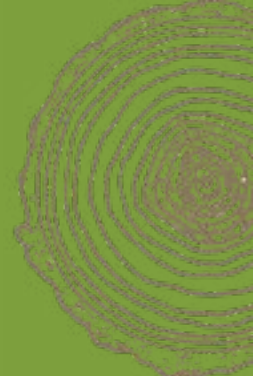




# Programs & Places Spotlight

## Helping Out at Outdoor School

with Dan Prince



Blue Mt. 4-H Center Dining Hall

Last May students from Elgin were at Outdoor School at the Blue Mountain 4-H Center north of LaGrande. I was there to learn about a citizen science project I wrote about in the summer edition of this postcard. But it was a side conversation that reminded me of an important element of many Outdoor School programs: kids learn to help, and that is empowering.



Blue Mt. 4-H Center Cabins

As teacher Dena Ledbetter and I walked the trail back from studying the creek, she told me about how teams of Elgin kids prepare, serve, and clean up after meals. Everyone helps, so everyone knows what it takes to pull off a community event. And everyone can build an appreciation for the work that others do in the community.



Weather Crew, 1980s

Over the 65 years of Oregon Outdoor School, students have set tables, cleaned bathrooms, swept their cabins, and cleared dishes. Often these jobs have been regarded as chores nobody relishes, but when the importance of the work becomes apparent students feel good about contributing.



Setting Tables, 1990s



Cabin Clean Up, 1980s

I remember one particularly frigid week of Outdoor School at Camp Namanu when the temperature barely got into the low thirties. The cabins had fireplaces and woodstoves, so we asked the kids to haul firewood to keep the cabins comfortable. The job quickly changed from being a chore to being a chance to help friends stay warm. Soon kids were reminding their leaders that they needed to swing by the woodshed on their way back to the cabin to make sure nobody was too cold.

It's no secret that we are living in difficult times. Children are reporting higher levels of anxiety and stress, and educators and their colleagues are working hard to support the mental health of students. Giving kids power and control over their circumstances in uncertain times is one way to help them gain confidence and reduce anxiety. Accomplishing something you've never done before, with the help of caring mentors, is incredibly empowering. And lunch tastes a bit better when you know you helped make it.