



Children & Nature Network ♦ Izaak Walton League ♦ National Recreation and Park Association ♦ National Wildlife Federation ♦ Outdoor Foundation ♦ REI ♦ Sierra Club ♦ YMCA of the USA

America's Great Outdoors

Recommendations from the Outdoors Alliance for Kids (OAK)

The Outdoors Alliance for Kids (OAK) supports the Administration's America's Great Outdoors (AGO) initiative to engage the public in shaping a new conservation and recreation agenda that meets the needs of the 21st Century. OAK appreciates in particular the emphasis on engaging youth in the agenda-setting process. The members of OAK are brought together by the belief that the health and well-being of current and future generations, our planet, our communities and the economy depend on humans having a personal, direct and life-long relationship with nature and the outdoors. OAK is working to expand the number and quality of opportunities for children, youth and families to connect with the outdoors.

Today's children are spending less time outdoors in nature than any generation in history. Best-selling author Richard Louv coined the phrase *Nature Deficit Disorder* to describe this relatively recent phenomenon that is shaping the way our children relate to the natural world. Emerging research suggests that time spent outdoors in nature results in health benefits for children and youth and that significant exposure to the natural world during childhood results in positive attitudes towards the environment in adulthood. When shaping the 21st Century Conservation Agenda, OAK recommends that the Administration advance and promote policies, programs and initiatives that foster inter-agency collaboration at all levels of government, as *Nature Deficit Disorder* has societal implications that extend beyond the scope of any single federal agency or department and solutions will require broad-based collaboration. The America's Great Outdoors initiative should consider the vast array of federal, state and local policy solutions for reconnecting children, youth and families with the Great Outdoors, including in the areas of recreation and conservation, transportation and built environment, health and wellness, and education.

OAK recommends four broad principles for the 21st Century Conservation Agenda:

- Connect health and wellness initiatives to outdoor recreation and unstructured outdoor play in nature, and promote solutions that encourage appropriate use of public and private lands as a means to improve the health of children, youth and families;
- Create policies and further conduct research that helps to build the next generation of conservationists by connecting children and youth with the outdoors through unstructured outdoor play in nature, quality recreation, education programs and service opportunities;

- Engage diverse audiences in experiences in the great outdoors through targeted outreach and initiatives to make outdoor experiences more culturally relevant; and
- Engage youth and parents to learn more about the barriers preventing children, youth and families from connecting with the great outdoors and provide opportunities for them to help shape the agenda and participate in the implementation of solutions at all levels.

OAK's Top Ten recommendations for the 21st Century Conservation Agenda:

- 1. Create Smarter Federal Coordination on Behalf of Children and the Outdoors** by establishing a multi-agency coordinating council to foster collaboration at the federal level to reconnect Americans, especially children and youth, with the natural world and create a national strategic plan to implement the findings of the council. Multiple federal departments, agencies and offices play a role in reconnecting Americans with nature and have the capacity to leverage existing programs and funding streams to meet this goal. A multi-agency coordinating council should include participation from the White House Council on Environmental Quality, the White House Office on Women and Girls, the Department of the Interior, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Office of the Surgeon General, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Education, the Department of Labor, the Department of Commerce, the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, and others. The Coordinating Council should recruit organizations working in conservation, recreation and health in an advisory board and engage youth leaders in the decision making process.
- 2. Host a "Let's Move Outside" Health and Nature Summit** to raise the profile of our public and private lands as contributors to healthy lifestyles and to identify strategies and deepen partnerships with organizations that can further enhance this work. This summit would bring together health, conservation and other experts to identify ways to further align the Administration's conservation goals with the First Lady's Let's Move Outside campaign, consider the request for a Surgeon General "Call to Action" on the physical and mental health benefits of time outdoors, and create a plan to implement the relevant physical activity recommendations of the Federal Task Force on Childhood Obesity.
- 3. Support Passage of the Moving Outdoors in Nature** section of the Healthy CHOICES Act (H.R. 5209) and request funding in the fiscal year 2012 budget to pilot the initiatives outlined in the bill. Moving Outdoors in Nature supports development and implementation of state strategies that connect children with the great outdoors through multi-sector policies (recreation and conservation, transportation and built environment, health and wellness, and education) including those that: 1) support outdoor recreation programs, 2) promote public health initiatives, 3) create community-based natural play areas, 4) develop trails and greenways to connect parks and outdoor recreation areas with places where children live, learn and play, 5) create outdoor learning environments, and 6) other efforts to connect children, youth and families with nature.
- 4. Pilot Partnership Coordinator Staff Positions on Public Lands** to develop local partnerships with community-based, conservation, recreation and other partners focused on connecting children, youth and families with the great outdoors. The Department of the Interior, U.S. Forest Service and Army Corps of Engineers should pilot coordination projects in fiscal year 2012 and provide dedicated staff based at local units of federal land

management agencies to leverage resources, coordinate programming and promote outreach to youth and diverse communities.

- 5. Fund Studies of National Significance on Children and Nature** focused on the impacts on children, youth and families participating in outdoor activities on public and private lands to advance the scientific understanding of: 1) barriers to connecting different communities of children, youth and families with the great outdoors, 2) the physical and mental health impacts of active time in the great outdoors (as called for by the Moving Outdoors in Nature section of the Healthy CHOICES Act), 3) the degree to which time in the great outdoors leads to the development of conservation ethics, and 4) other academic, behavioral, and societal impacts of outdoor programming in nature.
- 6. Increase the Number of Safe and Accessible Green Spaces**, particularly in low-income communities with significant health disparities, by eliminating park, playground and natural space deserts where they exist, providing adequate funding mechanisms for outdoor infrastructure, increasing safety in parks, creating safe routes to the parks, playgrounds and natural spaces, including better connecting green spaces with public transportation routes, sidewalks and bike paths.
- 7. Support Close-to-Home Unstructured Outdoor Play in Nature** by supporting passage of the National Program Promoting Lifelong Active Youth (PLAY) and Implementation Grants section of the Healthy CHOICES Act (H.R. 5209), which provides resources to communities to build the spaces and places and increases the opportunities for close-to-home play, including outdoor play. Provide resources to parents and caregivers that help address the barriers to allowing unstructured outdoor play.
- 8. Strengthen Outreach to Communities of Color** at all relevant agencies by integrating 21st Century communications tools such as mapping devices, iphone applications, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other tools that will increase the visibility of our parks, playgrounds and natural spaces. Federal agencies should design targeted media and marketing campaigns to reach communities of color and invest resources in developing partnerships and identifying appropriate role models within these communities.
- 9. Engage, Employ and Empower Youth** on public lands through volunteerism, community service opportunities, employment and other means by building upon the Department of the Interior's 21st Century Conservation Corps program. Support passage of the Public Lands Service Corps Act (H.R. 1612 / S. 1442) and similar legislative initiatives that would expand the capacity for service work on federal, state and local lands, build and maintain the necessary infrastructure to connect children, youth and families with the great outdoors, engage and employ youth, especially youth from communities of color, and diversify our conservation constituency. Reach out to youth through newer technologies including social media.
- 10. Engage Youth in the Outdoors during the School Day** by collaborating with the Department of Education and local school leadership to engage school children in outdoor learning opportunities and active time outdoors at school. Support the establishment of schoolyard habitats and gardens, leverage programs that connect school children to our public lands before, during and after the school day, and support environmental education legislation including the No Child Left Inside Act (H.R 2054 / S.866) that would provide funding for outdoor and field-based learning and train teachers to provide quality environmental education to students.