



Fact Sheet: Youth and the Outdoors

From parks and rivers to farmlands and forests, America's great outdoors fuel our national spirit of adventure and independence and help power our economy. Our lands and waters also are where our families go to unwind, to fish, hike, and hunt, and to spend valuable time together.

Today, however, much of America's great outdoors is under intense pressure. Open lands, farmlands and woodlands are disappearing, waterways are polluted, and a changing climate is threatening natural systems. At the same time, many Americans – especially young people – are losing touch with the outdoor places and traditions our country has always treasured. President Obama believes that for America to be at its strongest, we need healthy and accessible lands and waters and healthy and active youth who are connected to them. That is why he established the America's Great Outdoors Initiative in April, 2010, to work with the American people develop a 21st century conservation and recreation agenda.

The America's Great Outdoors Initiative turns the old ways upside down. Instead of dictating policies from Washington, it calls for supporting local, community-driven conservation ideas. Instead of growing bureaucracy, it calls for reworking inefficient policies and making the Federal Government a better partner with states, tribes, and local communities.

During the summer of 2010, senior Administration officials held 51 public listening sessions across the country, 21 of them specifically with youth. Some 10,000 Americans participated in the live sessions and more than 105,000 provided comments. The outcome of this national conversation is a report to the President, *America's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations*. Prepared in consultation with the American people, the report reflects their ideas on how to reconnect with America's lands, waters, and natural and cultural treasures, and build on the conservation successes in communities across the nation.

Youth and the Outdoors: What We Heard

In 21 youth-focused listening sessions, thousands of young people from across the country shared their experiences in the outdoors and expressed their ideas for how make America's great outdoors more relevant and accessible to future generations. From a uniformed conservation corps in Missoula, Montana to a group of high school students in Orlando, Florida to Native American youth at Haskell University in Lawrence, Kansas, these voices were diverse, passionate, and thoughtful. Some participants had spent their childhoods outdoors, working the family farm, or attending summer camps where they learned to paddle a canoe, camp, and trek. Others had rarely experienced the outdoors beyond their own backyards, but nonetheless expressed a strong desire to get outside and explore America's wealth of public lands and waters.

Studies show that young people today are spending half as much time outdoors as their parents did – and an average of more than seven hours a day with electronic media. Listening session participants cited poor access to parks and open spaces as one of the primary factors in deterring them from going outside. Young people also expressed concern about the safety of neighborhood parks, and told us that they need programs and mentors to make going outside easier and more accessible. They articulated a need for better information about how to find and access outdoor places close-to-home. Many young people are interested in finding jobs and service

opportunities on public lands, and called for more streamlined and efficient hiring processes for federal jobs. As we look to protect America's great outdoors for current and future generations, it is imperative that we continue to engage, empower, and learn from our young people.

Youth and the Outdoors: What We Are Doing

Responding to the priorities of Americans, the Obama Administration will take action to:

Provide quality jobs, career pathways, and service opportunities.

- Form a 21st Century Conservation Service Corps to engage young Americans in public lands and water restoration.
- Create an easy-to-use job locator web portal that connects qualified applicants to natural and cultural resource job opportunities across the federal government.
- Improve federal capacity for recruiting, training, and managing volunteers and volunteer programs to create a new generation of citizen stewards and mentors.

Create and enhance a new generation of safe, clean, accessible great urban parks and community green spaces, and facilitate increased recreational access to the nation's lakes and rivers waterways.

- Establish the AGO Great Urban Parks and Community Green Spaces initiative by targeting increased funding for the National Park Service's Land and Water Conservation Fund stateside matching grant program to leverage investment in new and enhanced urban parks and community green spaces.
- Support and align federal agency programs and initiatives to promote the creation, expansion and enhancement urban parks and community green spaces.
- Target technical assistance support to communities to create and enhance great urban parks and community green spaces.

Increase and improve recreational access and opportunities.

- Establish a Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation to provide the public with reliable and up-to-date web-based information and engage youth and their families in outdoor recreation.
- Support community-based programs that increase access to outdoor recreation and that improve the safety of open spaces and access routes and promote a healthy lifestyle.

Cultivate stewardship and appreciation of America's natural, cultural, and historic resources through innovative awareness-raising partnership initiatives and through education.

- Work with Let's Move Outside! to raise public awareness that experiencing America's great outdoors is fun, easy, and healthy.
- Work with the Department of Education and other federal agencies to align and support programs that advance awareness and understanding of nature's benefits for clean air and clean water..
- Support and expand existing federal programs that emphasize place-based, experiential learning, including: the National Park Service's Parks as Classrooms and Junior Ranger programs; U.S.Forest Service's Children's Forests, and Bureau of Land Management's Take it Outside and Hands on the Land programs.

Build stewardship values and engage youth in the implementation of AGO.

- Create an America's Great Outdoors youth engagement strategy.

The full AGO Report and a separate pullout, "Youth and America's Great Outdoors," is available at: www.doi.gov/AmericasGreatOutdoors.