



February 4, 2010

The Honorable Michelle Obama
First Lady of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mrs. Obama:

On behalf of our tens of millions of members and supporters, we would like to express our sincere gratitude for your commitment to combating childhood obesity. We applaud your childhood obesity initiative for promoting improvements in school lunches, access to healthy foods, physical activity and nutrition education. While proper nutrition is necessary to solve the childhood obesity crisis, it is also important to engage youth and their families in healthy, lifelong activities. We urge you to promote and support a deep connection between children and the great outdoors by considering the addition of an “outdoors in nature” component, either as an element of your physical activity pillar or as a stand alone 5th pillar, to your childhood obesity initiative. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with your office to further discuss the initiative and the role that an “outdoors in nature” component might play in tackling childhood obesity.

Programs that encourage youth to get active in the great outdoors and projects that create the conditions that make nature-based outdoor play safe, healthy and fun are critical to setting children on a path towards healthier and happier lifestyles. These opportunities address what author Richard Louv has called “nature-deficit disorder”—and will go a long way to supporting children’s healthy development and overall well-being. Adding an “outdoors in nature” element to the initiative would more comprehensively address childhood obesity, while supporting additional benefits to children and the natural world. Efforts to engage children in nature-based and other outdoor activities create cost-effective, fun and lifelong pathways to building healthy people, families and communities.

We urge you to consider adding an “outdoors in nature” element to your childhood obesity initiative. Specifically we recommend:

- Promoting the use of our National Parks, National Forests and other public lands as places where families can spend time together, enjoy America’s heritage and get physically active. Consider launching the initiative on our public lands in partnership with the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture and Health and Human Services. Partnering with the Department of the Interior to publicly promote fee-free weekends again this summer at our National Parks would be an excellent way to connect American children and families to the great outdoors. Additionally, you might consider promoting Parks and Recreation month this July as communities across the nation will be celebrating the benefits of parks and recreation through local events to get citizens outdoors and reconnect children to nature.
- Promoting local recreation such as bicycling and walking paths and green initiatives like school and urban gardens, schoolyard habitats and natural play areas such as local parks that provide safe and engaging outdoor spaces for children to play and learn. With 80% of Americans living in urban areas, city, school and home gardens are great ways to improve nutrition, green our cities and provide safe outdoor places for kids to be kids. The National Wildlife Federation’s “Certified Wildlife Habitats” initiative offers informational resources for schools and homes to create spaces for outdoor nature play and learning.
- Promoting the events of nongovernmental organizations that work to connect kids with the great outdoors. These are great platforms for plugging the childhood obesity initiative.

- On February 17-19th, YMCA of the USA is training state and local leaders on how to influence the built environment to make outdoor opportunities for physical activity an easy choice through their Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative.
- On April 3rd, as part of the Children & Nature Network's (C&NN) Children and Nature Awareness Month, C&NN will be hosting a national Natural Leaders Day, calling on youth across the country to get outdoors in nature
- On April 18th, the YMCA will celebrate Healthy Kids Day, the nation's largest health day for children and families, celebrated at Y's across the country
- On June 5th, the American Hiking Society will promote National Trails Day, encouraging organizations across the country to host events
- On June 19-20th, the Outdoor Foundation along with government and nongovernmental partners will bring thousands of youth to Central Park in New York City to shape the national agenda around youth, the outdoors and active living
- On June 26th, the National Wildlife Federation will host its annual Great American Backyard Campout
- Highlighting ongoing campaigns and initiatives of nongovernmental organizations that work to connect kids with the great outdoors.
 - Children & Nature Network: "Nature Rocks," "Natural Leaders Network," "Natural Teachers Network," "Natural Families Network," "Nature Clubs for Families," grassroots campaigns throughout the United States to "Leave No Child Inside" and an emerging campaign to engage physicians and the health care provider community with the movement to reconnect children and nature for their health and well-being.
 - National Recreation and Park Association: "Play in America's Backyard" and "Healthy, Livable Communities" initiatives
 - National Wildlife Federation: "Be Out There" campaign and "Green Hour"
 - Sierra Club: "Building Bridges to the Outdoors" project, "Water Sentinels," "Inner City Outings," and "Military Families Outdoors" initiative

As you continue to shape the childhood obesity agenda, we hope you will strongly consider the inclusion of time spent "outdoors in nature" as one of the primary elements of your physical activity pillar or as an additional 5th pillar to the initiative. We would appreciate the opportunity to follow up with your staff to discuss the initiative. To schedule a meeting or for questions related to this letter, please contact Jacqueline Ostfeld, Sierra Club's National Youth Representative at 202-548-6584 or Jackie.ostfeld@sierraclub.org. Thanks again for your ongoing efforts to improve the lives of American children. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Charles, Ph.D.
 President and CEO
 Children & Nature Network (C&NN)

Barbara Tulipane
 CEO
 National Recreation and Park Association

Larry Schweiger
 President and CEO
 National Wildlife Federation

Christine Fanning
 Executive Director
 The Outdoor Foundation

Sally Jewell
 President and CEO
 REI

Michael Brune
 Executive Director
 Sierra Club

Neil J. Nicoll
 President and CEO
 YMCA of the USA