



KUFM RADIO COMMENTARY

Feb. 24, 2011

## **“No Child Left Inside”**

Northern Rockies and Prairies Regional Center

On my son’s seventh birthday he received his first real fishing pole as a gift. He was so excited to try it out, he immediately asked me to take him to the river. I tried to explain that it wasn’t a good time for fishing, late spring was causing the river to be dangerously high, there was too much debris floating in it, not to mention the banks were still very muddy. He looked at me with big pleading eyes and I couldn’t say, “No”. I figured, “What’s the harm in taking him out and letting him try; besides we could both use some fresh air.”

I proceeded to set up his pole with a hook and a bobber. I knew the set up was ridiculous, but there is no proper set up for terrible fishing conditions. My son was fidgeting with anticipation of the fun and excitement this new pole would bring him. He was describing to me, as I worked, how big the fish he was going to catch would be and what colors it might have. It wasn’t long before we set out, armed with a bag of mini marshmallows, to catch this amazing imaginary fish.

The river was roaring that day. I felt bad for my son because it became obvious, even to him, that this truly was a bad idea. I consoled him and suggested we practice casting anyway. He brightened up a bit and we trudged through the mud to the river’s edge. I placed a small marshmallow on his hook and with all his might he tossed the line in as far as he could. It only went about fifteen feet and was now whizzing by us at an astonishing speed. Just as he began to reel his line in he began squealing with delight, “I’ve got one, I’ve got one!” To my dismay he had hooked a beautiful trout. We landed the fish, carefully removed the hook, and returned the prize fish to the river. In five minutes time, my son’s birthday fantasy had come true. I was so glad I had put my reluctance aside and enabled this wonderful moment to happen.

I learned a lot that day about the value of encouraging our children to get outside, and to explore, and play. I reflected on how my own outdoor adventures as a kid helped me become the person I am today. Outside is where I learned how to get along with others, handle peer pressure, and determine who I was and what I believed in. My young body was fit, agile, and strong. Playing outside was one of the highlights of my childhood and that day I realized I wanted my children to have the same experiences and appreciation for nature as I have.

My son is now fifteen years old and is an avid fisherman. He learned to fly fish two years ago and some of my favorite times with him have been on Montana's rivers. As the sun grows orange late in the evening and the bugs are floating in the air, I marvel at his patience, and how his body has grown. I reflect on how so many of his peers are fighting obesity. I think about how different he might be if that one birthday that sparked his passion for fishing had never happened. Would he be sitting at home on a beautiful summer evening, in front of the T.V.? I Recently read that the Kaiser Foundation did a study and children are spending a startling seven hours a day using a variety of digital media. That is nearly a full time job! Since the advent of video games, internet, texting, and T.V., America has watched its children's health dwindle, and now there is a palpable feeling of urgency to get our kids off the couch.

The National Wildlife Federation has been a leader in education and conservation for 75 years now. Our dedication to children has been outstanding with three publications for various age groups, the "Be Out There" program, and the "Green Hour" project. The National Wildlife Federation also has a Montana license plate with the theme of "no child left inside" that you can put on your car to remind you, and others who see it, of the importance of outdoor recreation and activities. You can see this license plate at [nwf.org/montanaplate](http://nwf.org/montanaplate). The National Wildlife Federation website offers numerous free project ideas, recipes, and coloring pages that help children understand nature and our environment.

If you're trying to help your children embrace a more active and healthy lifestyle, the National Wildlife Federation website is a great place to get started. One thing I've learned as a parent over the years is that my children value time spent with the important adults in their lives. As parents, grandparents, and caregivers we have the power to influence our children's willingness to embrace nature, wildlife, and most importantly themselves. If you need help getting started, please visit [nwf.org/montanaplate](http://nwf.org/montanaplate) for free ideas and activities.

This is Nicole Hiler for the National Wildlife Federation in Missoula, Montana