

Nature's Children

Looking back on my childhood, I consider myself fortunate that my parents were outdoorsy people. They were constantly taking the four of us kids on camping trips all over the place. And when we moved to sunny Florida, we went fishing almost every week. But in today's world, it seems that many parents, educators and even physicians are concerned with the disconnection between kids and nature.

American children in past generations have grown up with an understanding and respect for the natural world. Today, with new technology and televisions and computers in every room, kids may be occupied with activities indoors. Are they missing out?

According to the United States Forest Service, "This separation from nature, coupled with a sedentary lifestyle, has serious implications for long-term health and well-being of our nation's children. These health concerns are behind expectations that the next generation will have a shorter life expectancy than its parents. Disconnection from nature also translates into a shaky future for sustainable forests and healthy public lands. Any plan to sustain healthy productive ecosystems must ensure that people remain connected to them."

It is critical that our future generations understand nature and why it is so important. We rely on them to grow up into responsible citizens who will support conservation and work toward a bright future for our earth. Unfortunately, since 1995, interest in natural resource careers has been on the decline by 40 percent. This is somewhat frightening since just over a decade ago, these careers were extremely competitive and difficult to get in to in many cases.

The opportunity to gain knowledge of the great outdoors may be lost on much of today's youth. In the past, kids learned from their daily activities. They may have had outdoor chores or just learned from playing in the natural environment. They saw the connection of our natural resources to their communities and homes. Over the past 40 years, family life has changed so much. Kids may be more interested in watching their favorite television show or playing computer games than playing outside and making fascinating discoveries about nature.

"The American population has shifted from rural settings to metropolitan areas. More than 80 percent of the 300 million Americans live in cities, with fewer connections to rural or natural areas. Many children live in cities and don't have easy access to parks or natural areas." (U.S. Forest Service)

Throughout history, the loss of forests has resulted first in floods, erosion of fertile soils, reduced productivity, followed in many parts of the world by increased poverty, population dislocations and civil strife. This should be a lesson in history. We must learn from the mistakes that have been made in the past. If we do not actively take a part in our children's education regarding the environment, what legacy are we leaving behind?

Take time out of your busy lifestyle to take a child out into nature. There are so many beautiful natural areas in Highlands County. Sure, they may kick and scream at first as you tear them

away from the computer. But once you get out in nature, I would venture to say that you will enjoy it. The natural world has a way of soothing the soul.

Get involved with a nature based group such as Scouts or 4-H. Read up on your local parks and natural areas. Find out about where you live. Highlands County is one of the most fascinating and unique natural areas in the world. Take time to learn about it. Have a picnic! Or just go for a walk!

If you need some help, visit our website at www.highlandsswcd.org and get some information on environmental subjects or give us a call at (863) 402-6545 and find out how you and your children or grandchildren can get involved with environmental projects in this county.

To waste, to destroy our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed. *Theodore Roosevelt*