

Students, staff enjoy Spring outdoor school at Camp Wilkerson

By Shawn Stevens

The 1994 Outdoor School adventure has come and gone, but it has left great memories for staff and students from Vernonia schools.

This year was different from the routine of many previous years, though the activity was still held at Columbia County's Camp Wilkerson, and the stay was still for three days. The change was moving Outdoor School to the spring instead of having it in early fall.

How did the change go? "Success" is the word that best sums up this year's experience. Because of the seasonal change, the camp was clean and fresh from winter's slack time, unlike au-

turn when the camp is winding down from summer's busy season. Another plus was that insects were not a major problem (especially yellow jackets, which are so cranky in the fall and which many students are allergic to). But paramount in the eyes of sixth grade teacher Cathy Ward, was the quality of high school counselors the program was able to include because it didn't interfere with football, volleyball or cross-country seasons.

The counselors were required to complete an application process which included a week of training in the summer. The whole experience turned out to be a real learning experience for the

counselors. As one counselor told Ward "It's kind of hard; you have to be the campers' friend, yet you have to be able to maintain discipline."

Outdoor School includes three days and two nights at Camp Wilkerson. In addition to several different classes in field study, there is time for organized recreation, which is the responsibility of the high school counselors, plus evening camp fires, which are always a highlight for students and staff.

On the last day of the 1993 Outdoor School, the students didn't break up into their field study groups. Instead, they were told by camp staff that because of revenue shortages, the county had decided to eliminate Camp Wilkerson because it wasn't generating enough income.

The task set before the students was to create a money-making facility out of the Wilkerson property. It was a great way to provide the children with experience in the political processes, but many of the students took the closure of Wilkerson quite seriously and, before they were told that the project was simply an exercise, many a tear had been shed for the fate of their beloved camp.

This year, when the scenario was presented, it was

with full knowledge that it was a mock situation. The students were separated into groups representing industries that wanted to use Wilkerson for various purposes. The different proposals included a dump site, a location for condominiums, animal preserve, logging camp, a mini mall and even a location for outdoor schools of Oregon. Another group of students played the roles of the county planning commission.

Each group had to prepare a presentation on the financial benefits, tax breaks and environmental impacts of their proposals, and draw a blueprint. Then each group had to present its plan to the planning commission, as well as the other students, and be able to field questions from

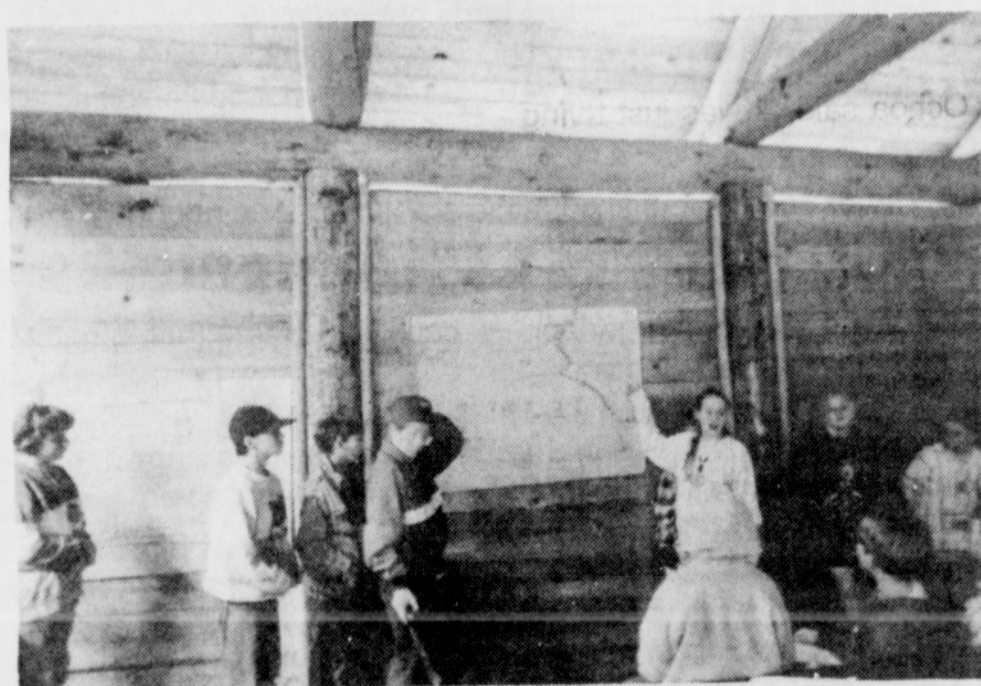
the floor. When the exercise was over this year, the Oregon Outdoor School program prevailed, unlike last year, when a proposal for a dump site won the panel's approval.

Let us hope that the scenario created by the staff of the Vernonia Outdoor School never comes to pass. If it should, however, let's hope that the prevailing proposal would be the outdoor school program. Outdoor school is a priceless experience for students and staff alike, and the program has proven that it can change with the times as well as any other program

For more information on the outdoor school program, contact the co-ordinator, John Richter, at Washington Grade School, 429-7941.



John Richter explains procedure to students during public forum.



This group presents their plan for a Condo/Golf Course development to replace Camp Wilkerson.

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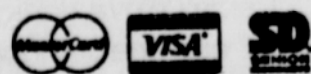
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