

A NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON CHILDREN & NATURE
A Connection for the Health and Well-being of Our Children
September 7 - 10, 2006

National Conservation Training Center, home of US Fish and Wildlife Service

"This gathering event will serve as a national call to action and a first step to begin implementing strategies to reconnect children and nature. The actions that arise from this dialog will provide all Americans with concrete examples of how we can, working together, improve the lives of children and the world they will inherit from us."
Larry Selzer, the Conservation Fund Richard Louv, author "Last Child in the Woods"
Rich Lemon, US Fish and Wildlife Service/NCTC

On the evening of Thursday, September 7, 325 people from around the United States gathered for a weekend dialogue. I was among those people, invited as a representative of Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Educators. Since my main interest is the environment those were the names of attendees I noticed first. There were the leaders of the US Department of Agriculture, National Wildlife Federation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of the Interior, US EPA, National Audubon Society, National Park Service, the Smithsonian, National Zoo, ETC, ETC. Other people represented were top physicians, lawyers, architects, businessmen, university professors, scouts, and many more.

Others from Pennsylvania were, Kathleen Paul representing PA Center for Environmental Education, Melodie Anderson-Smith of Renfrew Institute for Cultural and Environmental Studies, Larry Brown from EPA, Rick Carlson of Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Larry Hayes, and Wayne Kober from Ned Smith Center.

The speakers and panelists were of a caliber that met the standards of the elite group to which they were speaking. The speakers also participated in the entire conference.

THURSDAY EVENING: CHARLES JORDAN, Chairman of the Conservation Fund, An African American Giant: This is the business of the community for building people, parks, and programs. Ones point of view is effected by your point of viewing. Reach your littlest ones, take them outdoors.

FRIDAY AM:

SEC. OF INTERIOR, DICK KEMPTHORNE, Committed to help with this initiative, The Dept. of the Interior controls 1 of 5 acres in this country. If we leave behind our adult positions and talk about our childhood nature experiences, we will get something done. Do children today have less life expectancy than us? The nation's children brought us to Shepherdstown!

Escape Blackberries, pick blackberries: leave your ipod for a pod of whales: instead of a channel search, search the Channel Islands. The primary responsibility belongs to families, but the government can be a catalyst.

LARRY SELZER, PRESIDENT OF THE CONSERVATION FUND, We have failed to recognize the rift between children and the environment. We must step outside our comfort zone and form new partnerships. This national forum will launch 20 signature projects to forward this cause.

RICHARD LEMON, DIRECTOR OF NCTC, *While you are here, share your knowledge, share what is already happening, build networks for a collective effort, and developed solutions.*

KEYNOTE SPEAKER, RICHARD LOUV, author, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature Deficit Disorder*, *introduced as a journalist and father, People in nature centers were doing SACRED WORK, long before the book was written. The book was started 16 years ago with the research for the book, " Children's Future". this is not just talking about a nostalgic memory. We are stake holders in a society of stake holders. Parents do not allow their children in the woods, because the are afraid of stranger danger, and that fear is distorting society. Actually the level of stranger danger is exaggerated. It is no more today than in the last generation. A sign seen on a playground in Broward county - NO RUNNING! It is too easy to blame electronics; parent's need to get children outside, schools need to keep playtime. This is a more important issue that global warming.*

This is a challenge to grab; have core goals, use your capacity to bring people together, raise all boats, bridge cultural gaps, partner, distribute information, look at the role of the news media, the tourist industry, the design community, and the baby boomers who are the last generation to have free range of nature opportunity. Get legislation around the country to support environmental education. Do everything to help this movement grow. Kids involved with electronics are just doing what the culture has taught them to do. Move NATURE to parent's primary list of things to do to be good parents. (Like the no smoking campaign.) Say hopeful things about the environment!

DISCUSSION: IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH, Dr. Roberta Debiasi, associate professor of pediatrics at the George Washington University; Kathy Baughman-McLeod, Co-founder and principal of healthy development; Dr. Michael Suk, director orthopedic trauma center, University of Florida; Dr. Terry Neu, Sacred Heart University: *There is an epidemic of preventable diseases. The outdoors and land management are the gateway to better health.*

DISCUSSION: EDUCATION IMPACTS POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS. Dr. Hunt Lyman academic dean, The Hill School; David Kuhn, exec. dir., Montessori; Jack Shea, Director of Teton Science Schools; David Orr, Oberlin College, *Give them hands on in their own way , in their own time. We need to save our children with nature attachment integration! They should find a place to work in nature, be productive. Preserved land is of no use, unless we engage education. Get rid of the no's and have a yes place. Those in environmental ed talk to those in environmental ed - we should be on school boards! Fake right, go left!!! Use their language - change our language. Don't say green buildings - say high performance design. Have soccer science - have place based science at soccer school. From David Orr came 5 propositions. 1. This is not an accident, but a product of a system that brought to us malls and neon. 2. It isn't just nature deficient disorder, but kids standing at an abyss where science is done and the carbon amplified 30 years ago created Katrina. 3. Global warming is planetary destabilization. 4. The nature we introduce kids to will change dramatically in their lifetime. 5. It is the permanent destruction of nature.*

It is harder to stay away from indoor virtual nature. We live at the threshold of a design revolution of green schools and designed communities and industries. Change how we

teach; engage students. Read Tom Berry, "the Great Works". Our great work is to rescue our kids and their relationship to nature and the world.

LUNCH: SPEAKER JOHN FLICKER, PRESIDENT NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY, a nature center in every community!

BREAKOUT SESSION: *How do we address this to public schools? In what ways are urban people of color not as accessible to the natural world. How can we change the ethic of consumption? (By 18 children have seen 1/2 million ads, by 10 they can recognize 1,000 logos.) None of the children will succeed in the future without ALL the children! There are 10,000 environmental organizations; a new one every day. Physicians need to help parents get over fears. Teach life long sports like fly fishing. It is organic health - the environment is the drug of choice. Keep it clear that it means FREE time in the environment. don't just latch onto the issues of obesity and ADHD. Get the Health insurance companies involved. Children need to have ownership of the spaces. We need to recreate the environmental ethic. Start family rituals like say good morning to the sun. Take time with what you have. Promote measurable student centered, service oriented, inquiry based, place based education. BUT this is not all the responsibility of the schools . Teach teachers, Involve religious groups. Reach home schoolers. Foster a sense of wonder. Make nature back in focus. Look for institutional barriers that prevent what we want to happen.*

PM SPEAKERS: DALE HALL, director of USFWS; **PETER FORBES**, Center for Whole Communities, *Make a biography of place that makes you what you are. List all the significant places you have experienced the environment. Your relationship to the land is the story of your place. It effects my life more than anything. How many of these place can't you go to anymore? 38% of private land and 78% of public land is posted, no trespassing. We have protected 14 million acres, but have we connected people to the land? Laws cannot protect what has already left the heart. Will children grow up to protect the environment? MLK didn't say, "I have a plan"!! Replace no child left behind with no child left inside.*

SATURDAY: DR FRANK DUKES, review

DISCUSSION: IMPACTS OF MODERN CULTURE, **Mark Madison**, USFWS; **Dudley Edmondson**, author , *Black and Brown Faces in America's Wild Places*"; **Lowell Monke**, author, *"Breaking down the Digital Walls*"; **Dr. Jackie Ogden**, director of animal programs, Disney, *Black children's disconnect began long ago when they left the rural south. They feel unsafe away from the safety of others of their same culture. Use nature to get them through tough times. We need to make nature hip. There has been a cultural change from real things to an abstract representation of things. We as adults have a backlog of real experiences to interpret pictures, children do not. We live in a misinformation world, because kids have nothing in the real world to connect to. It is like eating the menu instead of eating the meat. No one prays over the menu! Kids are drawn to the computer because of the sense of power it gives. Because the computer can take them anywhere, they lose their sense of place. Advocate the elementary schools sell their computers to the high schools, that we have media free schools. Stop looking at schools as factories turing out machines, only thinking of kids as machines makes us*

think we can give them a test that evaluates them and is graded by a machine. It is like trying to put chemical grease to a gear in his head. We commit SOUL SUICIDE, when we give them powerful technology while taking away their soul. If we connect back to our own nature experience we will believe we can do this! Represent the purple group. Stop taking jabs as red vs. blue. Partner with new corporations. Use new language. We are at the tipping point!!!

KEYNOTE: STEPHEN KELLER, YALE UNIVERSITY, Biophilia, Inherent inclination to connect to the natural world effecting our health and well being. Everyone has an involuntary reaction to the natural world.

DISCUSSION: BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND CHILDREN , Wayne Kober, former director of Bureau of Environmental Quality , PA Dept. of Transportation: Noah Mehrkam, the Rector Companies; Robin Moore, director of the Natural Learning Initiative and professor of landscape architecture, North Carolina State University: Carol Adkins, Water and Ecosystems FHWA Office of Natural and Human Environment. ***A healthy natural childhood will bring a healthy hopeful planet. "Never before an event where I felt so empowered!" Robin Moore and many of the speakers each day. Playing and learning are part of the development of a child. Education must move outdoors. (Pictures were shown of a kindergarten that was all outdoors in a forest, no buildings!) Environmental exposure is preventative health. It can happen in small spaces. Mandated state curriculum can be delivered outdoors. (More pictures - a school playground that was totally turned into a garden with curvy paths, ponds, and much more.) Naturalize childhood with pickable places. (research Sallis, 1993) Have a school in every zoo, botanical garden! Children must be part of the process of planning this. We must reach home builders. There is money from the government for pedestrian and bike trails, the Walkable Safe Routes to School program, and Scenic Byways program.***
www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/ecological/eco_index.asp

LUNCH: SPEAKER DR. OLIVER PERGAMS, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO and DR. PATRICIA ZANRDIC, BRYAN MAWR COLLEGE ,PRESENTING THEIR RESEARCH ,Is Love of Nature Becoming Love of Electronic Media?

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: GINA MCCARTHY, Commisioner Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection - No Child Left Inside Campaign, Mother's used to say, "Go out and play!" Kids don't have down time. Being bored doesn't equal - go outside. We're terrifying, choking, smothering our children with fear fo the outdoors; stranger danger, ticks, sunburn, etc.! Families need to hang outside together in unstructured time. America's pasttimes are playing less and watching more. Adults, your most precious memories are of OUTDOOR activities. The environmental community is getting old. If you haven't climbed a tree, you will not take care of a tree. Connecticut held the Great Park Pursuit, that was 8 weeks of Saturday family adventures in different state parks. www.nochildleftindoors.org A family was described as anyone under 18 with anyone over 18.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS: Possible actions that could address the issues. Synergism in actions: partners?, We should have included sportsmen and their organizations. "Leave No Partner Behind!" These children who are last in the woods, may be the last in land use decisions.

EVENING PROGRAM: Closing address and announcement of future action, **Frank Dukes** gave a summary,
SYLVIA EARL, CHAIR DEEP OCEAN EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH, EXPLORER IN RESIDENCE, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY, *No child left dry! In 200 years, if we continue at the rate of now, there will be no polar ice. This will be the first time in 38 million years. Reasons for hope: humans will see the light and realize the problem, the human can do spirit, resilience of nature, kid in all of us has optimism. Embrace new technology; use games, Google Earth. The earth is a black blue space you haven't filled in yet. In the display area of this building, in the log replica of the Muir house is a sign - "Those who dare to teach must never cease to learn." Experience is worth a 1,000 pictures, get out there.*

LARRY SELZER, *Things I have learned..... read often, make a plan; this is a crisis of creativity, be creative; there are economic benefits of children and nature; it is a design problem, but we are living in a design revolution; there is importance in optimism; this is a cultural change. WE ARE LAUNCHING A NATIONAL FORUM FOR OVER THE NEXT 12 TO 18 MONTHS WITH A PLEDGE OF \$1 MILLION FOR THIS "SACRED WORK"!!!!*

THINGS TO DO RIGHT NOW! Go to the Oprah website and click on suggested programs, suggest Richard Louv! Visit the Children and Nature web site - www.cnaturenet.org