

Generation Next: Youth Program

By Scot McClure
Outdoor Adventures Coordinator,
Dallas Ecological Foundation

Dallas Ecological Foundation's Outdoor Adventures Education



"I want you to know what a difference you're making in our son's life," said one parent. "He is going through a very difficult stage, and your Outdoor Adventures class has been like a breath of fresh air for him."

Retention and recruitment of outdoor enthusiasts have been on the decline for many decades. Because of this decline, there is a decrease in tax revenue and financial support for wildlife habitat and conservation throughout the world, not to mention a generation of youth becoming less and less active. In an effort to sustain a continued enjoyment and appreciation for the great outdoors and wildlife conservation, the Dallas Ecological Foundation is committed to its mission to fund and promote the teaching of outdoor life skills by conducting and supporting a wide range of educational initiatives, primarily through youth programs.

Education Program History

In the fall of 1998, Dallas Ecological Foundation (DEF) learned of an outdoor education course called Outdoor Trails. The accredited, semester-long physical education class provided outdoor education and life skills to secondary school students. The course included the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's hunter education, boat safety, and angler education units, along with camping, backpacking, orienteering, wilderness safety and survival, outdoor cooking, archery, first aid, and CPR.

Upon investigation of the program, DEF learned that Outdoor Trails helped foster parent/child communication and activities, respect for self and others, built self-esteem, improved attendance, promoted wildlife conservation, and provided life skills that cannot

be developed in other physical education programs. The students in the physical education class were not engaged in the educational process, and most of the students had no experience in hunting, fishing, and outdoor activities. Unfortunately, budget concerns prevented this fine course from being offered in other schools and districts.

In 1999, the DEF purchased the necessary equipment used in the course and then offered the outdoor education program to other schools in north Texas. The DEF provided the necessary equipment, funds and resources for teacher training and certifications, as well as to help fund off-campus parent/student field trips and activities associated with the program. This assistance allowed the course to expand to 22 schools by 2007. The program needed an accredited curriculum recognized by the Texas Education Association and aligned with the National Physical Education Standards. The DEF contracted with a group of teachers and wrote the comprehensive accredited curriculum, called Outdoor Adventures Education. The new curriculum was offered to schools and the program grew from 22 schools to 115 secondary schools across Texas in 2011.

Outdoor Adventures Grow Beyond Texas

The DEF is expecting a huge increase in the program to continue in the near future, thanks to recognition from the Texas Parks



and Wildlife Department. The DEF and TPWD are shooting for 300 schools in the program by the fall of 2014. TPWD offers free teacher training for hunter education, angler education, boat safety, and National Archery in Schools Program to any teacher. By utilizing the large base of volunteer instructors across Texas, teachers in any school can receive the same teacher training. The impact across Texas is only the beginning. The Department of Natural Resources in any state can provide the same teacher training to secondary schools across the country. This year the DEF is excited to announce the first school outside of Texas to use the Outdoor Adventures Education curriculum with great success. In August 2011, Westbrook High School in Westbrook, Maine, inquired about the program, hoping to find an exciting way to get students outside and learn more outdoor skills. Since the Outdoor Adventures curriculum is aligned with the National Physical Education standards, the program was a natural fit, and in fact, any secondary school across the country can offer Outdoor Adventures Education because the program has physical education components in every lesson—from orienteering races to backyard bass competitions to cardiovascular

exercises around hunter education and camping lessons.

Outdoor Adventures Success for All

The average number of students enrolled in the Outdoor Adventures program is 100 students per year. Most schools report Outdoor Adventures is the most popular course on campus and have a waiting list for students wanting the physical education class. Since the program started, 50,000 students have passed through the 18-plus-week program and the 2011-'12 school year will have 11,500 students alone. With the anticipated goal of 300 schools by 2014, more than 30,000 students per year will learn outdoor skills and the value of wildlife conservation.

From the smallest school in the program, Electra High School in far West Texas, where every one of its 130 students will have the opportunity to take the course before they graduate (80 already have), to the largest offering the program, Allen High School, (5,700 students) where 300 students enrolled in the course the very first year it was offered and the school district gave the program its own indoor archery building, Outdoor Adventures has been proven to be successful at all schools, regardless of size, socio-economic background, or academic pressures.

Future includes everyone!

Wildlife conservation groups across the United States offer outstanding education programs. The DEF's Outdoor Adventures Education program targets students who usually are not active in their school communities—most have never experienced the great outdoors, they have limited knowledge of wildlife, and the sustained use of wildlife is foreign to them. Through everyone's concentrated efforts to educate our youth today, wildlife and those who enjoy the outdoors will have a future.

The DEF encourages everyone to help promote Outdoor Adventures Education in your local schools; the curriculum has been written, and the course is ready to be installed in your schools. Funding is one area of greatest concern. Please ask your local retailers to follow Cabela's example, where, along with Cabela's 2011 new store opening in Allen, Texas, the sporting goods chain donated \$20,000 to DEF for equipment to area schools. Thanks to that generous donation, at least nine high schools were given the necessary angler, archery, and outdoor gear to start the Outdoor Adventures program. How many more students can learn these new skills if everyone promotes and funds education programs? ■

THE BRIGHTEST AND FASTEST RANGEFINDING BINOCULARS WITH BALLISTIC INFORMATION SYSTEM - BIS®

ACCURATE READINGS IN SLEET, SNOW, AND RAIN.



ZEISS EXPERIENCE

Discover tomorrow's innovations today:

zeiss.com/theexperience



10x45 RF



10x56 RF

Right hand, "One Touch" operation ensures fast and precise measurement with minimum blur caused by hand shake.



Victory RF Binoculars

When speed and accuracy matter above all else, the world's top guides and hunters trust Victory RF binoculars. With objectives that produce stunningly bright images and BIS® that provides instant distance readings and holdover values out to 1,700 yards, Victory RF binoculars enable the most accurate shots at distant targets. Your adventure begins at zeiss.com/sports.



We make it visible.