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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

ORIGINAL DATE 1-25-07

SPONSOR Hall LAST UPDATED _____ HB 369

SHORT TITLE Outdoor Classroom Program SB _____

ANALYST Woods

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY07	FY08		
NFI	500.0	Non-Recurring	General Fund

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

Relates to HB220

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From

Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD)

Public Education Department (PED)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Bill 369 seeks to appropriate \$500,000 from the general fund to the State Parks Program of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department for expenditure in fiscal year 2008 to support a statewide public school outdoor classroom program. The program is intended to encourage participation and improve performance in math and science. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of fiscal year 2008 shall revert to the general fund.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

PED indicates that while the appropriation is made to the State Parks Division of EMNRD, there will be costs for Public Education Department – especially in the Math and Science and Rural Education Bureaus – in assisting EMNRD in the development of the teacher education training program, assisting in recruitment of teachers and evaluation of the project. An estimation of time required to support this legislation would be .15 Administrator A @ \$25.50 per hour and

benefits. The cost of time and benefits would be \$10,383. Monitoring the project would include travel @ .32 for 750 miles and per diem for 4 nights at \$85 for a total of \$ 580. The total cost of the time, benefits and travel to support this project will be \$10,963.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

EMNRD indicates that HB369 stems from a study prepared by the State Parks Division (SPD) and the Public Education Department (PED) required by SJM 24, which passed the Legislature in 2005. SJM 24 requested SPD and PED to evaluate opportunities for collaboration. This study, “Making New Mexico Schools Work Outdoors,” was presented to the Legislative Education Study Committee in October 2005, as required by SJM 24. SPD and PED found potential for partnerships that can improve the education of New Mexico’s children, benefit state parks, and better serve the state in general. The joint study cites recent research indicating outdoor, interactive education, can increase student academic achievement, improve test scores, reduce discipline problems, build citizenry skills and resource stewardship ethics, and increase teacher job satisfaction.

Each of the 34 state parks is a potential outdoor classroom, encompassing a variety of natural and cultural resource themes, positioned for a hands-on, interdisciplinary approach. In 2005, however, only 5 percent of New Mexico’s K-12 students visited state parks as part of their school program. This situation reflects great, unrealized potential as 80 percent of schools are within 30 minutes of a state park.

The SJM 24 study recommended the establishment of the “New Mexico Outdoor Classroom” initiative, the mission of which is: “State Parks and PED will improve academic achievement and encourage resource stewardship by engaging New Mexico’s children in heritage education.” The study proposed non-recurring funding for a pilot project to launch and test the initiative. The pilot project would consist of:

- Outdoor Education Institutes – To provide short teacher training institutes, develop curriculum-based programming, and build partnerships between parks and teachers.
- Teacher Resource Program – To provide hands-on teaching materials for children, expand the State Parks Junior Ranger program, develop on-line educational programming, and augment staffing to deliver the programs.
- Kids-to-Parks Grant Program – To provide transportation funding for outdoor education initiatives.
- Service Learning Program - To provide funding for students to complete resource-related projects at state parks.

As coordinator of an outdoor classroom program, SPD would approach the program as a partnership with numerous entities, such as the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, New Mexico State Land Office, the U.S. National Park Service, and non-governmental organizations.

HB 369 could help to improve achievement by pairing schools with state parks and connecting children with the outdoors and with their natural and cultural heritage. The outdoor classroom

program could help lay the foundation for a strong SPD/PED partnership. HB 369 would make possible a significant increase in interdisciplinary, hands-on education; increasing student academic achievement and making schools work outdoors.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

EMNRD suggests that HB369 would allow SPD to implement a statewide outdoor classroom program cooperatively with PED and other agencies and organizations, and would therefore enhance the performance of SPD in providing quality educational programming. The number of interpretive programs offered by SPD is a performance measure specified by the Legislature that has been in place for a number of years. This metric is also recommended as an FY08 performance measure. The outdoor classroom program would assist SPD in exceeding this performance measure. Other key legislative performance measures that could be positively affected by this program include the number of visitors to state parks and self-generated revenue. Increased exposure to state parks for children will lead to increased visitation in general and repeat visits by families.

PED adds that their partnership with SPD could impact the public school performance measures relating to the percent of stakeholders who rate their involvement with public schools as positive and the percent of elementary and middle school students who achieve at the level of proficient or above on the standards-based assessment in mathematics and language arts. It also supports the Math and Science Bureau's goal to improve student achievement in science. Further, the number of education programs and the percentage of park visitors participating in education programs are key performance measures for the SPD. The program will assist the Division in augmenting the performance of its outdoor education programs by creating closer ties to the statewide educational system and linking division programs and statewide educational curriculum standards and benchmarks.

PED adds that there is a growing focus on developing standards-based outdoor education programs among non-profit and governmental non-formal educators (e.g., Audubon Society, Forestry Division, U.S. National Parks, etc.). The Math and Science Bureau has begun to work with the state's teacher professional organizations (Environmental Educators Association of New Mexico, the New Mexico Science Teachers Association and the New Mexico Council of Teachers of Mathematics) to provide guidance in how these outdoor education efforts and resources can best support and align with New Mexico science and math content standards and benchmarks. If funded, this program could position the SPD as a key partner in coordinating the educational efforts of many governmental and non-governmental entities to provide more coherent, consistent outdoor education for school children and their teachers

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

EMNRD concludes by noting that SPD has the staff, experience, and infrastructure to effectively administer HB369 and to succeed with the project. The SPD education program staff would administer HB369 in conjunction with PED. Management staff could undertake the programmatic implementation of the statewide Outdoor Classroom Program and State Park education field staff could provide the hands-on programming and school-to-park connection. The partnership with PED, through the Office of the Secretary and the PED's Rural Education Bureau, will provide State Parks with a unique, effective link to schools across the state, crucial to the success of this program.

CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

Relates to HB220

BFW/nt