

Kids in the Woods

October 27, 2008



“The challenges of water and climate change are related, and they are huge. They will not be solved in a few years. It will take decades. Future generations will need to rise to these challenges no less than our own. As conservationists, we have an obligation to help kids connect to the outdoors—to understand the connection between forests and water ... to understand the implications of their own choices and actions, both now and when they are grown.”

Chief Abigail Kimbell to North American Association of Environmental Educators, 10/08

Under the banner of “Kids in the Woods,” the Forest Service is continuing our long tradition of working with kids, highlighting our ongoing education and outreach programs and developing new efforts. The goal of the “Kids in the Woods” is to create an enduring impact on young people’s values and attitudes towards nature and their understanding and appreciation for their role in conserving natural resources.

Forest Service employees in all of our mission areas are working with educators, volunteers and community, state and international partners to connect America’s youth and their families to nature. Working with so many individuals and entities increases our capacity to reach all this special segment of our society, including the underserved and culturally diverse populations.

National forests and grasslands provide an abundance of natural outdoor classroom opportunities to urban, suburban and rural kids for learning and caring about the environment, and for sheer enjoyment. Our collaboration with state, and nongovernmental partners are also building appreciation of forests and open spaces in developed areas and on public and private lands.

An agency framework to integrate and guide our efforts for “Kids in the Woods” is in development. In the long run, “Kids in the Woods” activities will help create a citizenry that is informed about their natural resources and the importance of sustaining our reliance on them for our long-term wellbeing and quality of life.

Some Ongoing “Kids in the Woods” Activities

Conservation Education Program

The Forest Service continues to work across programs and disciplines to integrate conservation education into everything we do. Based on 80 years of experience, the Forest Service has focused our educational programs to work with partners to deliver

high-quality, science-based education to children from pre-K to grade 12, in both formal, school settings and in outdoor settings. In 2006, the Forest Service worked with hundreds of partners and leveraged our funding with them 3 to 1. We doubled the number of programs and reached about 4.4 million people, including a 35 percent increase in urban areas. Chief Kimbell recently addressed hundreds of environmental educators at the North American Association for Environmental Educators annual meeting. A copy of her speech is available online at <http://www.fs.fed.us/news/2008/speeches.shtml>.

Visit: <http://na.fs.fed.us/spfo/ce/index.cfm>

Get Outdoors, It's Yours

Announced in Mid-October, **Get Outdoors, It's Yours!** is an interagency, national effort to raise awareness of the opportunities for America's youth to reengage with nature on federal and state public lands. This initiative which brings together the resources of cooperating Federal, state, and nongovernmental groups is to encourage children and their families to spend more time participating in outdoor education, recreation, and stewardship activities. The Forest Service is participating in Get Outdoors, It's Yours! principally through a pledge of commitment for coordinating and information sharing at the national level, and through outreach on the Get Outdoors, It's Yours! website.

Visit: <http://www.getoutdoorsitsyours.gov/>

MonarchLIVE

MonarchLIVE is an exciting international conservation education project that uses satellite broadcast and Web technology to bring the magic of monarch butterfly migration to classrooms and children throughout the Western Hemisphere. On October 10, 2008, children from the United States, Mexico and Canada tuned in to watch Chief Kimbell, and a host of partners kickoff MonarchLIVE. The annual migration cycle of the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) was the subject of the first broadcast and presented the spectacular phenomena the monarchs' migration thousands of miles to winter in the mountain peaks in the states of Mexico and Michoacan, Mexico.

Visit: www.fs.fed.us/monarch to learn about future MonarchLIVE events.

NatureWatch

The mission of **NatureWatch** is to "provide children and adults the opportunity to safely view and participate in activities and programs that raise their level of awareness and understanding of wildlife, fish, and plants, and their connection to ecosystems, landscapes and people." This highly successful program provides hundreds of educational programs and hosts hundreds of educational and community-based festivals each year. National Forests provide some of the finest nature viewing opportunities in the world. Wildlife, fish, and wildflower viewing has become the second most popular outdoor activity in the United States, second only to gardening.

Visit: <http://www.fs.fed.us/outdoors/naturewatch/wheretow.htm>

More Kids in the Woods

More Kids in the Woods Awards Program receives 2008 Secretary of Agriculture Honor Award! Under the category of “Improving the Nation’s Nutrition and Health,” the Forest Service was recognized “For outstanding teamwork and exceptional commitment to facilitating learning and organized activities that expose thousands of children to healthy, outdoor, active lifestyle choices while reconnecting them to America’s natural heritage.” More Kids in the Woods was launched in 2006 as an agency-wide effort to focus attention on connecting children with nature and helping them better understand the value and benefits of the nation’s forests and grasslands. Since then, the Forest Service has awarded \$1 million to support 40 projects from around the country. In turn, our partners donated \$2.5 million in cash and in-kind service to the program. In FY 2009, the Forest Service will again call for proposals with \$500,000 to be awarded to get kids outdoors.

Visit: <http://fsweb.wo.fs.fed.us/mkiw/#>

Sustainable Operations

Under the banner of **Sustainable Operations**, which includes many efforts to reduce the Agency’s environmental footprint, we are creating a society that is more informed about natural resources and their role in sustainable practices. Through an Adopt-A-School program, working with Bailey’s Elementary School in Fairfax County, VA and Munford Elementary, Middle and High Schools in Talladega, AL, the Forest Service is fostering life-long learning and understanding of natural processes through specific activities that connect kids, parents and teachers to the natural environment. The expansion of this unique partnership into diverse communities will help us ensure a more sustainable future for all.

National Get Outdoors Day

National Get Outdoors Day is an annual multiple-agency event to encourage first time visitors, especially children under the age of 14, to enjoy and explore public lands. The first national Get Outdoors Day was held on June 14, 2008 when over 50 official sites across the nation welcomed thousands of new people to their public lands. National Get Outdoors Day is co-sponsored by the American Recreation Coalition and a number of national nongovernmental groups to encourage opportunities for citizens who have been less involved or unaware of outdoor recreation, especially Hispanic, African, and Asian Americans, and many urban dwellers.

Visit: <http://www.getoutdoorsusa.org/>

Natural Inquirer

The **Natural Inquirer** is a science education journal for the middle school audience created so that scientists can share their research with students. Each article tells readers about scientific research conducted by scientists in the USDA Forest Service. The Natural Inquirer brings Forest Service research to 100,000+ children and their educators each year.

Visit: <http://www.naturalinquirer.org/>

Urban Outreach

The Forest Service, through Research and Development, National Forest Systems, and State and Private Forestry, is reaching urban and suburban dwellers and bringing more people outdoors on public and private lands. Our **Urban Connections** program has projects in four northeastern and midwestern cities. In Chicago, we are partnering with others in the Chicago Wilderness Consortium. This consortium includes 225,000 acres of protected lands in the greater Chicago area, including the Midewin National Prairie. The Forest Service is implementing similar partnerships in cities such as Atlanta, Los Angeles, Tacoma, Portland, Houston, New York City, and Boston.

For more information, visit the **Kids in the Woods** Web site:
<http://www.fs.fed.us/emphasis/kids.shtml>