

America's Great Outdoors Initiative Reconnects Children, Youth and Families with Nature

White House Report Highlights Health, Economic, Conservation and Social Benefits of Outdoor Recreation and Unstructured Outdoor Play

WASHINGTON (February 16, 2010) — The Outdoors Alliance for Kids commends President Barack Obama for highlighting the importance of reconnecting children, youth and families with nature in the *America's Great Outdoors* report released today.

More than 100,000 Americans provided input into this report, both online and in person at more than 50 general and youth listening sessions across the country last summer and fall. Their collective messages are reflected in the report.

The report recommends increasing Department of the Interior investments in the Youth in the Great Outdoors initiative to employ, educate and engage young people from all backgrounds. This includes supporting the "Trail to Every Classroom" professional development program for teachers, partnering with communities to improve recreational opportunities and investing in urban parks to provide outdoor opportunities where most Americans live.

The report shines a spotlight on key barriers to Americans spending more time outdoors, including lack of access, safety, and transportation issues, especially for youth from disadvantaged communities. It also highlights key benefits like the 6.5 million jobs created every year from outdoor activities as well as the health benefits of spending active time outdoors.

"To reverse the childhood obesity epidemic in this country, we must make sure that all children have access to safe outdoor places where they can be physically active—especially children who live in low income neighborhoods, communities of color, and children who live in geographically isolated areas. To safeguard the future of our kids and the health of our nation we must reclaim our surroundings and the enjoyment they can provide. Programs and policies in *America's Great Outdoors* call for just this," said Joe Thompson, MD, MPH, director of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity.

"Increasing the number of safe and accessible green spaces is critical to reconnecting families with nature, especially those in low-income communities who already face numerous health challenges," said Neil Nicoll, president and CEO of the YMCA of the USA. "The report acknowledges the need to provide community-based green spaces that are safe and accessible."

The conditions are right for making lasting changes in the ways children, youth and families relate to nature. In June 2010, first lady Michelle Obama unveiled *Let's Move Outside!*, which expands upon

the first lady's initiative to solve childhood obesity within a generation by providing resources for families to get active in nature.

In November 2010, Congressman Ron Kind (D – WI) introduced the Moving Outdoors in Nature Act to support federal, state and local strategies that connect children with the natural world. In addition to helping reduce the incidence of obesity, outdoor play can reduce nearsightedness, vitamin D deficiency, stress, and the symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorders in children.

"By making outdoor time a national priority, we are taking a much-needed step – out the door – to healthier, happier kids," said Larry Schweiger, President of the National Wildlife Federation. "The nature of childhood has changed, and there's not much nature in it. This report provides a blueprint for reversing this alarming trend."

The Outdoors Alliance for Kids will work with the Administration and the Congress to implement the recommendations of the *America's Great Outdoors* report.

About the Outdoors Alliance for Kids (OAK): OAK is a national strategic partnership of organizations from diverse sectors with the common interest in expanding the number and quality of opportunities for children, youth and families to connect with the outdoors. The members of OAK are brought together by the belief that the well-being of current and future generations, the health of our planet, communities and the economy depend on humans having a personal, direct and lifelong relationship with nature and the outdoors.

OAK's steering committee brings together the <u>Children & Nature Network</u>, <u>Izaak Walton League of America</u>, <u>National Association of State Park Directors</u>, <u>National Recreation and Park Association</u>, <u>National Wildlife Federation</u>, <u>The Outdoor Foundation</u>, <u>REI</u>, <u>Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity</u>, <u>Sierra Club</u>, and the <u>YMCA of the USA</u>, collectively representing more than 30 million members and supporters, to address the growing divide between children and families and the natural world.

Learn more at www.OutdoorsAllianceForKids.org.

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