

Written by Sara Paulson, © Oregon Historical Society, 2006.

---

Oregon History Project

<https://oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/historical-records/cherry-park-sixth-graders-at-outdoor-school/>