

USING INFORMATIONAL WEBSITES TO FOSTER A CONNECTION BETWEEN
OUTDOOR EDUCATION AND STATE PARK PRESERVATION

By

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Project Summary

My capstone project focuses on the relationship between classroom educators, outdoor education and state park preservation. Through my research I discovered that several of the most common barriers preventing the growth of outdoor education are: educators lack of confidence in being able to teach outside, not enough time to research safe spaces to teach outside, and a lack of communication between educators and state park and nature center employees. I knew that any project I would create had to be able to reach every educator in the U.S. in order to be effective. So, in the end, I decided to create a website. This website is a tool for educators to learn more about outdoor education while also helping them find state parks and nature centers to teach outdoor education. It also has a blog component so educators are able to share their outdoor education experiences and inspire others to try outdoor education. I decided to create the website using Google Sites. I know that this website can help answer my research question: *How can websites and blogs help educators foster a connection between outdoor education and state parks? How can this connection benefit students and state parks?*

This website is created with educators in mind. I have made it easy to navigate through and encourage educators to contact me with their questions and experiences regarding outdoor education. I believe that 4th and 5th grade students respond most positively to outdoor learning. However, because there is no specific curriculum tied to my website educators of all grade levels and subjects are encouraged to use the website and participate in outdoor education.

The inspiration for this website formed while I was researching the topic of outdoor education. I discovered that there were several barriers stopping classroom educators from taking their lessons outside. Fägerstam (2012) stated that a common barrier identified by teachers is the

lack of confidence in teaching outdoors (as cited in Hansen & Sandberg, 2019). Many classroom educators have had years of experience teaching in a classroom setting and the thought of taking an entire class outside can be daunting or even terrifying. However, communication and collaboration with other outdoor educators can make those first steps into outdoor education a lot easier. Collaboration is vital for educators wishing to grow in their field. Do not be afraid to ask other educators questions or to ask for their help. Too often teachers view asking for help as a weakness, when in reality, communication is their greatest strength (Meador, 2019). This knowledge led me to believe that an informational website and blog would be able to connect educators all over the country with each other. Findings suggest that one teacher has the potential to help a school overcome policy and marketing-related barriers related to accessing outdoor education (Reese, 2018). This website is designed to be easy to share and navigate. It is also intended to set a fire of curiosity and excitement in educators that they can share with the rest of their school district.

Through my research, I discovered another barrier that educators seemed to have regarding state parks and other potential outdoor education locations. Teachers have highlighted an interpersonal communication barrier from potential outdoor learning locations in regard to their location and price ranges (Reese, 2018). This website serves to make finding information about state parks and nature centers far easier for educators. I have dedicated an entire page to links for every state that will allow educators a starting point when they have decided to try outdoor teaching. I know a classroom teachers' time is valuable so I have tried to make information as readily accessible as possible in hopes that when they do reach out to state park and nature center employees regarding transportation and use of facilities educators do not feel frazzled or pressed for time.

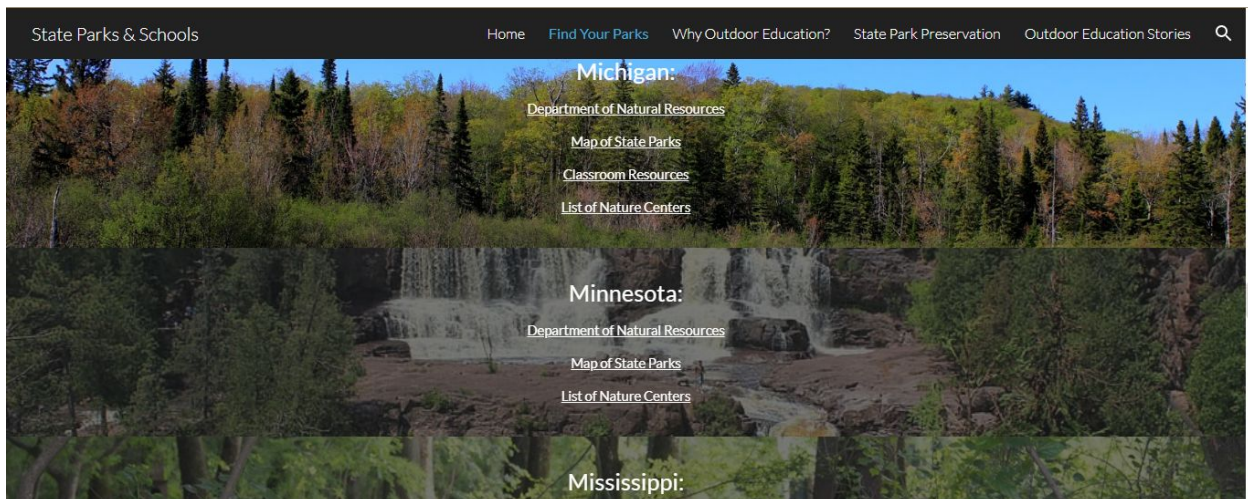
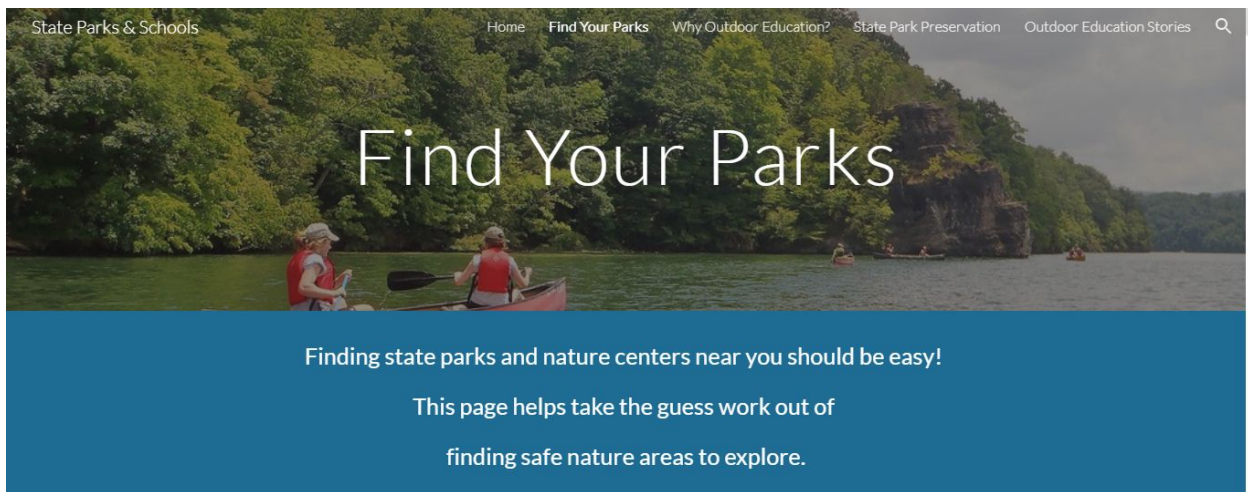
Capstone Project

<https://sites.google.com/view/stateparksandschools/home?authuser=1>

Above is a link to my capstone website. My website has several pages: a Home page, Find Your State Parks, Why Outdoor Education?, State Park Preservation, and Outdoor Education Stories. The “Home” page reads “Bringing State Parks to the Classroom” at the top. Below that it has links to the other pages for the site as well as a brief explanation behind the creation of this project. This page is meant to introduce views to the website as well as encourage them to visit the other, more informative, pages.

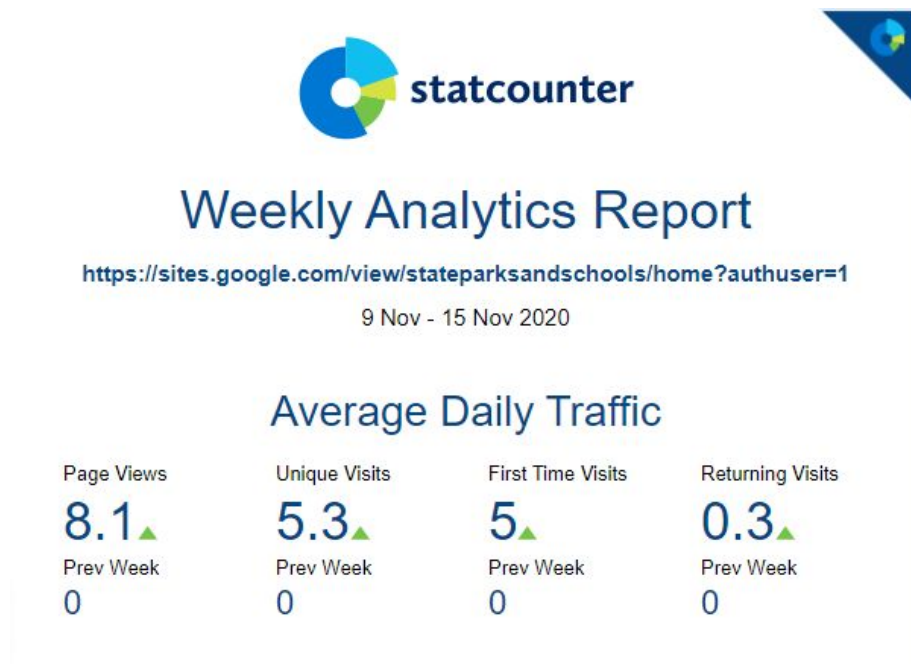


The “Find Your State Parks” page has information on how to find state parks and nature centers for every United State state. Aside from the Outdoor Education Stories page, this is meant to me the most influencing and helpful page of the entire website. I have completed hours of research finding the most helpful links for aspiring outdoor educators. The ideal outcome is that this page will encourage viewers to visit their state parks and enjoy their beauty.



The “Why Outdoor Education?” page showcases some of the many positive academic, social and academic outcomes attributed to outdoor education. The “State Park Preservation” page brings light to how visitors can help the parks remain beautiful, healthy ecosystems for future visitors as well as the wildlife that call the parks home. The “Outdoor Education Stories” page acts as a blog for educators to share their experiences with outdoor education. We can all grow as outdoor educators together through the stories shared by others.

On September 12th, 2020 I shared a link to my website to my personal Facebook page. Many of my Facebook friends are educators so sharing my website on this platform enabled me to get feedback from many members of my target audience. Before I shared my website I added a visitor counter to the website. I used the company Statcounter to ensure that I monitor the traffic of my website. The success of this website is based off of its increased viewer traffic.



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DNR/division-parks-watercraft/Explore%2BOhio%2BState%2BParks/](https://ohiodnr.gov/wps/portal/gov/odnr/discover-and-learn/safety-conservation/about-O
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