CONNECTING KIDS AND NATURE

American children are not spending time outside like children of generations before. This phenomenon is currently affecting children and is beginning to affect public lands and parks. The limited connection of nature and children is harmful as there is now a more sedentary lifestyle, losing of meaning in nature, and less unstructured playtime.

About 20% of children are obese. There are many factors for this but much has to do with their sedentary lifestyle. Before, children were ushered outside to play after school and now they are ushered to the TV as a babysitter. With the reduced time to run around children are not getting the exercise that they need and are becoming unhealthier.

The less time children spend outside the less they are attached to it. As people become more removed from nature they are less prone to protect it. Nature will not have the meaning to children as it does to their parents or grandparents. This will affect parks and recreational companies in a variety of was including land allocation and funding.

Many questions were asked and answered about how the little time children do spend outside is all scheduled or planned time. There may be soccer clubs, scouts, or school recess but there is very little unstructured play time. This is making it harder for children to know what to do outside if they are given the opportunity thus, having most of them opt out of going outside.

Legislation is now working on trying to pass an amendment to the “No Child Left Behind Act” to also include “No Child Left Inside.” This would help promote nature in the classroom. It would also try to help with the amount of homework that can prohibit playtime and include homework activities that incorporate nature. Many questions were asked and many of the bookmarks offered were taken. It was very clear that people in this general session were concerned about this subject.
Connecting Kids and Nature: No Child Left Inside

Fran P. Mainella
Visiting Scholar, Clemson University
Park, Recreation, and Tourism Mgt
February 21
In the Beginning

- What was your experience with nature?
- My experience with nature
- What is happening today?
  - Security
  - TV/Video games
  - Computers
  - Online networks
    - Myspace, Facebook
  - 70% of mothers reported playing outside when they were young; 31% of their children are allowed to do so
  - Children between the ages of 8 and 18 spend an average of 6.5 hours a day with electronic media.
Richard Louv

- *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*

- Awareness
  - Problem Exists
  - Associated Health Issues
    - Obesity
      - 4% of children were obese in 1960
      - 20% were obese in 2004
  - Attention Deficit Disorder
  - Stress, Depression
Nature Deficit Disorder

“Describes an environmental dissatisfaction or dejection flowing from children's fixation on artificial entertainments rather than the natural wonders.”

“Miss the restorative effects that come with the nimbler bodies, broader minds and sharper senses that are developed during random running-around at the relative edges of civilization.”

Dr. Howard Frumkin, Director of the National Center for Environmental Health, CDC, says in his Land Trust Alliance Special Anniversary Report:

“Evidence suggests that children and adults benefit so much from contact with nature that land conservation can now be viewed as a public health strategy.”
Solutions

- Educating the public about the problem.
- Steps to correct the problem.
  - Training
  - Communication
  - Children and Nature Network
  - www.cnaturenet.org
  - Media
Solutions

- Research on successful actions
  - Must reach all cultures, ages, and affiliated groups
- Mentors
- Adult and Youth Leaders
  - Young people are not just the future, they are the present!
- Joining with other groups in support of amending H.R. 3036 and S. 1981- the No Child Left Behind Act- to include the No Child Left Inside Act.
Louv’s Suggestions

- Think small.
  - Start near the Visitor’s Center or Parking Lot
  - “Nearby nature”
- Plan activities.
  - Planting a garden in spring
  - Backyard camp-out
  - "Wild crafting," the gathering of plants for art projects.
  - Bird watching are easy and rewarding.
- Use technology.
  - Cell-phones
  - Digital cameras

“More Kids in the Woods”

- A program that will fund local efforts to get children outdoors.
- Examples:
  - Nature Field Work Partnership – New York City
  - Schoolyard Habitat & Education Project – Baltimore
  - Latino Legacy – Texas
  - Sci-Fun Project – Detroit
  - American Indian Math & Science Camp – Montana
Junior Ranger Program

• Available at most National Parks

• Interested individuals complete a series of activities during their park visit and receive an official badge, patch and/or certificate.
NPS continued

- Parks as classrooms
- Partnerships with teachers (sol’s)
- Virtual Tours
- Partnerships with scouting and others
State Parks

- South Carolina
  - Training of Volunteers to work with children
- Connecticut
  - No child left inside effort
- Florida
  - Partnership with schools
  - Summer camps
  - JR ranger programs
Girl Scouts

“Linking Girls to the Land”
- A partnership between Girl Scouts of the USA and federal natural resource agencies

The Elliott Wildlife Values Project
- Learn the importance of wildlife, nature, and the environment.
- Have hands-on, field experiences.
- Practice science and stewardship skills.
- Investigate careers.
- Do community service through activities that benefit the environment and earth's resources.

Various Badges & Awards
Boy Scouts

- Tenet of all the various age range programs
  - Every level contains outdoor activities
- Service projects
- Badges and awards:
  - Backpacking, Camping, & Environmental Science
  - Soil and Water Conservation & Wilderness Survival
- Are pursuing a new direction of outdoor recreation with wholesale adoption of the Leave No Trace philosophy.
  - This will help scout groups lessen their impact to your resource
Sierra Club

“Building Bridges to the Outdoors”

– Promoting the positive benefits of outdoor experiences on children's academic achievement especially science and math.

– A Sierra Club funded study by the California Department of Education showed a 27% increase in students' science test scores after a week-long outdoor experience.
Chicago Wilderness
- will offer workshops for educators, opportunities for partnerships among consortium and community organizations, and efforts at the state and national levels to support outdoor programming for children.

Michigan School Systems
- “Take it Outside”
- more school districts are being encouraged to add curriculum and participate in programs that promote outside activities.
Suggested Actions from the Recreation Forums

1. Collaborate with sponsors and local governments
2. Build a pool of mentors
3. Counteract parental safety fears
4. Research into what local youth want
5. Integrate outdoor education into local schools
6. Provide both structured and unstructured activities in your district
7. Identify barriers to participation

NGOs’ parents, teachers, youth, churches, etc. take action

Use the Children and Nature Network

Develop successful techniques for children getting back to nature
- Nature hikes
- Butterfly gardens
- Scouting
- Youth camps
Actions

- Simple Techniques
  - Insect netting
  - Birding
- Emphasizing how nature is all around you, even in urban areas.
- Junior Ranger programs, Kids in the Woods
Let’s Start Now

- We all can help
  - Communicate the challenge
  - Know simple techniques to get kids outdoors
  - Capture successes to share with others
  - Help us find leaders, both adult and youth
  - Join in legislation supporting No Child Left Inside.
Thank You

Questions