

LIVING THE GREEN



MEMBER NEWSLETTER

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MIKE RILEY

STAYING TRUE TO OUR SUSTAINABILITY MISSION

We say it so often it's almost a cliché: This past year has been doozy. But the truth is that the disruption has been profound and catalyzed many to reflect and reassess.

Like others, the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, and the disparate impacts of COVID on Indigenous, Latino and Black Americans, got our attention. This attention was new for many of us at The Environmental Center, reflecting our privileged and protected experience of daily life as white people in America. People of color see a different reality every day.

So we've spent time this past year learning and reflect-

ing on the persistence of racism and oppression in the US and what it means for our work. We started asking ourselves some hard questions, such as: Why are equity and justice important to The Environmental Center's work?

In the end, we went back to our mission to help us answer these questions. For although our name is The Environmental Center, our mission is to embed sustainability into daily life in Central Oregon.

cont'd inside

LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CONT'D

And sustainability is not just about the environment. Sustainability is about balancing three interdependent ideas: a healthy environment, a vibrant economy **and** a socially equitable society. The truth is that equity is a core part of our mission — and equity does not exist in a society that still produces vastly different outcomes for white people compared to people of color.

The Environmental Center has historically paid close attention to nurturing a healthy environment by improving environmental literacy among youth and helping our community to conserve resources. More recently, we have bolstered a vibrant economy by advocating for policies and infrastructure that support smart growth and safe walking, biking, transit and driving. But we have not paid enough attention to meeting the needs and including the voices of individuals who are most often impacted by environmental degradation and climate change — including Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), people who are LGBTQ+, people with diverse abilities, and people with low incomes. Just last week, here in Oregon and Bend, a Latino farmworker and two houseless individuals died from an extreme heat wave that was undeniably fueled by climate change.

This past year has caused us to look in the mirror.

Sustainability is our foundational principle here at The Environmental Center. As we move forward, that means ensuring our work leads to equitable outcomes for all. For example, we support changes to zoning policies in Bend that will provide a wider range of housing types and price points in **all** neighborhoods, not just in dense, high-rise apartments next to busy roads.

We don't have all the answers about how to achieve a sustainable future. And we're not the right organization to take on every specific challenge. But we are re-committing ourselves to the fullness of our mission, especially to equity and justice, in how we do our work and in the outcomes we seek to achieve. I invite you to join us and engage so we can learn and grow together.



Mike Riley, Executive Director

While writing this, I was inspired by Frederick Douglas' speech from July 5, 1852. Douglas challenged his fellow Americans to remain true to the foundational principle of our nation: "we hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal; and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; and that, among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Read his full speech here: tinyurl.com/4sj9xpj7.

NEW OUTDOOR CLASSROOM & GARDEN SPACES

When most Central Oregon schools were closed in November due to COVID-19, we didn't know if any teacher was going to apply for our annual garden grants. When the deadline came we were thrilled to see more applications than ever before, and worked with local partners to fully fund a majority of the projects. In total, we awarded \$14,500 to 13 projects. Here are some highlights from local teachers:

StepUP in Redmond turned a basement space into an indoor seed starting classroom to grow plants during the winter months and start seeds for their greenhouse.

Elk Meadow Elementary School in SW Bend filled most of their beds with perennials and the kids got to prep, plant, and care for the plants. They utilized the garden as a classroom one day a week in the spring and focused on learning topics including gardening

101, worms, plant parts, pollinators, seed germination, and more. An educator shared: "Thank you so much for money that has bought weeks of learning, fun and laughter. The kids are very much invested in their garden, and it is now a space that they feel truly belongs to them."

Skyline High School in NE Bend transformed an empty concrete pad into a courtyard garden area to grow edibles and flowers and to create an outdoor space for students to connect and learn. Over 100 students from botany, art, and wood shop classes were involved in building and planting 15 raised beds and a trellis.

Visit envirocenter.org/blog for more project highlights.



SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATORS DIDN'T MISS A BEAT

EarthSmart is an in-classroom series where students learn about waste management, environmental advocacy, climate change, food waste, and water conservation and pollution. This year, we shifted to teaching students virtually through an online platform. Using this technology allowed our educators to be projected on the classroom's big screen SmartBoard, and for students to engage with our lessons in real-time. We even delivered hands-on activities to teachers and then led students through those activities via livestream!



We hope to be back in classrooms next year. **Teachers: Email becca@envirocenter.org to schedule your 4th/5th grade class.**

WELCOME TO THE TEAM!

Welcome to our Project Zero Intern, Justina Trevino. Justina will be working with our team through December to gain experience in a non-profit organization. She will help lead our youth education summer programs in the forest and in the garden, learn about event planning, and support various outreach efforts.

Udara Abeysekara is joining our team as the Program Manager of the Rethink Waste Project. She has spent the last seven years designing and implementing sustainability programs and joins The Environmental Center with a strong background in climate science communication and outreach, working with diverse groups of non-profit organizations, government agencies, businesses, youth, and educators.



Left: Justina (she/her)
Right: Udara (she/her)



BY THE NUMBERS! (JANUARY-JUNE 2021)

700+ STUDENTS REACHED

Over 700 students in Central Oregon learned about sustainability in virtual classrooms.



28 CLASSROOMS



- Across 2 counties
- Using 4 online platforms
- 4 grades of students
- 8 separate lessons
- 10 schools virtually visited

1,000+

SHARED QUESTIONS, THOUGHTS AND IDEAS.

Students made *real* behavior changes in their lives, educated their families, started compost bins, made recycling signage, and took virtual field trips to the landfill.



5 COMMUNITY PARTNERS



EarthSmart is funded by Deschutes County Solid Waste, City of Bend, and local waste management companies. We also worked with The Avarna Group this year to make our lessons more inclusive and culturally relevant. Thanks to all the organizations who collaborated with us on programs this year!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

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- Tracy Ryan
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- Youth Education Director*

IMPROVED RECYCLING AT APARTMENTS

The Environmental Center's Rethink Waste Project, in collaboration with Housing Works, has developed a multifamily recycling education program that's making change in Central Oregon! Over the past 18 months, our staff member Tess Freeman has been tabling, talking, and teaching residents in four apartment communities all about recycling. And we're excited to share several positive outcomes so far:

Increased recovered recyclable materials from 72 tons per year to 146 tons per year by adding more recycling carts and a cardboard dumpster at each apartment complex.

Performed waste audits to determine most common contaminants (for example, plastic bags) and organized education efforts around those items including door hangers and an interactive recycling competition.

Dispersed recycling education toolkits to 200 multifamily housing units, including a helpful sticker for residents' home recycling bins in both English and Spanish. *Above image.*

This project will culminate in a set of best practices for other complexes to follow across the region. Despite all of the challenges of launching a new program during COVID-19, this recycling education has made a real difference for residents in Bend and Redmond. Thank you, Tess!



YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROJECT



Hey, High Schoolers!

Get outside this summer to explore and connect with your peers who are interested in equity and the environment.

SUMMER OUTINGS (free)

- July 19th: BBQ & lawn games at Ponderosa Park
- July 26th: Kayaking and beach time at Elk Lake
- August 23rd: Caves and hiking at Lava Lands

MICRO-INTERNSHIPS

(20-50 hours, paid \$12.75/hr)
Choose from 13 different outdoor and environmental jobs.

These opportunities are intended for LGBTQIA+ youth, youth experiencing disabilities, rural youth, and youth who are Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and people of color.

Learn more and sign up for summer outings or a micro-internship today. Scan the QR below to get started.



BUILDING A MORE EQUITABLE FUTURE IN

CENTRAL OREGON.

 Over the next few months, you'll notice new language on our website and print materials that speaks to our commitment to equity and how we're putting these words into action. We invite our members to engage in these conversations, too.

LEARN WITH US! HERE ARE TWO PLACES TO START.

This month, our staff and board Learning Club is reading or listening to *Disability Visibility*, edited by Alice Wong. Visit your local library or book store for a copy.

Our DEI Committee is learning about local environmental injustices. We watched and discussed a series of videos from the Oregon Health Authority in collaboration with StoryCenter called *Voices of The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs*. Each story touches on different cultural traditions and resources threatened by climate change and the impacts on individual and community identity and well-being. Visit oregon.gov and type 'storycenter' in the search bar to view.



ELECTRIC SCHOOL BUS HITS THE ROAD

Our Electric Bus Learning Project is a collaboration with other electric experts to support access to clean transportation options. We recently completed a five-day electric school bus tour across Oregon, visiting eight school districts in Central, Western and Southern Oregon. We interacted with transportation managers, bus drivers, mechanics, and policy makers and offered several Ride 'n' Drive opportunities. Even the most skeptical riders enjoyed the quiet, clean experience!

We know from our work promoting electric cars that it's very important for individuals to get first hand experience driving an electric vehicle in order to grasp its unique benefits and differences from diesel technology. We will continue to work with school districts in Pacific Power territory to help prepare them for grant opportunities for electric bus funding. We are excited to see and support this important expansion of clean, electric technology!

Learn more at envirocenter.org/electricbus.

VICTORIES IN SALEM!

There are many challenging issues facing our state right now, which was made clear by the sheer number of climate bills that were introduced during the 2021 legislative session. While not all made it through, a few monumental bills passed. Big victories include the Clean Energy Opportunity bills that were led by rural, coastal, low-income and communities of color across the state; in addition to legislation that will improve electric vehicle infrastructure and recycling.

100% Clean Energy 2021 (HB 2021): This groundbreaking bill will transition Oregon's electricity to 100% clean by 2040 and ensure the transition benefits communities and workers most impacted by climate change. Oregon will have the fastest timeline and best labor standards for emissions-free energy in the country, and will be the first U.S. state to ban new development or expansions of fossil fuel power plants.

Healthy Homes (HB 2482): This bipartisan bill will invest \$10 million in a new Healthy Homes Repair Fund at the Oregon Health Authority to support low income Oregonians with energy efficiency retrofits and repairs that reduce energy costs and improve health and safety.

Electric Vehicle Omnibus (HB 2165): Strengthens Oregon's Electric Vehicle Rebate Program to ensure consistent funding, and expands the EV incentive from \$2,500 to \$5,000 for low and moderate income families (can be used on new or used EV purchases).

Modernizing Oregon's Recycling (SB 582): Requires truthful, easy-to-understand recycling labels; establishes a state-wide recyclables collection list; and establishes and funds educational programs to increase public understanding of recycling. This legislation will also improve recycling opportunities in rural areas by equalizing the cost of transporting recyclable materials to markets.

Thank you to everyone who advocated for these and other bills focused on climate action and equitable solutions during this long session. Each letter, phone call, and email to elected officials made a difference!

MAKING LOCAL CLIMATE ACTION A REALITY

Our team member Neil Baunsgard, authority on all things energy & electrification, was recently selected to co-chair the City of Bend's new Environment and Climate Committee. This committee is tasked to provide input and recommendations to City Council on topics related to environmental stewardship; and to oversee implementation of the Community Climate Action Plan (CCAP) adopted in December 2019. For the last six months, this committee has been working to prioritize specific strategies identified in the CCAP in order to meet our fossil fuel reduction goals. You can watch archived and future committee meetings at youtube.com/CityofBendOregon.

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EVENTS IN OUR OWN BACKYARD

Tuesdays, July-August : 4-6pm

Happy Hour in the Garden:

Stop by our Kansas Avenue Learning Garden for a weekly volunteer series complete with cold beverages.

Fridays through Labor Day : 2-6pm

Madras Farm-to-Table Market

A new opportunity for Jefferson County farmers and ranchers to sell products directly to consumers. Buy local!

July 23 : 5 - 11:30pm

Gala de Oro

A celebration and fundraiser to support Latino Community Association's mission.

Wednesday, July 28 : 5-7pm

Bend Young Professionals Social

We're hosting Bend Chamber's YP social event in our Learning Garden. Swing by to network and

learn about our work in Central Oregon.

July 29 : 5pm

BIPOC Climbing Night

Join Latinos Outside, Vamonos Outside and the Circuit Bouldering Gym for the third BIPOC bouldering event. First visit is free.

August 10 : 3pm

Season Extension Techniques

Webinar for the experienced gardener led by OSU horticulture experts.

August 18 : 12pm

Home Backup Power

Explore options for making your home more energy resilient. You'll receive information on back-up batteries, generators and air filtration.

September 10-19

Welcoming Week 2021

A week-long series of events to build meaningful connections and welcoming spaces.

VIEW MORE EVENTS AT ENVIROCENTER.ORG.

August 4

Annual Member Appreciation Event

We're excited to welcome you back to The Environmental Center, in person, for a safe event! **Please keep an eye out for your formal invitation via email, with a link to RSVP for one of two available time slots.**

We'll share updates and stories of how we're putting your membership contribution to work for the community. Cookies and beverages will be provided (no full lunch this year to limit contact).

Thank you for sticking with us through a tumultuous year. Your support has kept us going and we can't wait to see you!