

News Article  
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## OUTDOOR CLASSROOM GROUNDBREAKING

The Coosa Central Elementary and Middle School is an attractive facility that is the educational center for all the youth of Coosa County. Since our county is known for our forests and natural resources, it makes good sense to promote a healthy understanding of these resources to our students. In an effort to do this, Coosa County Extension Coordinator, Roger Vines teamed up with the Superintendent of Education, Todd Wingard, fifth grade teacher, Debbie Phillips and 4-H volunteer, Doug McGinty to come up with a plan for an Outdoor Classroom.

The Coosa County Extension Office submitted a grant proposal to the Coosa Valley Resource Conservation and Development Council for \$1000 and received approval to proceed with the project. A small courtyard at the school, outside the fifth grade hall, was selected as the site to construct a backyard wildlife habitat area. This project will not only improve the appearance of the school landscape but will also be a great location to demonstrate to the students the concepts they learn in their science courses.

The original condition of the site was nothing more than bare dirt. Even the weeds struggled to take hold in the hard packed subsoil left after the construction of the school building. The idea of the Outdoor Classroom is to demonstrate to the students the concept of succession and how we can make habitat improvements that will encourage certain wildlife to use the area.

The students will take a baseline "living organism inventory". They will inspect the site and record anything living that they find both plants and animal. At first they may only find a few weeds, and maybe an insect or two. But with time and as the area develops they should begin to "discover" more and more wildlife. With the addition of a water pond, they may find tadpoles, frogs and aquatic insects. With the addition of structures like rocks and logs they may find lizards, snails, and other insects. As small trees and shrubs are added to the site they may begin to see birds, butterflies and maybe even a mouse. As flowers bloom they may see hummingbirds and honeybees. So with time the students will see their inventory list grow and grow.

Work is getting underway. So far a pea gravel trail has been constructed which wraps around a small pond. Then a dry creek bed has been developed that leads down to what will be a bog garden. Native plants, rocks, logs and other features will be coming soon. Anyone who would like to contribute to the project is encouraged to contact Roger Vines at the Coosa County Extension Office at 377-4713. One thing needed is a source for some large and small stones, especially the old mossy looking stones. We also hope to transplant some native plants found throughout our county. Special thanks to project coordinator Doug McGinty, Debbie Phillips and Todd Wingard for their support.

**Cutline:**

Work gets underway for an Outdoor Classroom at the Coosa Central Middle School. Pictured above, project coordinator and retired biology professor, Doug McGinty works with Regional Extension Agent, Andy Baril to lay out the nature trail.