

Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands

In an increasingly developed and technology-laden world, elementary school students are becoming more separated from nature. An outdoor classroom allows students to work and discover in an outdoor setting that fosters curiosity about and awareness of forestry and the natural environment. This opportunity to spend time outdoors is especially important in light of COVID-19 as it's easier to practice social distancing in an open-air setting.

The Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands teamed up with Riverton Elementary School in Riverton, Utah, and awarded them a Community Forestry Partnership Grant for an outdoor classroom. The elementary school has a grove of mostly native trees and shrubs that was planted around 20 years ago. Initial work on the project consisted of establishing trails and clearings in this grove, providing access to study areas as well as locations for students and their teachers to gather for discussions. Additional tree plantings and pruning are also taking place which will upgrade and beautify the outdoor classroom area.

Another component of the project included purchasing portable bucket seats and filling them with materials such as magnifying glasses, identification field guides, trowels, scales, thermometers, and other equipment to allow students to investigate, observe, measure, and ultimately discover the natural environment.

The school is collaborating with the Utah Society of Environmental Education to develop lesson plans and incorporate ideas using Project Learning Tree to provide structure and enhance outdoor learning opportunities.

Teachers were trained on how to use the outdoor classroom at the end of August. In September, this unique grove will be teaming with curious students. Teachers, students, parents, and local businesses are all involved with the long-term maintenance and sustainability of the project. It will be thrilling to realize the impact of this project as it reaches fruition at the end of the school year.



Outdoor classrooms allow students to work and discover in a setting that fosters curiosity and awareness of forestry and the natural environment.



1. Volunteers establishing trails. **2.** Volunteers pruning trees. **3.** Volunteers establishing clearings. Photo Credit: Jeran Farley.