



Explore! Experience! Expand!

**2015-2020 Strategic Plan:
Creating a network to support and sustain outdoor education for the North State**





Mt. Shasta
(STEVEN J. ARRISON)

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Front Cover Image:
CHICO CREEK NATURE CENTER

Back Cover Image:
KATHLEEN HUBER/ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

**If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go further,
go together.**

AFRICAN PROVERB

Northern California is known for rich natural resources and the history of the area is filled with cultures and communities coming together around them. Thousands of years ago, there were dozens of Native American tribes that lived off the abundant salmon and acorns of the area. Food came from the trees and the rivers. The valley was filled with deer, elk, and bear. During the Mission period, Spanish colonizers established vast ranchos and brought agriculture to the area. In 1849, the gold rush brought American settlers west to find their fortunes but soon, it was the “green gold” of the thickly forested foothills and mountains that brought settlers wealth and prosperity. The fisheries, wildlife, and fertile soils of the Great Valley sustained all those who made the venture west. These same values and histories currently form the foundations of the cities and small rural towns across Northern California. Today, this area we call the North State exports natural resources and extensive agricultural products around the world. And yet, our kids are losing their connections to this land and its history.

Today, children don't know milk comes from cows. Fishing is in decline as are the fisheries. Water comes from faucets. Food is bought at grocery stores. Kids are

oblivious to the migrations of animals and the seasons of growth. Television, video games, and computers take up most of a child's time. Adults are also forgetting our own histories. How can any of us understand the carbon cycle without knowing our trees and forests? How can we notice the declining pollinators if we are not growing food or talking to farmers? How can we make wise decisions around water-use if we don't know from where the water comes?

From these worries and a mutual love of our cultural and natural history, a group of local citizens, non-profits, government agencies, businesses, educators, and more came together to form Outdoor Education for All! (OEFA) in 2013. Many have years of experience working outdoors, or educating kids outdoors. We are farmers and fishermen. We are teachers and business owners. We are parents and grandparents. We are historians and storytellers. Together, we understand our natural resources sustain our lives in this area. It is our connection to the past that helps us make wise decisions in the future. **Through OEFA we hope to build appreciation and stewardship of these special resources that not only sustain our environment, but also contribute to the health of people and the environment statewide, nationally, and globally.**

“That was the way I bonded with my dad. We were always doing something outdoors whether it was hunting, fishing, camping or... mowing the lawn. It’s how I learned to love being outside and I wanted to pass all that on to my daughters.”

LISA SPEEGLE, OEFA STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBER



Father and daughter at Llano Seco Wildlife Refuge, Snow Goose Festival
TOM BARRETT/ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Our Strategy

VISION **Outdoor Education for All! (OEFA) brings together dedicated organizations and individuals who collectively deliver a range of standards-based and high quality outdoor learning experiences for students of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.**

MISSION **We partner to collectively deliver outdoor learning experiences that promote ecological literacy and health and wellness, building a citizenry active in natural and cultural resource conservation and stewardship.**

CORE These are the values that inform our work together.

VALUES

- Stewardship of Nature:** Our future depends upon people who respect and protect the earth.
- Awareness:** We welcome all the varied ways we make connections to the natural world.
- Culture:** Natural history is intimately connected to cultural history.
- Inclusiveness:** We provide quality experiences to all learners and honor the diversity of all who want outdoor education.

- Commitment:** All involved in OEFA have strong commitments to learners of all ages, to the organization, and its mission and vision.
- Partnership:** Our collective efforts bring out the best in each of us.
- Health and Wellness:** Access and opportunities outside improve health and wellness.
- Kids:** Children are our future.

Outdoor Education for All (OEFA) is a collaboration of organizations and individuals who want to improve our educational system and conserve our natural resources. Through outdoors and place-based experiences, we not only ground education in the land that sustains us all, we provide perspective to future generations through natural and cultural history. We provide opportunities to develop healthy lifestyles as key to building healthy communities. Organizations in the OEFA network are committed to serving all socio-economic groups and people of all abilities.

Programs & Training

- GOAL 1** Support standards-based programs that connect providers, schools, and students of all ages and promote the value of Outdoor Education For All in the educational community as a primary resource for outdoor learning experiences.
- GOAL 2** Identify and build recognition of outdoor learning places within proximity of communities and learning institutions.
- GOAL 3** Coordinate and support leadership development and training for informal and formal educators.
- GOAL 4** Support and expand the capacity of providers to meet demand and deliver quality programs.

Outreach & Engagement

- GOAL 5** Build awareness and participation in OEFA targeting diverse partners and the public.

Assessment, Monitoring, & Organizational Effectiveness

- GOAL 6** Assess the progress and effectiveness of Outdoor Education For All! on a regularly scheduled basis and assure its improvement and sustainability as an organization and in program delivery.
- GOAL 7** Establish a formal organization (nonprofit, partnership, fiscal agent, MOU or other model) to support OEFA's ongoing activities, growth, and sustainability.

Financial Stability

- GOAL 8** Establish and maintain financial stability to sustain the organization (OEFA) and program delivery.

Natural history is intimately connected to cultural history.

The nine counties of the North State cover 25% of the landmass in California, yet this rural area contains less than 2% of the population. The North State's farm and forestry lands support very limited industry, placing students and educators in economically challenging environments. The majority of the approximately 100,000 K-12 students served in the 128 school districts and

450 schools are high-need students, living in poverty. The median school district size is just 222 students, and only one school district (Chico Unified) has more than 10,000 students. Most are comprised of fewer than 800 students.

In Butte County, 21% of the population is 5-18 years of age. Just 29% of County graduates in 2011-12 were eligible to attend University of California schools or California State universities compared to 40% statewide. The County high school dropout rate is 11.4%.



LASSEN VOLCANIC NATIONAL PARK / NPS

Getting Started: A Spark Ignites the Future

Our story starts in Butte County at the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve (BCCER), a 4,000-acre learning laboratory for students owned and managed by the California State University Chico (CSUC) Research Foundation. In 2003, Reserve staff, supported by CSUC students and professors, initiated an Outdoor Classroom opening awareness and appreciation by students and adults of the North State's flora and fauna. As the Reserve could only accommodate 1,200 participants a year, BCCER staff had a dream to offer outdoor classroom experiences to every student in every grade in the county.

By 2008, the worst of the economic recession hit Butte County. Unemployment rose above 10% and the vital tourism economy abruptly declined. Cuts to education, park and recreation services, and non-profit conservation organizations became a frightening "new normal." A community member and neighbor to the reserve reached out and engaged the Reserve Director in exploring creative ways to expand outdoor and place-based learning throughout the North State.

The concept of educational partnerships gained momentum after 18 North State organizations visited the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA). For two days, participants experienced the GGNRA partnerships at work and the vision of Outdoor Education for All! was born that day on February 28, 2013. From this beginning, OEFA has held to the value of being grounded in community input and continues to grow from grassroots efforts.

In April 2014, the Superintendent of the Butte County Office of Education famously urged OEFA partners to take action: "We're not here just to plan. Let's try out some of our ideas!" Ready! Fire! Aim! was the rallying cry. A former Principal from a school in south Butte County immediately volunteered to help bring together OEFA partners and students. Demonstration projects were tested and launched. Through the many talents of formal and informal educators and community leaders, we tamed a variety of complex problems into a Strategic Plan. Through this Plan, we are ready to "Aim and Fire!"

A Steering Committee formed to provide essential leadership and support for the growing network of OEFA partners. We are eager to offer our programs, share our best practices, and continue to grow throughout the North State.



Dawn Garcia with outdoor classroom students
SCOTT HUBER/BIG CHICO CREEK ECOLOGICAL RESERVE, CSU CHICO

Accomplishments & Results

During its first two years, Outdoor Education for All! was supported by nearly 170 teachers, school administrators, park and recreation managers, informal education providers, organizations, and interested individuals. Since 2013, the organization has contributed over 7,000 hours or almost 3.5 years of volunteer time. Additionally, more than two years of in-kind hours and services have been donated. Together we have achieved a variety of successes, we have found there is a demand for partner programs and offerings, and we have envisioned our next steps through our Strategic Plan.

Participation

- 170 organizations and individuals are now participating in the OEFA network.
- 31 school field trip sites have been identified.
- 15 OEFA providers partnered to serve just over 2,000 students at four schools in 2015.
 - › Delivered demonstration programs at Thermalito Forebay serving the Hearthstone (kids at risk) and Four Winds (Native American focus) charter schools.
 - › Held five standards-based themed events in the Oroville City Elementary School District.
- 16 other OEFA providers offered a wide variety of programs at other sites and schools.
 - › Conducted a providers training needs survey and began planning for workshops to meet identified needs.

Outreach

Volunteers & Grants

- Directly or in partnership, received 2 grants, 4 donations, and provided about 5 years of donated volunteer and in-kind hours (over 9,500 hours).
- Received a Frieda C. Fox Foundation / Education by Nature grant to support web-connections between providers and teachers in Butte County on the CREEC website.
- Received a technical assistance award from the National Park Service, Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance program to support strategic planning.

Organizational & Strategic Planning

- Conducted initial gap analysis of Butte County provider programs based on information from the CREEC website.
- Developed a pre- and post- outdoor education assessment survey to collect data on impact of OEFA programs.
- Established the OEFA Steering Committee – the OEFA core leadership and work group.
- Held 12 Steering Committee meetings.
- Conducted 4 OEFA Community Workshops.
- Completed the OEFA Strategic Plan 2015-2020 and set our course for action.

- Established a social media and online presence
- Established an OEFA digital image library and shared with the network.
- Produced 4 illustrated e-newsletters.
- Designed and produced an OEFA brochure that features 20 outdoor education providers. Brochure was distributed to every school in Butte County.
- Initiated communication and collaboration with Glenn, Tehama, Shasta, Lassen and Plumas Counties to explore ways to expand the OEFA network in 2015 and beyond.



Ruth Kennedy and Melinda Teves at BEC Endangered Species Fair
MARY MUCHOWSKI/ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

“OEFA and Stanford Avenue School developed a very valuable partnership over the 2014/2015 school years uniting in a true California pioneer spirit. Stanford Avenue School made a school-wide commitment to embrace wellness, the environment, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (WE STEM) as the lens to magnify meaningful learning with two primary purposes.

One was to teach teachers how to use the natural environment as a classroom and learning tool. The other was to provide experiential learning for students that helped motivate them to enjoy the outdoors and understand the value of science and nature. OEFA fulfilled both of these purposes with passion, knowledge, and dedication. Our Outdoor Ed Days allowed students the opportunity to spend the entire day outside learning about their own natural environment and opening doors to becoming our future conservation leaders. These experiences supported through OEFA help our students learn about, understand, and value nature. “

PRINCIPAL PATTY GARRISON
STANFORD AVENUE SCHOOL
OROVILLE CITY ELEMENTARY DISTRICT

Strategic Priorities 2015-2020

In 2014 and 2015, OEFA partners completed a five-year Strategic Plan that charts OEFA's course from 2015 to 2020 building on its early success.

The plan identifies eight strategic goals and over 30 major actions framing the partnership's work over the years ahead. We are ready to lead and partner in efforts that contribute to a "rising tide that raises all boats." OEFA partners have the capacity to raise educational standards, contribute to healthier communities, and support a deepened and expanded land stewardship ethic. We know our strengths and what we bring to the table. Funding will allow OEFA the ability to leverage the energies of all in the network. Staffing will support the more rapid sharing of lessons learned through our partnership efforts with others in the North State and beyond.

These efforts will fill the targeted gaps we have articulated that will make a difference between one-shot programs and a sustainable outdoor and place-based education program.

Our future depends upon people who respect and protect the earth.

Making Connections in Outdoor Education

GOALS 1 & 2

Support standards-based programs that connect providers, schools, and students of all ages and promote the value of Outdoor Education For All in the educational community as a primary resource for outdoor learning experiences.

Identify and build recognition of outdoor learning places within proximity of communities and learning institutions.

Children are our future.

- OEFA will support providers and schools in the network to deepen their work, expand educational quality, broaden financial, professional development and communication benefits, and allow each partner to do what they do best.
- Facilitating communication between providers, classroom teachers, and community members is key to making connections that lead to increasingly effective and standards-based outdoor learning programs. OEFA will be the coordinator.
- With the adoption of Common Core standards, classroom teachers will soon be clamoring for the programs providers can offer. Learning outdoors easily integrates social studies, math, science, art, reading, and public speaking and helps develop critical thinking skills. OEFA

will continue to work with the Butte County Office of Education to develop an integrated experiential education curriculum compatible with Next Generation Science and Common Core Standards to provide opportunities to support Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics classes.

- In Butte County, we are expanding STEM programs to include both Art and Agriculture (STEAM) – areas that provide the potential for exciting programs that will be unique to our region.
- OEFA providers are increasingly thinking up new ways to teach in the field bringing two or more providers together who have developed programs to support themes and needs identified by the schools. Providers cooperate on daylong thematic programs, build cumulative learning across specific topics, and seek ways to incorporate science, recreation, health and wellness, and self-esteem into their programs.
- OEFA will work towards more sustainable outdoor education curricula by teaching teachers outdoor teaching skills to extend the capacity of outdoor educators.
- OEFA will encourage exploration of new outdoor learning places by identifying and mapping sites throughout the North State.

GOAL 3

Coordinate and support leadership development and training for informal and formal educators.

The Chico Creek Nature Center is already a designated North State hub for outdoor education providing professional development workshops for Projects Wild, Wet, Flying Wild, and Learning Tree. The CREEC Regional Coordinator, housed under the Center for Science and Math Education in the College of Natural Resources at CSU Chico, also offers extensive training for informal educators in how to develop standards-based programs.

OEFA will look for opportunities to connect our outdoor education network to these opportunities and to support the work of current providers and others engaged in professional development to extend learning throughout the network.

All involved in OEFA have strong commitments to learners of all ages, to the organization, and its mission and vision

GOAL 4

Support and expand the capacity of providers to meet demand and deliver quality programs.

An obvious gap in meeting the need for more outdoor and place-based education programs is that there are not enough providers to serve all students in Butte County let alone work with schools AND the general public.

We provide quality experiences to all learners and honor the diversity of all who want outdoor education.

OEFA participants support three solutions to this dilemma.

1. Recruit college interns to assist in delivery of provider programs through the Integrated Teacher Education Core, Department of Education at CSU Chico.

2. Establish and develop the UCC

Extension California Naturalist and and CalFresh Wellness and Nutrition programs. The Naturalist program trains docents to provide outdoor learning experiences. CalFresh promotes wellness and nutrition, bringing fresh fruits and veggies to OEFA programs. Both expand program reach to diverse community interests.

3. Work with the Butte County Office of Education and its Special Education corps of instructors to support the needed adaptations at various sites to ensure special needs students enjoy outdoor education experiences and that providers can work with these specialized instructors.

A Spotlight on Success

The OEFA Steering Committee has been working with the Butte County Office of Education (BCOE) to find both a location and opportunities for providing more outdoor experiences for students with special needs. BCOE has a large and talented staff of adaptive recreation instructors and adaptive recreation classes are also taught at CSU Chico. A demonstration project will bring outdoor educational opportunities to students with special needs at the Forebay Aquatic Center (FAC) at the North Forebay SRA. Skills learned by the providers in working with Adaptive Recreation professionals, interns and with various techniques will hopefully spread throughout the OEFA network to other providers expanding the capacity to serve these students. The FAC provides water safety equipment and some transportation grants to all schools.



BCOE

Growing the Partnership

GOALS 5-8

Build awareness and participation in OEFA targeting diverse partners and the public.

Assess the progress and effectiveness of Outdoor Education For All! on a regularly scheduled basis and assure its improvement and sustainability as an organization and in program delivery.

Establish a formal organization (nonprofit, partnership, fiscal agent, MOU or other model) to support OEFA's ongoing activities, growth, and sustainability.

Establish and maintain financial stability to sustain the organization (OEFA) and program delivery.

OEFA is a young, growing organization, building its skills in collaboration through communicating, coordinating, and facilitating the work of providers, teachers, schools, and administrators. Partnering is key to the OEFA model. This investment in collaboration builds capacity throughout the network and deepens our skills as a “learning community.”

OEFA will continue outreach to schools and non-profit organizations that participate in or support outdoor and place-based educational experiences using a variety of tools including social media, web tools, and face to face conversations.

OEFA, as a learning community, is committed to self-assessment, nurturing best practices in outdoor education. We will build on our work in 2015 testing one tool used at Stanford Avenue School: pre- and post-program surveys. Through these surveys we assess what impact pilot programs, delivered by a mix of providers, had on students' attitudes about science. This insight will contribute to enhanced programming in the months and years ahead and will continue to build professionalism, trust, and inter-dependence among providers and with educational institutions, teachers, students, parents and the general public.



Outdoor Classroom at Butte Creek
SCOTT HUBER/BIG CHICO CREEK ECOLOGICAL RESERVE, CSU CHICO

“California is at a pivotal time in the quest to develop environmental literacy in our students. In July 2015, the State Environmental Literacy Task Force completed its report to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction outlining a number of actions to help all students develop environmental literacy upon graduation from high school. Key among these recommendations is supporting grass roots efforts to integrate environmental education efforts. Environmental education (EE) has been seen as the domain for non-formal out-of-school organizations. The new focus of EE is to build bridges between formal K-12 classrooms and non-formal providers; articulating programs so that every student has meaningful outdoor experiences at EVERY grade level. With minimal seed money from the California Department of Education and CREEC Network, OEFA has risen to the occasion by bringing together EE programs from all over Butte County to strategically plan how best to implement programs for youth. With its solid infrastructure and strategic planning, OEFA is becoming a model for other regional collaborations throughout California.”

DR. ANNE STEPHENS PROFESSOR, SCIENCE EDUCATIONS, CSU CHICO

“Teaching children about outdoor education is one of the most important components we can provide to teach science and civic life. The Butte County Office of Education has been a supporter of OEFA since their first meeting in February, 2013. Research supports the need to introduce all children, especially children of diverse backgrounds, to the sights, textures, smells, tastes and sounds of the outdoors. Doing so supports overall learning and connections to school. OEFA is an integral partner of implementing STEM curricula in Butte County Schools. OEFA means it when they say they are working towards the goal of providing Outdoor Education for ALL!”

TIM TAYLOR, SUPERINTENDENT, BUTTE COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

As the OEFA network continues to build month-to-month, we will evaluate organizational options and seek a path of least resistance to sustain our investments and build success as an outdoor education network while working towards a shared vision. Our Steering Committee will diversify and continue to play a leadership role in guiding, supporting, and building the OEFA organization.

Our organizational planning will address a need to have a central “space” out of which partners can meet, work, and create together, deepening trust and collaboration. The “space” can also respond to functional needs such as shared office and conference space, centrally available gear lockers and program supplies to leverage administrative and programmatic efficiencies and cost savings.

As we look ahead, a key consideration is financial growth and stability. Over the past two years Outdoor Education for All! has leveraged contributions of over 9,500 hours of volunteer support and thousands of dollars of cash and in-kind donations. We are just beginning to build from partnerships with public and private organizations and commitments of essential funding to grow our network and the work we do.

We will also look at options to seek and administer grants through OEFA for high impact investments that address shared challenges, needs, and opportunities.

Lessons Learned

As OEFA's vision evolved into actions and progress over the last few years, five "lessons learned" stand out that support our goal **to expand throughout the North State.**

The Power of Place "Outdoor learning laboratories" support providers in collaborative experimentation. By working at Stanford Avenue School and the Forebay Aquatic Center, program quality improved, our ability to attract grants increased, and we achieved heightened visibility within the network and with the public.

The Efficiency of a Backbone Organization: OEFA is a convener, operating with minimal staffing and overhead. Its role is to watch for emerging needs and bring partnerships together to fill gaps.

The Ability to Reduce Program Costs for Participants:

By coming together as a community that supports experiential learning, it is easier to find funding, waivers, or innovative technological methods to reduce the costs of learning outside the classroom.

The Need for Institutional Support: A network organization provides stability and efficiencies by working across and supporting many partners. Smaller network organizations and individuals provide a continual flow of community creativity and talent.

Customized Programs for Individual Audiences:

Informal educators and classroom educators are working together to take outdoor and place-based education experiences to After School programs, Home Schools, and students with special needs. A corps of trained college interns and adult volunteers expands capacity.

"OEFA gives me - and everyone - a chance to work together for a healthier future for our beautiful North State environment and the wonderful people who live here."

MARTI LEICESTER, OEFA FOUNDING MEMBER





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