



USDA Forest Service Update March 2008

SUBJECT: KIDS IN THE WOODS AND NATIONAL GET OUTDOORS DAY

SUMMARY:

The Forest Service is working with many of our partners to raise awareness about the vital role healthy forests have on the quality of our lives – from clean water to clean air to climate change. For over 100 years, we have been connecting people to nature through interpretive walks, outdoor recreation opportunities, conservation education, wildlife viewing, and hunting and fishing.

BACKGROUND:

By working with partners we can do even more. That is why we in the USDA Forest Service created *Kids in the Woods* - a program that integrates all of our existing efforts toward confronting the national issue of childhood obesity, adult diabetes in children, hyperactivity, and other illnesses so eloquently described by Richard Louv in his book *Last Child in the Woods*.

There is a strong correlation between nature-based activities and health and well-being. Outdoor activity is essential to developing the cognitive, emotional and physical well being of children and is as important as nutrition. We in the USDA are uniquely positioned to help promote the well-being of the nation's children. Between the Food and Nutrition Service's school lunch and nutrition programs, and the Forest Service's efforts to connect Kids to the outdoors, we can promote lifelong healthy lifestyles, from eating right to exercising right, and the understanding of the connections of natural resources to their daily lives, in the beautiful settings of the National Forests and Grasslands.

Two specific initiatives in this regard are:

- The **Kids in the Woods** Challenge Cost Share, begun in 2007, leveraged appropriated funds with partners such as you to get children outside to experience nature first hand. An initial investment of \$500,000 in 2007 was matched with an additional \$1M in private funding, and reached over 23,000 kids. The effort strengthens existing programs and reaches out to new partners to address the growing disconnection of people and nature and promote environmental literacy. \$500,000 is available again in 2008 and all funds will go through local forest units. We are reviewing the 277 proposals received and will announce winning projects in April.
- **National Get Outdoors Day** is a special event to be held across the nation on June 14, 2008 targeting new and first time visitors to public lands, and part of a broader campaign aimed to reach under represented segments of the population. We hope to have 100 sites nationwide to help introduce people to their shared legacy of public lands by offering specialized activities.

With our **Kids in the Woods** effort, **National Get Outdoors Day** and continued collaboration with many partners, the Forest Service aims to increase awareness and understanding of the value of wild landscapes and functioning ecosystems to all Americans.

CONTACT:

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