



2007 Recreation Forums Summary Proceedings

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Tread Lightly!

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“There needs to be mass awareness, particularly for the minority populations, in terms of connecting people to the outdoors. There’s a great connectivity between nature and the power to inspire, heal and educate.”

—Audrey Peterman, President,
Earthwise Productions, Inc. (Georgia
forum)



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“Our children are book smart, but application is where we have the void. We need to provide children with the opportunity to observe nature and form their own perspective.”

—Peg McGann, retired teacher
(Illinois forum)

In March and April of 2007, the American Recreation Coalition and the National Forest Foundation teamed up to convene a series of six Recreation Forums across the nation—five regional sessions followed by a national gathering in Washington, D.C.

With a blend of presentations, facilitated dialogue and open discussion, the Recreation Forums united diverse organizations and agencies seeking to identify challenges and solutions to meeting the nation’s recreation needs through our public lands and waters. As hikers and anglers, OHV enthusiasts and cyclists, climbers and equestrians, and more, these diverse recreation stakeholders gathered to hear the ideas and concerns of allies in the recreation, health, tourism, education and economic development fields. The meetings helped document the importance of recreation to societal goals, including: improved public physical, mental and spiritual health; better environmental stewardship; deterrence of crime; enhanced educational systems and student performance; and, local, regional and national economic vitality. They also offered an important venue for defining key transportation issues limiting access to nature-based recreation and for brainstorming creative solutions.

More than 100 leading recreation, conservation, youth service and local government officials organized the forums through a structure of regional task forces. Together, they defined the local agendas, recruited presenters, and lent their spirit to developing partnerships via the forums. This planning structure enabled us to build new partnerships, while learning about many successful programs around the country that connect local people to the outdoors. In most cases, the regional task forces have maintained their commitment, through ongoing meetings to review ideas and issues highlighted at the forums.

Thanks to the passionate participation of hundreds of individuals, we have built a rich idea bank for recreation community leaders and national public policy leaders alike to turn to over the next decade—just as listening sessions for the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission did in the 1960s and as the President’s Commission on Americans Outdoors did in the 1980s. This model for idea sharing is increasingly critical in an era of rapidly changing demographics, growing populations, strained federal and state budgets, and disappearing open space. With the momentum generated through the forums and the publication of these proceedings, the forum sponsors hope to prompt continued discussion and action toward enhancing America’s public lands and recreation resources.

Why Now?

The opportunity to bring together concerned individuals and organizations to address declining participation in outdoor recreation proved timely for a number of reasons. Today we witness increasing public concern over the diminished physical activity of Americans—youth in particular—and its impacts on our health and healthcare systems. Richard Louv’s book, *Last Child in the Woods*, has sparked a tremendous interest in the many benefits of a life connected to nature. He has opened our eyes to how a close relationship with the outdoors inspires creativity, better school performance and a commitment to conservation among youth.



“Don’t forget the fun side of recreation! People don’t fall in love with nature by being bussed to a visitor center or reading an information kiosk. They go on bike rides, get lost, get dirty, explore on their own terms.”

—Jenn Dice, *International Mountain Bicycling Association (Colorado forum)*

As a recreation community, we understand the many benefits of incorporating outdoor recreation into our lifestyles. However, our ability to get people outdoors is hindered by a number of factors, including access challenges, private lands development, increasing urbanization, budget restrictions, and more. In the face of such challenges, dialogue and collaboration are key to rejuvenating Americans' love for and participation in the outdoors.

The Approach

Regional Recreation Forums took place in Colorado, Georgia, California, Illinois and Oregon—each focusing on issues pertaining to outdoor recreation relevant for their regions. Each forum was organized by a dedicated regional task force made up of representatives from local, regional and national government, youth groups, conservation organizations, recreation interests, and others. More than 1,000 people attended the regional forums, representing government, outdoor industries, youth service organizations and conservation groups. These individuals shared a common belief that time spent outdoors contributes to the well-being of America's people, their communities and local natural environments—and that quality recreation opportunities depend upon effective cooperation among public and private interests. The regional forums allowed us to spotlight dozens of innovative programs that enhance Americans' participation in and enjoyment of our diverse outdoors. That momentum led into the National Recreation Forum on April 30 in Washington, D.C., where representatives reported on the regional forums and participants further discussed priority recreation topics and potential remedies identified in the regions.

Summary of Key Findings

Although the regional recreation forums zeroed in on specific recreation issues relevant to each region, many common themes emerged from across the country. As the forums themselves demonstrated a collaborative spirit among diverse attendees, the overriding theme of building multi-level partnerships to address recreation issues rose to the surface.

In general, both the regional forums and the national forum were structured to solicit concerns and solutions.

Participants agreed that outdoor recreation offers significant benefits to Americans, and we share a responsibility as people who care about our public lands, our youth and our communities to promote and provide quality outdoor experiences. The discussions generated a list of priority issues facing outdoor recreation, along with dozens of suggested action steps to address those issues. In summary, the shared issues and proposed solutions included:

Issues facing outdoor recreation:

- 1. Access:** America's trail and forest road systems are in need of significant repair and enhancement. An aging infrastructure, maintenance backlog, restricted budgets and losses of rights-of-way to public lands limit opportunities for many people to access and enjoy outdoor recreation areas. Urban proximity to national public lands requires a strategic approach for coordinated transportation planning of trails, roads and transit corridor connections, including traveler information signage and information systems. In addition, access for diverse user groups is challenged by a costly, restrictive and cumbersome special-use permitting process.
- 2. Youth Participation:** We need to explore creative ways to boost outdoor participation among youth. Challenges include making outdoor activity appealing to kids, providing transportation other than private vehicles, overcoming parental safety fears, and finding time and a place for outdoor education within the schedules of very busy families. Youth engagement in outdoor recreation would help improve their health; serve as a crime deterrent; enhance student performance and leadership skills; and link kids more closely to the outdoor recreation programs and natural resources that they will eventually manage. Intergenerational unstructured play opportunities need to be a core part of involving youth in the outdoors.
- 3. Budgets:** Federal and state budgets for recreation-related projects shrink annually. In the long run, this may significantly diminish the degree to which outdoor recreation stimulates local, regional and national economies. At the same time, communities and nonprofits compete for limited pools of funding to implement their own recreation and stewardship projects.

4. Urbanization & Diversity: Urban and ethnically diverse audiences have limited exposure to opportunities for outdoor education and recreation.

Finding ways to connect these groups to the outdoors must become a priority for outdoor recreation stakeholders.

5. Outreach & Education: Where can you recreate? What are the benefits of outdoor recreation? How do you get started? As a recreation community, we need to do a better job of communicating with potential constituencies about the amazingly diverse opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, how to access those opportunities, and the value and importance of outdoor recreation.

6. Collaboration: Faced with limited budgets and capacity, we need to overcome barriers to recreation partnerships at all levels—local to national, public to private—while also collaborating with nontraditional recreation interests.

Suggested Actions & Solutions:

1. Building Collaboration: Pooling capacity and funding can help overcome the budget challenges. We can also reach new audiences by teaming with new partners—youth service organizations like Boy Scouts, healthcare interests, sportsmen's groups, daycare providers, etc. We must look to develop stronger public-private partnerships and pay particular attention to starting the collaboration at the local level—between communities and their local offices of federal agencies—and with state agencies, within an integrated framework to maximize partnership effectiveness.

2. Marketing Outdoor Recreation: One of the main barriers to outdoor participation is a simple lack of information. Recreation interests need to explore creative and dynamic ways to share information about the benefits of outdoor recreation and about where people can go to enjoy the outdoors. This marketing needs to be targeted with special messages and strategies to attract youth as well as urban and more diverse audiences.

3. Empowering Volunteers: With a rising interest in volunteerism, recreation stakeholders can use volunteer programs to both enhance our recreation resources and build a citizen commitment to the outdoors. We should work collaboratively to share volunteer resources and to develop more “service-learning opportunities” for families.

4. Caring for Public Lands: With the country's rapid development and loss of open space, public lands are increasingly important for recreation. We must better educate the public about their public lands, devote shared resources toward enhancing these wild places, and demonstrate to our government leaders the value of investing in public lands stewardship—particularly access and recreation projects.

5. Finding Funding: Support for outdoor education and recreation stewardship depends increasingly on creativity and collaboration. Lottery dollars, special fees, private industry contributions, and pooled resources can all generate important funding, but organizational capacity of the agencies to guide and coordinate such resources is extremely strained. Ultimately we must appeal to elected officials with a unified voice about the importance of our public lands and recreation programs.

6. Employing Technology: For youth in particular, our ability to innovatively use technology to market and implement outdoor education programs can entice greater participation.

7. Establishing Urban Links: We need to develop stronger regional collaboration focused on recreation and transportation planning to link urban populations with nature-based opportunities and make it easy for them to learn about and enjoy the outdoors.

8. Continuing the Dialogue: To effectively enhance recreation resources and participation in outdoor recreation, we must maintain the momentum developed by the recreation forums. These discussions should form the foundation for a recreation network that facilitates information sharing, partnerships, collaborative projects and future gatherings modeled after the recreation forums.



“Connecting kids to the outdoors is not just about taking them to far away natural places. You can connect kids to the outdoors wherever they happen to be. It is important to simply give them a positive memorable experience to generate a permanent interest in the outdoors.”

Mike Barney, Denver Parks and Recreation (Colorado forum)

Turning Inside Out: Opening New Doors to the Outdoors

Recreation stakeholders from throughout the Rocky Mountain region launched the recreation forums, hosting the first one at the American Mountaineering Center in Golden, Colorado. Approximately 250 people attended, including key state officials, congressional staffers, outfitters, and representatives of many conservation and youth organizations. Keynote speeches kicked off the day, with comments from Rick Cables, regional forester for the U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region; Sally Wisely, state director for the Colorado Bureau of Land Management; and Mayor Charles J. Baroch of Golden. A leading researcher in youth and the outdoors, Louise Chawla, Ph.D., of the University of Colorado, presented the opening keynote speech, “Getting Children and Youth Outdoors: Why It Is Good for Young People and Good for the Woods.” The keynote was followed by a panel discussion on the role of outdoor recreation in our future.

Attendees then split up into three breakout groups:

- *Building Partnerships*: Increasing Outdoor Opportunities for Urban, Diverse and Younger Populations.
- *Venturing Out*: Exploring Effective Educational, Employment and Recreational Ways to Engage Youth in the Outdoors.
- *Getting Active in the Outdoors*: Increasing Public Awareness of Healthy Habits, Diet Choices and Physical Activity.

Key ideas and recommendations from the Colorado forum include:

1. Building Partnerships Breakout Session

- All nature does not have to be wilderness—encourage use of open space, city parks, greenways to overcome transportation challenges.
- Develop programs that are more inclusive and overcome barriers to minority participation—include people of diverse backgrounds in your materials & as your staff.
- Incorporate messages about the many benefits of recreation into outreach—especially the physical and mental health benefits.
- Need to address the problems of an inconsistent and challenging permitting process on public lands.
- Identify common ground and use that to build public-private partnerships.

2. Venturing Out Breakout Session

- Expand recreation opportunities for family units.
- Design programs based on what kids want and are attracted to.
- Sell the value of this movement to educators and policy makers.
- Link recreation to sustainability in messaging.
- Rethink permitting systems so they don't limit use.
- Establish an ongoing recreation dialogue.

3. Getting Active Breakout Session

- Need to overcome parental fears about safety for kids playing outdoors.
- Reach out to healthcare providers with message about the data showing physical and mental benefits of a life connected to nature.
- Build a grass-roots effort to help shift values toward environmental stewardship, belief in the restorative nature of time spent outdoors.
- Promote unstructured play outdoors (unschedule our overscheduled kids).



Connecting Youth with the Outdoors

The East Cobb Senior Center in Marietta, Georgia, filled with more than 150 people interested in introducing new and more diverse audiences to the outdoors. Staff from the governor's and congressional offices joined conservation, tourism, education, and federal, state and local government representatives to take part in the presentations and discussions about outdoor recreation in the southern United States. The day opened with welcome speeches from Charles Myers, regional forester for the U.S. Forest Service Southern Region; David Hankerson, manager for Cobb County; and Noel Holcomb, commissioner for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Panel presentations, which also invited open discussion, covered the topics of:

- *Outdoor Challenges*: How do we engage future generations and inspire our youth as public land caretakers?
- *Outdoor Projects*: A showcase of exemplary outdoor activities, programs and events around the southeast.
- *Outdoor Access*: How do we facilitate access to local, state and federal land, providing mass transit, meeting special needs and opening virtual gateways?

Closing speeches offered a call to action from Audrey Peterman, president of Earthwise Productions, and Pete Conroy, director of Jacksonville State University's Environmental Policy & Information Center Field Schools.

Key talking points from the keynote speakers include:

1. Noel Holcomb, commissioner, Georgia Department of Natural Resources

- We must provide quality, safe opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation in close proximity to where people live.
- We must build partnerships with federal, state and local government, conservation organizations, and the private sector to manage and set aside lands wisely.
- We must maximize recreation opportunities on our public lands.
- We must support funding for outdoor recreation initiatives at all levels.
- We must all work together to develop and deliver dynamic outreach programs that will interest newcomers to outdoor recreation and bring back those who used to participate.

2. Chuck Myers, regional forester, U.S. Forest Service Southern Region

- Despite the many benefits to outdoor recreation, public lands use has declined.
- The Forest Service encourages public input on the evolving future needs related to recreation.
- The agency needs to broaden its circle of conservation partners in meeting recreation challenges.
- We have a lack of quality information on forest recreation resources.
- Private land development is seriously restricting recreation access in many areas.
- Funding is a huge challenge—we have deteriorating roads and trails, an inability to sustain recreation infrastructure on Congressional appropriations alone.

3. Letter from Josh Morrison, founder of GEEKS in the Woods (Atlanta)

"Those of us who have crossed the great barrier and realized that nature is way cool and that being outside is "sweeeeeet!!" can tell you that the sound of the wind in the trees, the oxygen in our lungs, the song of a bird, the feel of the sun on our faces, the warmth of a campfire, or a starry sky overhead cannot be improved through technology. Oh, it can be enhanced, but please realize that you can get our attention with the real stuff."

Highlights of participant feedback:

- Spread the message far and wide about the fun and benefits of outdoor recreation. Educate people about how and where they can get outdoors.
- Utilize wildlife as a way to connect people to the outdoors—wildlife education, hunting and fishing activities, understanding habitat.
- Connect with parents—particularly single parents—to teach them about involving their kids in the outdoors.
- Develop dynamic marketing campaigns using technology, television, celebrities, etc. Make recreation more visible to kids, urban and diverse audiences.
- Demonstrate the power of nature to inspire, heal, educate.
- Work toward ensuring access to public lands as we lose open space and access points due to private lands development.



“Whatever you liked about nature, we’ll probably like it too, but make it relevant to us. Experience nature with us even if you’ve done it before. Make it fun! We like technology, but we don’t need it to have fun outdoors.”

Josh Morrison, 15-year-old founder of “Geeks in the Woods” (Pictured)

Recreation Rocks! Let's Get Outside & Into Life

Hearing from youth themselves about the barriers to getting them outdoors highlighted the third recreation forum held at the Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Garden in Arcadia, California. A panel of Southern California teens eagerly informed government and nonprofit leaders how they can better attract America's young people to the outdoors. Among the estimated 150 attendees were representatives of youth service organizations, recreation associations, city, state and federal agencies, and conservation organizations. Welcome speeches from Russ Guiney, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Parks & Recreation, and Bernie Weingardt, regional forester for the U.S. Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region, opened the day. The youth panel covering "What Recreation Means to Us" was followed by presentations of success stories and promising practices. Concurrent discussion sessions in the afternoon covered: California Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights; Connecting through Media; Trails: Access to the Great Outdoors; Youth & Outdoor Exploration; Getting Fit Outdoors; and, Connecting Youth to the Outdoors through Stewardship.

Key ideas and recommendations from California's recreation community include:

- Need to share model programs broadly—"how-to" program ideas.
- Start locally to build youth programs.
- Help families create outdoor traditions.
- Help people from diverse backgrounds feel like they "fit in" with the outdoors.
- Identify existing connectors to get constituencies more interested in the outdoors.
- Utilize youth stewardship to demonstrate the enduring, tangible results they can achieve.
- Demonstrate options for career paths from outdoor skills and experiences.
- Foster mentoring programs, peer-to-peer teaching, and hands-on learning opportunities.
- Start programs at the school level, expand to the city/community level.
- Help people become stakeholders—plant a tree, give kids a reason to remain connected.

Youth Day in L.A. Tests Technology in the Outdoors

In the quest to connect today's youth to the outdoors, the California forum hosted an important research effort exploring the possible role for technology in attracting youth to outdoor recreation and enhancing their experiences. Forest Service scientist Debbie Chavez conducted the pilot study, launched to help determine if technology matters in youth outdoor participation. Working with the City of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation, the Forest Service's San Dimas Technology and Development Center, and the American Recreation Coalition, youth ages 6 to 17, representing L.A.'s diverse cultural makeup, participated in a day of outdoor activities at Griffith Park.

The observers looked for differences and similarities between technology-dependent and non-technology-dependent activities. The technology-dependent activities included a digital camera safari and geocache activity. The non-technology-dependent activities included etchings and a nature scavenger hunt. Participants were asked to rate these activities by giving them a green, yellow or red light rating. In addition, the researchers recorded many observations related to ease of understanding and ease in the outdoors. In general, the study revealed that most of the children were interested in all of the outdoor activities, except etching. The camera safari received 86% green votes, geocaching 92%, etching 62%, and nature scavenger hunt 76%.

Ultimately, the partners in this research believe that such observations will have long-term national implications for providing outdoor recreation experiences that will convert young visitors into lifelong outdoor recreationists. John Fehr, director of the San Dimas Technology and Development Center, noted that we can make a difference by "... exploring ways to reach kids with technology before and during their forest experiences and then providing practical guidance to forests on alternative approaches and new strategies, from podcasts to geocaching."

To hear more about the study and other Forest Service research into trends in outdoor recreation, please contact:

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Re-connecting Youth to Outdoor Recreation

The scenic Columbia Gorge set the stage for Oregon's recreation forum, held at McMenamins Edgefield in Troutdale. Once again, many more than the expected 150 attendees showed up to focus on connecting youth with the Pacific Northwest's outdoors. State agencies, youth corps organizations, high school students, the travel industry, conservation and recreation groups were all represented in the diverse pool of participants. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department presented results of a statewide study on the outdoors conducted among parents and kids. Break-out discussion groups followed, covering the topics of diversity, access, public-private partnerships, health and physical activity, outdoor and life skills, and information and technology. A variety of organizations shared their stories of successful outdoor recreation programs. To wrap up the day, attendees reconvened to discuss opportunities to encourage greater participation in outdoor recreation and share ideas about building partnerships and overcoming barriers.

Key ideas and recommendations from the Oregon group include:

- Collaborate with sponsors and city government to provide mass transportation to outdoor recreation sites.
- Build a pool of mentors and leaders—particularly people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- Counteract parental safety fears with positive messages about recreation and its benefits.
- Collaborate with the media to attract youth outdoors and to show them how to access recreation opportunities.
- Research what youth want—then develop sites and activities based on those preferences.
- Integrate outdoor education into schools and childcare programs.
- Promote the health and quality of life benefits of outdoor recreation.
- Utilize technology to appeal to youth.
- Educate and engage parents in order to reach the kids.
- Create community bonding through outdoor service-learning projects.
- Network with youth groups, churches, civic organizations, etc., to pool resources and reach out to new audiences.
- Address and promote the social aspects and benefits of recreation.



“For some organizations, recreation is just not considered part of the central core mission. If we don't connect with the people who are going to be the stewards of the land in the future, we won't have a mission.”

—Jeann Wade Evans, U.S. Forest Service (California forum)

Leave No Child Inside: Connecting Children with Nature

With co-hosts Chicago Wilderness and Chicago Park District, the final regional recreation forum brought together an enthusiastic group at the South Shore Cultural Center on the shores of Lake Michigan. School teachers, park district staff, executives from several state and federal land management agencies, conservation groups, nature center and museum staff gathered with a goal to flesh out ideas about connecting kids and families to the region's outdoor resources. John Phipps, deputy regional forester for the U.S. Forest Service Eastern Region, opened the day with his remarks, followed by a series of presentations on successful Chicago-area outdoor education and recreation programs. In the afternoon, breakout groups brainstormed ideas and solutions in four topical sessions, including:

- *Kids in the Outdoors*: Providing both structured and unstructured experiences; identifying barriers to participation; developing adult mentors.
- *Multi-use and Common Ground*: Meeting the needs of diverse recreationists and trail users—from joggers to birders to bikers.
- *Live Healthy, Discover Nature*: Encouraging people to get moving; linking nature to health; motivating people to enjoy the health benefits of the outdoors.
- *Engaging Communities & Urban Partnerships*: Getting urban audiences interested; recruiting and keeping volunteers; generating feedback from non-traditional recreation audiences.

Key ideas and recommendations from Illinois' recreation stakeholders include:

1. Kids in the Outdoors Breakout Session

- Need to promote and provide a balance of unstructured outdoor play experiences as well as structured recreation programs.
- Incorporate messages about the value of our environment and stewardship into youth recreation programs.
- Coordinate programs with times that work for parents to get them involved.
- Develop an information exchange mechanism for providers of outdoor recreation programs to collaborate. (Create a blog!)

2. Multi-use and Common Ground Breakout Session

- Work toward balance meeting the needs of diverse trail users; also need to balance recreation uses with conservation needs.
- Better educate diverse users about sharing recreation resources.
- Involve user groups in recreation planning.
- Develop partnerships among agencies and recreation clubs.

3. Live Healthy Breakout Session

- Create incentive programs to get people outdoors.
- Link schools with outdoor spaces.
- Get involved in community and transportation planning, neighborhood design.
- Develop creative public recreation opportunities ("green" dog walks, outdoor yoga classes).
- Team with health professionals, insurance industry, federal health agencies.
- Make connections between outdoor recreation and community well-being.
- Share maps, park info, nature info more broadly to facilitate easy access (internet).

4. Engaging Communities Breakout Session

- Create walkable, neighborhood destinations, easy transportation options, sponsor day trips to recreation areas.
- Hold community meetings to hear local needs, fears and goals.
- Engage already respected community leaders.
- Make programs meaningful to the diverse groups we want to attract.
- Ask locally, "How can we be involved with your community?"
- Recruit and keep community volunteers—treat them well, appreciate them, reward them.

Summary

The five regional forums demonstrated the tremendous passion and commitment across the country for improving our recreation resources and encouraging Americans to get outdoors. In April, the National Recreation Forum offered a venue for consolidating the valuable ideas and feedback, while promoting further discussion on the priority recreation issues at a national level.

The National Recreation Forum was designed to:

- Provide a platform for showcasing key presentations and recommendations delivered at the regional forums;
- Provide an additional platform for suggestions and information designed to enhance the contributions of America's public lands to the American public, especially for representatives of national organizations and interests;
- Invite public and private figures to present information relevant to future recreation opportunities on public lands, ranging from the value of recreation to the nation's physical and mental health, to the role of recreation in the nation's regional and national economies, to the role of recreation in meeting America's educational needs, to key infrastructure and budgetary issues associated with recreation on public lands; and,
- Provide a national town hall session for open discussion of key recreation issues, with participation by representatives of the principal federal recreation providers.

The morning began with four topical sessions, covering: Partnerships & Volunteerism; Access; Youth Service Organizations & Public Lands; and, Travel, Tourism & Recreation on Public Lands. All participants gathered for an afternoon plenary session to hear reports from the morning topical sessions, summaries from the five regional forums, presentations from some national recreation leaders, and a perspective from some of today's youth.



Partnerships & Volunteerism

Hosted by: *National Forest Foundation & U.S.D.A. Forest Service*

This session focused on the importance of partnerships and volunteerism to the future of quality outdoor recreation on public lands.

Background: Forest Service Partnerships

The Forest Service has a long history of working with partners through its research branch, through delivery of technical assistance in private forestry, and with conservation organizations. The agency has an increased appreciation for using partnerships to problem solve and to connect people to the land. As they look to the future, the Forest Service is re-evaluating its role in relation to partnerships, helping the agency become more relevant for collaborative work. As evidence of this, the Forest Service has built a stronger partnership with the National Forest Foundation, improved interagency collaboration, and established the National Partnership Office in Washington, D.C. As they continue to break down past barriers to furthering partnerships, the Forest Service is focused on capacity building for partnerships at all levels.

Background: Public Lands Volunteerism

To better facilitate volunteerism, the Web site—www.volunteer.gov—matches opportunities with volunteer interests. In addition, an interagency group is working to make all agreements consistent across agencies to make it easier to share volunteers. The National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass offers volunteers a free pass for completing 500 volunteer hours. With retiring baby boomers, there is a big supply of volunteers; however, there needs to be a better way of reaching them. Suggested ways to market to these volunteers include:

- Volunteer vacations.
- Advocacy of programs to build community and perpetuate donors.
- Opportunities to support learning and stewardship and to create constituencies.
- An infrastructure that allows a volunteer to just show up and be put to work.
- Increased communication between agencies; reduced competition for volunteers.

Discussion Themes

During group discussion, the following themes emerged:

- Importance of inter-relationship between partnerships and volunteers. Volunteers represent a huge and important part of our partnership work on public lands.
- Widespread recognition that agencies do not have the capacity to fully take advantage of partnerships and volunteers.
- Need for better sharing of best practices among agencies and partners. Leverage existing Web sites and databases within the interagency groups. Provide access to partners.
- Concern for long-term stream of public lands constituents and volunteers across all demographic segments. How do we reach baby boomers, diverse populations, and the next generation of land stewards?

Recommendations

- Reconvene for a longer period of time to address the issue more completely and to identify barriers, solutions, and best practices.
- Federal agencies should create a new message to represent public lands. It would be great to have a new message or icon that has the recognition and success of Smokey Bear.
- Ensure that agencies and Congress do not see volunteers as a replacement for staff, but as an advocacy group for public lands.
- Develop procedures that allow partners to make long-term plans for their work.
- Help local levels of agencies increase their relationships with local organizations. It is important to have advocates locally that can mobilize and understand local needs.
- Institute cost-share challenge initiatives on a consistent, annual basis. Create a consistent funding mechanism rather than having sporadic funding.
- Avoid reinvention of interagency structures, databases, sources of information.
- Work on the bigger picture of building constituents and volunteers for public lands, and inspiring a conservation ethic. Develop marketing tactics to engage urban populations and youth, including diversity across ethnic groups.

Youth Service Organizations & Public Lands

Hosted by: *The Corps Network & Camp Fire USA*

Youth service programs harbor the potential to inspire thousands of kids to enhance their lives and help perpetuate our natural resources through outdoor stewardship. This session focused on how youth service interests, from both the nonprofit and government sectors, can better collaborate and be more effective.

Key discussion points include:

- We need to improve communication among various youth organizations and agencies, engaging elected officials, the media and schools.
- Can these diverse groups and agencies develop a consistent, shared system or database for cataloging service learning programs?
- In connecting with the education community on this issue, the group targeted a number of organizations, including the National Association for Environmental Education, American Zoo & Aquarium Association, and the importance of looking at school systems, as well as before- and after-school care providers, summer programs, etc.
- How can we overcome parental fears about safety and security for their children?
- How can we best reach new youth audiences with youth service opportunities and how do we make those opportunities appealing? Suggestions include leveraging the interest in climate change, working with after-school care providers, utilizing publications like *Ranger Rick* magazine, teaming with the environmental education community, better promoting the successful models for youth stewardship and leadership development already taking place, promoting the individual health benefits of these programs.

The session concluded with the suggestion to create a task force of 10-12 people, made up of stakeholder groups including nonprofit organizations, youth and agencies, which would develop a six-month plan around the four key focus areas from the topical session:

1. Improving communication and capacity-sharing among groups around the table to collaboratively better engage youth in nature.
2. Promoting public health and wellness through outdoor engagement.
3. Addressing parental safety and security concerns.
4. Focusing on engaging kids outside of their traditional school times (summer vacations, before and after school).

“We are motivated and inspired by the knowledge that (our students) are making a life-long connection to the precious remnants of our local ecology. They are learning their ecological address, and we are convinced that nothing could be more basic or vital in the challenging times facing our next generation and our world’s environment.”

—Pete Leki, Ecology Coordinator

Waters School (Illinois forum)

Access

Hosted by: *National Association of Counties, Tread Lightly! & National Wild Turkey Federation*

People representing a wide array of interests—including county governments, OHV groups, sportsmen's and recreation organizations—gathered for this session to discuss the issues related to public lands access that impact the recreation experience.

Key issues include:

- Limited budgets for access and maintenance. There is an aging infrastructure and maintenance backlog compounded by decreasing budgets.
- Trail systems in disrepair, yet funds are being redirected to other areas like fire fighting.
- Keeping the outdoors relevant to current and future generations.
- Establishing partnerships and working with the private sector.
- Local involvement in the land use planning process can be tedious and time consuming.
- The process and policies for travel management.
- Lack of recorded documentation for access routes to public land. Location of public lands access points not always well known.
- Need for right of ways / easements.
- Change in public's attitudes about public lands.
- Lack of active management on public lands and the negative impact on aesthetics and wildlife populations.
- Loss of open space through urbanization and fragmentation; changing ownership of private lands affecting access and management.
- Unmanaged recreation; concentrating more people on fewer trails.
- Limitations on access prevent people from participating in outdoor recreation.
- Need better local collaboration and input on access issues and management.
- Many diverse recreation interests need consideration—from boaters to mountain bikers to OHV riders.

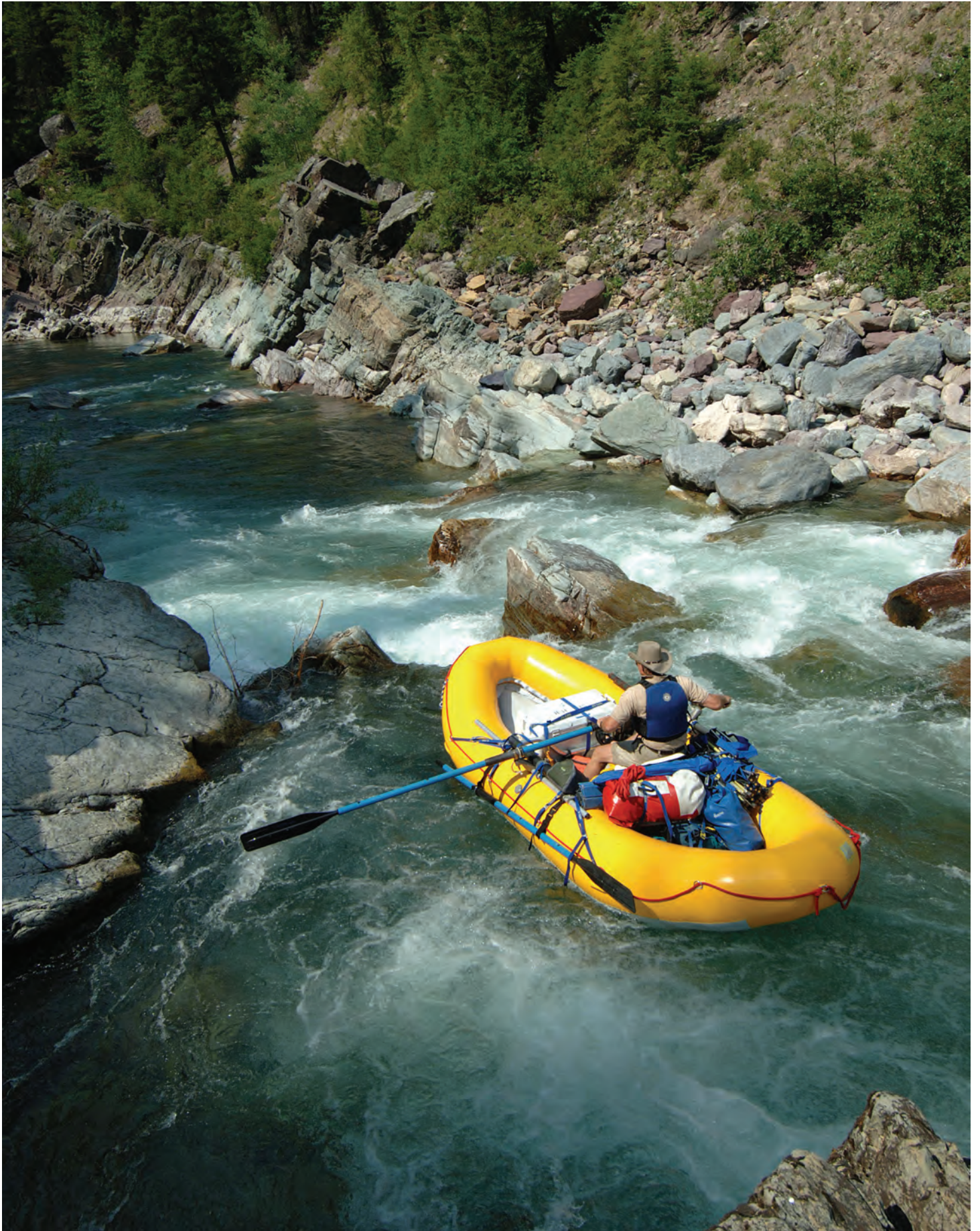
What is already being done to address access issues?

- National Wild Turkey Federation has teamed with 27 other conservation organizations to form an “access roundtable,” with USFS, USFWS, and BLM, as an ongoing platform for discussing access issues and finding innovative solutions.
- National Association of Counties (NACo) is working for improved funding through transportation bills to improve maintenance and provide better maps and route marking.
- Tread Lightly! is strengthening partnerships with the private sector to increase funding for education and communications efforts that instill a conservation ethic and support of public lands access. The “Restoration for Recreation” program is designed to help with maintenance of access routes and facilities.
- NACo is working with member counties to write land management plans that help facilitate and embrace this access management.

Suggested future solutions:

- Engage volunteers and local citizens to get to solutions.
- Adopt a system that shares access data readily.
- If funds are collected, keep that money on the ground where it is collected.
- Engage all recreation stakeholders in the decision-making process.
- Link environmental services as well as recreation services and social interest into the access planning and management process.
- Begin with good access and recreation planning as a starting, rather than ending point.
- Employ easements for better access.
- Educate our individual constituencies about access issues and encourage their support of access-related projects.
- Build multi-party partnerships to develop better and more effective access projects.
- Pool our capacity and resources to implement good access projects.
- Work toward increasing federal budgets for access improvements. Designate agency ombudsmen to work through the issues with permittees and agencies.





Travel, Tourism & Recreation on Public Lands

Hosted by: American Recreation Coalition, Southeast Tourism Society and Western States Tourism Policy Council

Travel and tourism on public lands increasingly provide important community economic support, while also nurturing citizen commitment to our natural resources. Industry, nonprofit and government travel interests met to express many concerns related to tourism on public lands and to brainstorm creative solutions. After exploring many of the general concerns related to public lands tourism, the group focused much of their time on the issue of recreation fees.

General public lands tourism and recreation issues:

- Not all federal land managers understand the many values of tourism to their lands; there is some disparity between the field office perspective and that at the national level.
- We must do a better job making outdoor experiences meaningful for youth, urban and diverse populations.
- The Forest Service budget has been increasingly consumed by fire suppression, at the expense of other programs, like travel and recreation management.
- Federal agencies have not done a good job marketing travel and recreation opportunities on public lands.

Proposed solutions:

- Collect better data on the values of tourism and public lands recreation to both local economies and individual physical and mental health.
- Promote better collaboration and communication among federal agencies, educational organizations, and outdoor industry.
- Federal agencies should recruit land managers from more diverse backgrounds, as well as more managers skilled in developing relationships with diverse publics and groups.
- Build partnerships between the private sector and federal agencies to market public lands recreation, promote its values, and provide opportunities to learn outdoor skills.
- Be creative with marketing programs: market health benefits of recreation; provide trail information in

hotel rooms; collaborate with the local and state tourism industry.

- Better coordinate travel & tourism programs at the local level, while lending advisement from the national level.

Recreation fee issues:

- Need stronger market and economic data system-wide. Determine how recreation stacks up financially against other uses, such as timber and gas. Explore how people view recreation fees in relation to the experience they expect.
- Need to better understand the actual costs to support various recreation activities.
- What's the best way and place to invest recreation fees? Should the fees stay at the site where collected or be used to help needier sites?
- Continued public resistance to paying any recreation fees at all.

Shared recommendations on recreation fees:

- Keep the fee program but continue to monitor and improve it—study carefully the relationship between fees and visitation levels. Keep in mind that fees are not the only way to raise revenue to fill gaps.
- Look at voluntary contributions (e.g. the \$1 check-off program at ski areas). Also explore sources of matching funds (e.g. National Forest Foundation model).
- Make fee retention the rule for all agencies (including the Corps of Engineers), preferably to be used at the site where collected.
- Utilize the marketing potential of fees. (Look at private sector where price is an integral part of marketing.)
- Revenue from special fee permits should be retained.
- Better coordinate fee collection and use policies and practices from agency to agency and from site to site within the same agency.
- No offsets for fee revenue. (Industry political influence essential to preventing offsets.)
- Share fee revenue with gateway communities, especially for programs providing visitor services and better education and training for public lands visitors.
- Educate the public about the values of fee revenue and how that money is invested. Collaborate with “affinity groups” that appreciate values of fees and will support them.

Opening Comments by Derrick Crandall, American Recreation Coalition

The afternoon session commenced with comments from Derrick Crandall, president of the American Recreation Coalition. He discussed the genesis of the Regional Recreation Forums, and the unique opportunity to listen to opinions around the country regarding public lands and recreation. He indicated that this is just the beginning of a continuing dialogue.

Recreation on America's Public Lands and Waters: Federal Agency Leadership Panel

A panel of federal agency leadership discussed recreation on America's public lands. Their focus turned to increasing connections between youth and urban populations and public lands; balancing recreation with conservation; simplifying bureaucracy; and, increasing partnerships.

Panelists:

- Joel Holtrop, Deputy Chief, U.S.D.A. Forest Service
- Jim Hughes, Acting Director, Bureau of Land Management
- Geoff Haskett, Assistant Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Steve Stockton, Deputy Director of Civil Works, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Steve Whitesell, Centennial Coordinator, National Park Service

Comments by Bill Possiel, National Forest Foundation

Bill Possiel, president of the National Forest Foundation, emphasized the need to expand the quantity and diversity of Americans who have personal connections with our public lands. Noting that these connections are born out of human values, he highlighted the challenge of creating bonds with individuals who possess a spectrum of values. Future decision-makers must have a personal relationship with the outdoors in order to continue the legacy of stewarding public lands, he said.

Regional Forum Reports

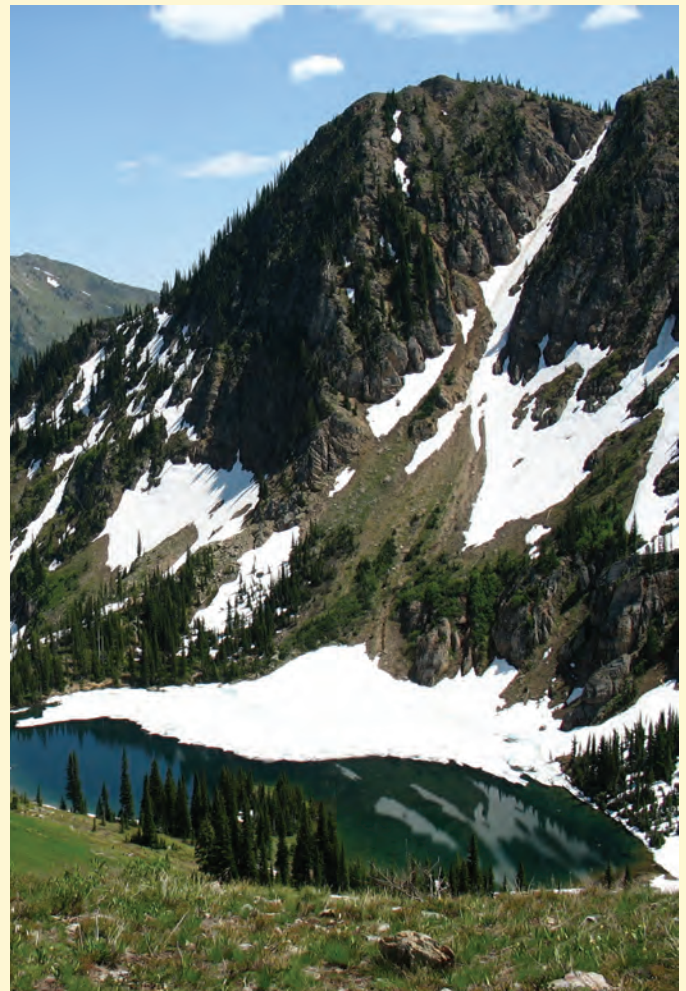
Representatives from each of the five regional recreation forums presented summary reports from their events. The highlight of those summaries came from Josh Morrison, founder of the youth outdoors organization GEEKS in the Woods, who shared the teen perspective on the outdoors and innovative ways to attract youth to nature.

Presentations by National Organizations and Interests

Several national organizations and interest groups profiled their programs and presented their perspectives on enhancing recreation and engaging youth in the outdoors. These speakers underscored the level of community involvement that is necessary to develop meaningful and lasting relationships with youth, underserved populations, and tomorrow's leaders.

Youth Panel

Derrick Crandall sat down with two youth participants to discuss their thoughts and behaviors related to technology and the outdoors. The young panelists had connections to the outdoors either from an early age or from high school, but helped enlighten the audience about how to interest youth in outdoor recreation.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

“I want to thank the conveners, regional task force members and participants for their contributions of energy, passion and ideas. I can’t think of a better way to have spent a large portion of my first year as director of recreation. I met many people inside and outside of the Forest Service, and I heard the concerns and ideas for improving recreation on all public lands. I see new coalitions forming and existing ones strengthening at both the regional and national levels as a result of the dialogue over common interests. The Forest Service will play a part in these coalitions as appropriate and will utilize the issues and solutions described in this report to continuously improve our Recreation, Heritage, Volunteer and Partnership programs in the years ahead.”

Thank you,
Jim Bedwell
Director of Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources
U.S. Forest Service

“The convergence of changes in demographics, technology, and the way people live and work in our nation has made the places we go for recreation increasingly important. The significance of National Forests was clearly reflected in the perspectives provided by participants in the recreation forums. While National Forest visitation continues to increase, it is clear that the internet generation is less inclined to enjoy the benefits of outdoor recreation. We learned many things from each other throughout the Recreation Forum process, but none more poignant than hearing directly from young people the obvious need to get youth outdoors. It is said that we care for only those things that we value. If this is true, then the very future of the 193-million-acre National Forest System depends upon the next generation enjoying and valuing this rich natural legacy.”

Bill Possiel
President
National Forest Foundation

“Time outdoors has been important for generations of Americans and has helped define our culture and society. Love of the outdoors has also inspired leaders in America to create systems of parks and forests, refuges and greenways. Today, the benefits of outdoor recreation are appreciated more and more—mental and physical health, economic vitality, parent-child relationships and education. Yet there are challenges to delivering memorable recreation experiences ranging from public agency budget limitations to competition from computer games and shopping malls. Through the Forums, we heard about those challenges—but more importantly we heard about individuals, about organizations and about partnerships that are making a difference. The Forums have refilled our idea bank and forged new alliances, and I’m excited about the results this will make for future generations of Americans.”

Derrick A. Crandall
President
American Recreation Coalition

RESOURCES AND LINKS

The regional and national recreation forums highlighted dozens of quality organizations and programs that enhance outdoor recreation and connect kids and families to the outdoors. To learn more about the many efforts profiled during the recreation forums, explore some of the links listed below.

American Recreation Coalition

1225 New York Ave. NW, Ste. 450
Washington, DC 20005
202-682-9530
www.funoutdoors.com

National Forest Foundation

Building 27, Suite 3, Ft. Missoula Rd.
Missoula, MT 59804
406-542-2805
www.nationalforestfoundation.org
www.becomeafriend.org

California Roundtable on Recreation, Parks & Tourism

California Children's Outdoor Bill of
Rights
www.calroundtable.org/cobor.htm

Camp Fire USA

www.campfire.org

Chicago Wilderness

www.chicagowilderness.org

Children & Nature Network (Richard Louv)

www.cnaturenet.org

Children, Youth & Environments Journal

University of Colorado (Louise
Chawla, Ph.D.)
www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/

Colorado Youth Corps Association

www.cyca.org

Earthwise Productions, Inc.

www.earthwiseproductionsinc.com

GEEKS in the Woods

www.geeksinthewoods.org

High Mountain Institute

www.hminet.org

Jacksonville State University

**Environmental Policy &
Information Center Field Schools**
<http://fieldschool.jsu.edu/>

Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation

www.lacountyarks.org

National Association of Counties

www.naco.org

National Wild Turkey Federation

www.nwtf.org

Oregon Parks & Recreation Department

www.oregonstateparks.org

Outdoor Industry Association

www.outdoorindustry.org

Southeast Tourism Society

www.southeasttourism.org

The Corps Network

www.corpsnetwork.org

Tread Lightly!

www.treadlightly.org

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado

www.voc.org

Western States Tourism Policy Council

www.wstpc.org

Federal Land Management Agencies

U.S.D.A. Forest Service

www.fs.fed.us

National Park Service

www.nps.gov

Bureau of Land Management

www.blm.gov

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

www.fws.gov

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

www.usace.army.mil

“We are dependent on the planet and its life-sustaining ecosystems for our very existence. It is only by connecting with and experiencing those ecosystems that we truly understand our role in nature and the impacts we have on every part of that system.”

—Rick Cables, Regional Forester, U.S.
Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region
(Colorado forum)