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**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE**  
**BILL ANALYSIS**  
**55th Legislature, 1st Session, 2021**

**Bill Number** SM1 **Sponsor** Hemphill  
**Tracking Number** .218761.1 **Committee Referrals** SRC/SEC  
**Short Title** Task Force to Promote Outdoor Classroom  
**Analyst** Hathaway **Original Date** 2/1/2021  
**Last Updated** \_\_\_\_\_

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**BILL SUMMARY**

Synopsis of Memorial

Senate Memorial 1 (SM1) requests the Outdoor Recreation Division of the Economic Development Department (EDD) and the State Parks Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) convene a task force to develop and recommend actions to establish and expand the use of outdoor classrooms. In addition, SM1 requests the task force to build career paths for New Mexico's youth by coordinating existing efforts on outdoor recreation and education and youth career development. The task force would submit a report to "the appropriate interim legislative committees" by October 31, 2021.

SM1 requests EDD and EMNRD include representatives from the following organizations and agencies on the task force:

- Wild Friends Program
- Environmental Education of New Mexico
- Public Education Department (PED)
- Forestry Division of EMNRD
- Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD)
- State Land Office (SLO)
- New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF)
- New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA)
- New Mexico Tourism Department (NMTD)

Finally, SM1 requests that the governor to declare an "Outdoor Learning Day" in 2021.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

Legislative memorials do not carry appropriations. SM1, however, would require staff time and agency resources. The State Land Office (SLO), in its analysis of SM1, noted the acquisition of additional educational access or recreational permits from SLO due to this effort could have a small positive impact on SLO revenues. SLO also reports no additional resources would be needed

to support the requests made in SM1 because the agency has established an office of outdoor recreation.

Additional agency analysis was not available at the time of bill analysis.

## SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

**Research on Outdoor Classrooms.** Research shows that learning outside can be beneficial to children. A [2018 study](#) that assessed third-grade students, found learning outdoors was not just novel for children, but also helped them to focus once they returned to the classroom. Prior studies have found teaching outdoors may also increase students' [interest](#) in a subject, [intrinsic motivation](#) to learn, and ability to [retain information longer](#) than regular indoor classes.

A 2020 [article in EdWeek](#), published as more schools explored outdoor learning in the wake of the Covid-19 public health emergency, noted outdoor learning spaces can cost from \$5,000 to \$10 thousand per classroom to set up, although the cost varies depending on what schools choose to purchase. Outdoor learning spaces can range from students simply sitting outdoors to canopies with benches for students and whiteboards and other teaching supplies outside for educators.

**Youth Career Development Related to Outdoor Recreation.** Transforming Youth Outdoors, in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, [released a guide](#) focused on outdoor recreation and conservation careers, noting these jobs include a wide range of professions across sectors including forestry technicians, wildlife biologists, cartographers, wildland firefighters, geologists, recreational guides, and more.

**State Initiatives** In 2018, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham launched [Build New Mexico](#), an initiative to direct and support New Mexico's 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. The initiative includes diversifying the New Mexico economy and lists tourism and outdoor industries, sustainable and green industries, and sustainable and value-added agriculture as sectors for possible diversification of the economy. In the 2019-2020 school year, the Public Education Department (PED) conducted a [comprehensive local needs assessment](#) to identify career technical education (CTE) priorities in 10 regions across the state. Multiple regions selected agriculture, hospitality/tourism, and skilled trades as priority areas. New Mexico also has a website, [NM Career Pathways](#), that allows educators, parents, and students to explore detailed labor market and career cluster information about their local school district. There may be some overlap in these state initiatives that could lend itself to developing career pathways and youth career development as requested in SM1.

## ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Agencies and organizations listed in the requested task force membership would need to dedicate staff time and resources to host the task force and produce the report requested.

## OTHER SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

In 2012, the New Mexico Legislature passed the Children's Bill of Rights, a memorial asking the state to recognize the rights of children to have access to outdoor activities and encouraging state agencies to develop outdoor programs for children. It is unknown if efforts from this 2012 memorial are currently in operation.

SLO notes SM1 may not adequately identify the Wild Friends Program or the Environmental Education of New Mexico organization. Wild Friends is a civic education program at the University of New Mexico School of Law. Environmental Education of New Mexico is a nonprofit organization which provides, promotes, and enhances quality environmental education by offering New Mexicans opportunities for professional development, communication, and partnership.

**SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

- LESC Files
- State Land Office

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