Children In Nature
Alberta Recreation and Parks Youth Development through Recreation Services - Banff, March 2010

Cliff Lacey
ARPA Children in Nature Specialist
clifflacey@telusplanet.net
780-417-6661
Children In Nature
Alberta Recreation and Parks

- Overview of the book “Last Child in the Woods” by Richard Louv
- Review the ARPA “Dialogue on Children in Nature” from June 2008 in Red Deer
- Overview of Alberta initiatives of ‘08 and ’09
“Last Child in the Woods”

“Our society is teaching young people to avoid direct experience in nature. That lesson is delivered in schools, families, even organizations devoted to the outdoors, and codified in the legal and regulatory structures of many of our communities” Richard Louv, “Last Child in the Woods”
“Last Child in the Woods”

- We are in “The Third Frontier” (after settling the west and the agricultural era)
  - Severance from our foods origins
  - Only an intellectual understanding of animals
  - The rise of a new kind of suburban form.
- The “criminalization” of outdoor play
  - Tree forts and bike ramps are a “risk” to land owners
“Last Child in the Woods”

- Study of activity levels in pre-school children found that, “an indoor, sedentary childhood is linked to mental health problems” later in life. James Sallis
- Children have “the urge to affiliate with other forms of life” - called Biophilia
- The therapeutic value of pets and gardens has been proven...why not time in nature?
“Last Child in the Woods”

- Nature as a treatment for obesity, ADHD and Autism
- Children playing in natural settings develop broader senses and better problem solving skills
- Children engage in more creative play in green spaces, not manufactured areas
Edith Cobb observed “inventiveness and imagination…was rooted in early experiences in nature.”

Nature nurtures creativity - the story of the young man with the “WIGGLES”
“Last Child in the Woods”

- Nature can be a “restorative environment” for ADHD and autism but also for those in hospital beds or offices that look out upon open green spaces.
- The bogey-man syndrome - kids involved in unstructured play are sure to find trouble - the concept of stranger danger
Ecophobia or the fear of ecological deterioration (perpetuated by well meaning environmental organizations) may actually steer kids away from the outdoors.

Natural history is no longer a significant part of school curriculum.

Given the path we are on, where will the future stewards of nature come from?
“Last Child in the Woods”

- Louv cites fishing and “wildcrafting” as activities that could bring families into nature.
- Hyperawareness in nature as a child fosters more self awareness as an adult.
- We are encouraged to bring real world learning about nature, back into our schools by cleaning up streams or wild lands near our communities.
“Last Child in the Woods”

- Louv encourages eco-schools like the Toyota Evergreen Learning Grounds programs in Canada.
- Universities do not value natural history, producing scientists with little knowledge of the natural world but with a focus on revenue producing research.
“Last Child in the Woods”

- Liability issues cramp our ability to take kids outdoors. Louv suggests fighting some cases to establish case law on the topic of risk and liability.
- We need to conserve natural landscapes as well as active playing fields to make each metropolis a “zoopolis”
“Last Child in the Woods”

- At the close of the book, the author cites a variety of circumstances and ideas that hold promise for the future.
- Louv’s main message being “It is not too late, if we act NOW”
- In Spring 2009 in Edmonton, Louv suggested we should support the formation of Nature Clubs in our communities
“Red Deer Dialogue”

What prevents children from engaging with nature? THE CHALLENGES

- Accessibility and access
- Phobia about being outdoors
- Misperceptions about who is equipped to educate children about nature
- Marketing and media scare parents
- Perceived and real risks about the natural world
How Some See Our Kids
“Red Deer Dialogue”

- Legal restrictions and liability
- Appropriate use of technology and nature
- Social values
- Changing demographics

To cope with these challenges the group came up with nine strategies to better engage children with nature:
“Red Deer Dialogue”

- These 9 strategies are:
  - Discover unidentified barriers that prevent children from engaging with nature
  - Identify stakeholders, partners and actions to advance engaging children with nature
  - Develop the K - 6 school program in Alberta to engage children with nature
  - Address social values about nature
“Red Deer Dialogue”

- Address and find solutions to real or perceived fears about nature
- Address the risks of nature activities; the Liability Chill and what we can do about it
- Create child-friendly communities
- Balance use vs. conservation of natural areas
- Protect available Green Space
“Red Deer Dialogue”

From these strategies, the following actions are to be taken

- Promote the reading of “Last Child in the Woods”
- Create an inventory of activities underway elsewhere to engage children in nature
- Promote Children in Nature through existing Alberta organizations
- Develop a presentation about engaging children in nature
“New Developments”

- On the way to B.C., Richard Louv stopped in Edmonton on March 5, 2009 for lunch with 200 ARPA guests and meetings with senior government officials and the local press. Our goal was to bring this issue to the public and to policy makers.

- The author was also the keynote at “Get Outside! It’s in our Nature”, a Forum organized by the Canadian Nature Alliance in B.C., Mar. 6 - 8, 2009.
"New Developments"

- So what is happening in Alberta?
- Program ideas that are working from ARPA listserv
  - Lil Sprouts by Parent Link Strathcona
  - Seedlings Preschool in Stony Plain
  - Edmonton Natural Area Play Rangers
  - Evergreen Canada – Brightview School
  - Evergreen Canada – Drayton Valley
“New Developments”

- More programs for children and youth
  - Kerry Wood Nature Centre
  - Calgary Bird Sanctuary – Bird School
  - Boys and Girls Clubs – Cool Moves
  - River Watch – north and south
  - Parks Canada Palisades Stewardship Education Centre - Jasper
Lil Sprouts – Parent Link

- This program was offered by Strathcona Parent Link and addresses three of the pillars of their mandate:
  - Early Childhood Development
  - Parent Education
  - Family Supports

- Families with infants to 6 year old children participated in a Community gardens program. 3 sites are planned for 2010.
Lil Sprouts – Getting it ON!
Kids learn to plant seedlings at Lil Sprouts
Seedlings Preschool

- Stony Plain AB., for 2 1/2 to 5 year olds
- Cara Linzmayer offers child led project based learning
- Children have their own garden, secret fort, worm composting and recycling program
- Website is www.seedlinspreschool.ca
Edmonton Play Rangers

- Activities designed for 6 to 16 year olds included predator and prey, nature photography, shelter building and wide games, orienteering, fire building and bannock making.
- Participation was mainly from 6 to 12 year olds during first year of operation.
- Activities are run by City of Edmonton staff in designated natural area parks within city limits.
- For more info contact Sherry.Wallace@edmonton.ca
Geocaching was found to be too difficult for the younger children and has been removed from the program.

In 2010, 5 natural park sites will host the program

Younger children may attend with a parent or guardian.

Where: Dunluce Forest
(Entrance on the West side of the Forest by 158 Avenue and 121 Street)

When: Thursdays, September 17 to October 29
2:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Who: Anyone ages 6 – 16 that is looking for some fun in the outdoors!
If you are under the age of 6, you are still welcome to be a Junior Play Ranger with either a parent/guardian or a sibling over the age of 10.

The program is FREE and drop-in.
No registration required.
Program runs rain or shine, but will be cancelled in case of severe weather.

For more information on the program, call 496-2967.
Evergreen Canada

• Evergreen is a charity leading Canada’s urban greening movement.

• We’ve helped create and sustain thousands of natural outdoor spaces in cities across the country.

• We believe that by working together we can all enjoy greener, healthier, happier lives in balance with nature.

• Edmonton area contact kathygoble@newlinc.com for more info on the opportunities offered by Evergreen.
Brightview Elementary
Before
Student Design Input
Student Research and Design Displayed
Creating/Planting
Celebration – New Outdoor Classroom
Drayton Valley Early Childhood Development Centre

- Drayton Valley created an Eco-Park behind their Early Childhood Development Centre.
- This park was designed Evergreen.
- The Park incorporates natural elements like logs, boulders, and vegetation among play structures to create an environment that sparks a child’s imagination.
- The park has proven popular with seniors as well.
- Contact ecdc@incentre.net for more info
Drayton Valley Early Childhood Development Centre
Since 1987, the Kerry Wood Nature Centre in Red Deer has run a nature preschool program.

A child comes for two - half days per week, usually for one or two years.

A recent study revealed that after 7 years, participants were more "connected to nature" than non-participants.

See study at [http://dspace.royalroads.ca/docs/handle/10170/58](http://dspace.royalroads.ca/docs/handle/10170/58)

Contact [manager@waskasooypark.ca](mailto:manager@waskasooypark.ca) for info
Red Deer Nature
Pre-school Participants
The week long program for K – 12 focuses on long-term object-based learning, hands-on experiences, journaling, reflecting and observing in the Sanctuary.

Activities and presentations take place daily that both bring nature into the Bird School classroom and bring the class out to nature.

Studies have shown that students with these experiences have increased creative writing skills. See http://www.chevronopenminds.ca/images/CREATINGTHOUGHTFULWRITERS.pdf for details.

Contact kym.mcculley@calgary for more info.
Cool Moves – Edmonton Boys and Girls Club, Alberta Parks and City of Edmonton

- Cool Moves is an innovative, collaborative, coordinated approach to promoting healthy choices and enhancing the health outcomes of children and youth.
- The single day pilot program was attended by 25 children, ages 6 – 17 and six club supervisors.
- Children were given 8 hours of outdoor time at Miquelon Provincial Park.
- For info contact kevin.cantelon@gov.ab.ca
“Cool Moves” targeted inner city children and youth
Alberta Riverwatch helps science classes explore a 10 km section of their local river during a raft float trip. Along the way, students make shoreline stops to conduct water chemistry and biology tests. Back at school, the water quality data is used to answer the question, "How healthy is your river?"
Riverwatch Alberta

Bow River, Calgary...4500 students
Red Deer River, Red Deer...150 students
North Sask. River, Edmonton...2500 students
North Sask. River, Drayton Valley...200 students
Clearwater River, Ft. McMurray...350 students

Grade 8 age 13...25%   See website
Grade 9 age 14....50%   www.riverwatch.ab.ca
Grade 11 age 17...25%
Parks Canada Palisades Stewardship Education Centre - Jasper

**Vision**  “Canadian youth will share a passion and appreciation for Canada’s National Parks and National Historic Sites; through personal connection they will develop a sense of place and belonging. Youth will move beyond participation towards active ambassadorship.”

- Calgary Zoo Learning Journey
- SEVEC Québec Exchange Program
- Jasper High School Icefield’s Bike Trip
- Robert Bateman “Get to Know Your Wild Neighbour”
Parks Canada Palisades
Stewardship Education Centre - Jasper

Contact james.bartram@pc.gc.ca for more info.
“I do encourage outdoor play and physical activity (which is an uphill battle when many parents think the Wii is the solution :) … I have actually had parents who refuse to go outside with their children, saying they either hate the winter, or their neighborhood, or just being outdoors.”

Clearly we have a long way to go!
Thank you for your attention.

Background information and this presentation have been provided to the conference organizers.

Any Questions?