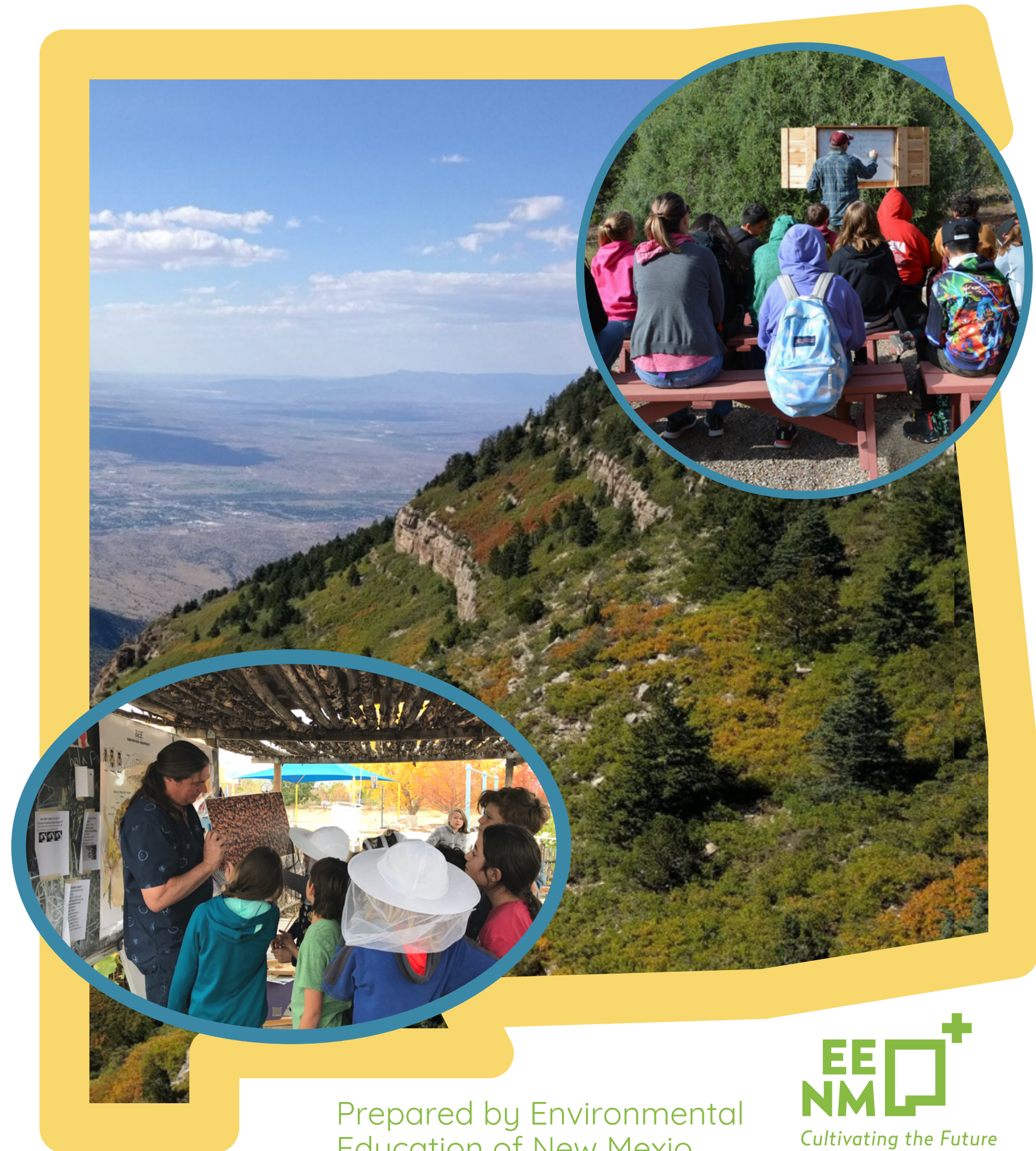


Recommendations for Outdoor Learning in New Mexico

*Presentation to the Legislative
Education Study Committee*

*Senate Memorial 1 Interagency
Outdoor Classroom Task Force*



Prepared by Environmental
Education of New Mexico



Senator Siah Correa Hemphill, NM State Senate

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Eileen Everett, Environmental Education of NM

Sue George & Students, Wild Friends



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districtadministration.com*



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Celebrating 25 years of

WILD FRIENDS

The University of New Mexico

School of Law

Institute of Public Law



Fifth Grade Students
Monte Vista Elementary, Las Cruces

Executive Summary

Outdoor Classroom Task Force named in Senate Memorial 1 convened June - October 2021 (p. 1)

Developed three recommendations with the goals of:

- Expanding the use of outdoor classrooms
- Building career paths for NM's youth

RECOMMENDATIONS

for Realizing Outdoor Classrooms

For successful implementation, provide critical expert support for teachers and schools through resourcing Outdoor Learning Coordinators

Integrate outdoor learning into education policies so that all New Mexico students have equitable access to the physical and mental health benefits



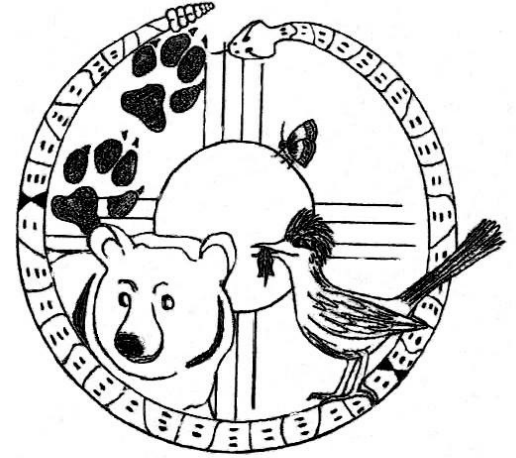
Source: Environmental Education of New Mexico, 5/13/21, Community Conversations

Origins of Senate Memorial 1

Fall 2020: Hundreds of Wild Friends students across NM voted to draft legislation on the topic of outdoor classrooms and then conducted research on benefits and challenges (p. 2)

Wild Friends students worked with sponsor, Senator Siah Correa Hemphill, and Environmental Education of New Mexico to draft the legislation

Passed the Senate on February 24 with overwhelming bipartisan support



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New Mexico

Senator Siah Correa Hemphill



Outdoor Classroom Task Force Goals from SM1

NM Outdoor Recreation Division & State Parks Division be requested to convene a task force with the goals of (p. 2):

- **Recommendations to expand the use of outdoor classrooms for schools**
- **Build career paths for NM's youth by coordinating existing efforts on outdoor recreation and education and youth career development**



image credit: corpsnm.org

Outdoor Classroom Task Force Goals from SM1

Convene Task Force Membership (p. 3):

- Wild Friends
- Environmental Education of New Mexico
- The Public Education Department
- The Forestry Division
- The Early Childhood Education and Care Department
- The State Land Office
- The Department of Game and Fish
- The Cultural Affairs Department
- The Tourism Department



Outdoor Classroom Task Force Goals from SM1

Task Force will submit a report to the appropriate interim legislative committees (p. 3)

- **Details the task force's recommendations, including strategies to promote outdoor classrooms in all schools in NM**



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Task Force Meetings to Date

First two meetings held via Zoom on July 22 & October 6, 2021 (p. 3)

Two representatives were invited from state agencies: an individual in a practitioner role and an individual in a decision making role

Purpose of first two meetings:

- **“...gain a shared understanding of statewide initiatives, programs, and projects that already support outdoor learning and outdoor classrooms to develop and recommend actions to establish and expand outdoor classrooms”**



Task Force Meetings to Date

Each state agency presented using the following two prompts (p. 5):

- 1. Share your agency's initiatives and programs for outdoor learning/outdoor classrooms.**
- 2. What is a recommendation you have from your agency (e.g. a lever to pull in the system, a policy) to expand or deepen your outdoor learning/outdoor classroom offerings at a larger scale?**



Task Force Meetings to Date

Agencies' existing programs and recommendations were shared and recorded (p. 6)



Table 2. State Agency Existing Outdoor Learning/Classroom Programs and Recommendations

Agency	Existing Programs	Recommendations
New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs	Sandia Mountain Natural History Center: nature center that partners with Albuquerque Public Schools to provide outdoor learning for district students and students statewide	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased funding for transportation• An additional Sandia Mountain Natural History Center staff member (which could serve an additional 5,000 students/year)

Other Statewide Initiatives: The State of Outdoor & Environmental Learning (SOEL)



The SOEL is a regional inventory of outdoor and environmental learning initiatives, curricula, and programs in the Southwestern region (p. 5)

- Currently includes more than 400 programs serving more than 280,000 NM children**

Other Statewide Initiatives:

Every Kid, Every Day, Every Way



Every Kid, Every Day, Every Way: A multi-year shared vision and strategy to provide daily equitable access to the outdoors and environmental learning for all New Mexico kids (p. 19)

- **Result of three years of community dialogues with more than 200 individuals representing 90 organizations & developed with the support of the 17 EENM Fellows**
- **Framework for systemic change to support equitable daily access to the outdoors & environmental learning in NM**
- **Consists of a variety of prioritized recommendations, including suggested policies**

Other Statewide Initiatives:

Cradle to Career New Mexico



- **NM's first statewide outdoor industry education and career pathway strategy (p. 19)**
- **Identifies existing federal, state, tribal, and local opportunities that provide outdoor access, programming, and internships within the state's outdoor industry**

Recommendations

1. Establish an Outdoor Classrooms Program at the New Mexico Public Education Department (p. 8)

To support the Outdoor Classrooms Program, funding should be designated for the following:

- Two permanent FTEs to be housed in the Public Education Department: Outdoor Learning Specialist and Outdoor Learning Assistant
- Micro-grants for schools to build and further develop outdoor classrooms on school grounds
- Ongoing professional development opportunities in outdoor learning for K-12 teachers



Recommendations

2. Create a synopsis of funding opportunities for outdoor classrooms and outdoor learning offered by state agencies and increase appropriations for these funding opportunities (p. 9)

- a) Outdoor Equity Fund and Outdoor Recreation Trails+ Grant (Outdoor Recreation Division)**
- b) Kids 'n Parks (State Parks)**
- c) Share with Wildlife (Department of Game and Fish)**
- d) Clean and Beautiful (Tourism Department)**
- e) Childcare Stabilization Grant and the New Mexico Child Care Health & Safety Grant (Early Childhood Education and Care Department)**



Recommendations

3. Support the continued work of the Outdoor Classroom Task Force on the following themes, prioritized from the meetings to date (p. 10):

- **Increasing state agency staffing for outdoor learning**
- **Professional development for pre-service and in-service teachers and informal educators**
- **Outdoor gear libraries**
- **Benchmarks and evaluation for outdoor learning**
- **Connections to environmental learning (e.g. forest management, climate change, etc.)**



Why?

Evidence-based approach directly in alignment with NM PED's vision

Documented benefits:

- **Improved physical, emotional, social, & spiritual health & wellbeing**
- **Increased connections with community**
- **Interest in civic action**
- **Academic skills including critical thinking and problem solving**
- **Enhanced academic achievement**
- **Motivation & increased enthusiasm**

*“Not all classrooms
have four walls”*
-Margaret McMillan



Thank You!



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