

# NEWSLETTER



## Intro

As The Environmental Center enters the final year of our 2023–26 strategic plan, we’re reflecting on progress and renewing our commitment to embedding sustainability into daily life across Central Oregon. Over the past three years we’ve expanded partnerships with schools, communities, and organizations beyond Bend. Along the way we’ve acknowledged we haven’t always prioritized the needs and voices of those most impacted by environmental harm—Native and Indigenous people, Black and other people of color, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness and/or low incomes, and rural communities. We recognize that it will take time and effort to build relationships across different parts of Central Oregon and that any expansion needs to begin with humility and curiosity of individual communities’ unique characteristics, experiences, and needs. In this issue we want to highlight our recent work in Jefferson County.

With Gratitude and hope,  
Al Kolenda(he/they),  
Development Manager

## Home Energy Assessments in Madras

We’re helping local households take control of their energy use through free home energy assessments. Available to single-family and small multifamily homes, we connect households with rebates and incentives that can significantly lower the cost of making energy efficiency upgrades, from insulation improvements to heating system upgrades. The goal: more comfortable homes, lower utility bills, and a lighter environmental footprint. Since launching this program in 2024, we’ve already completed seven home energy assessments in Madras, each one a step toward a more energy-efficient community.



## Garden Grants in Madras

Since the launch of our Garden for Every School program, we have awarded over \$16,000 in garden grants throughout Jefferson County to help build, maintain or expand youth learning gardens. Those projects include gardens at Madras High

School, Jefferson County Middle School, OSU Extension/Warm Springs K-8 Academy, OSU Ext/Warm Springs Early Childhood Education Center, Jefferson County School District Preschool Promise, and MountainStar Madras.



## Youth Education in Madras

We're bringing sustainability to life for local students through hands-on, real-world learning. Over the past seven years, 4th graders at Buff Elementary and 5th graders at Madras Elementary have taken part in our EarthSmart program, three interactive lessons that break down big topics like waste, recycling, and everyday choices into something students can see, touch, and act on.

During the Rethink Waste lesson, students played the Great Garbage Game where they were challenged to reduce the amount of waste in a trash bag by sorting some items into reuse, recycle, compost, or landfill choices. They learned what it means to rethink waste, with the hope that they and their families will be encouraged to consider recycling as a last resort. Recycling is still a good option for dealing with waste, and there are also even better actions to take that use way less energy and resources than recycling. The lesson teaches students to try to limit use of single-use items by refusing or reducing single-use, and choosing reusable items instead. Students also participated in the Hidden World lesson where they learned about the importance of food waste prevention and ways that they can compost food scraps. One compost technique is using a worm compost bin, and students viewed the worms, castings (AKA worm poop), and decomposing food waste. A few students from each class screamed with excitement or aversion, depending on how they felt about having red wiggler worms crawling on their hands and desks.

Not all our youth education programs take place within the walls of classrooms. This spring, Madras 5th graders stepped behind the scenes of our local waste system with a tour of the Jefferson County Transfer Station and Madras Sanitary Services, getting an up-close look at where their trash gets collected before being transported to its final destination at Wasco County Landfill.

Next up: even more outdoor learning. On June 2nd, Buff Elementary 4th graders head to Smith Rock State Park for a full Outdoor School Day, connecting with Central Oregon's incredible landscapes. Then on June 5th, all Jefferson County 4th graders will gather at Sahalie Park for Seeds of Discovery, which aims to engage students in outdoor field experiences connected to Central Oregon.

This work isn't new, it's built on nearly 20 years of showing up for Madras students. But every year, it reaches new kids, sparks new ideas, and builds momentum for a more sustainable future.

