



## American Recreation Coalition

*Dedicated to the protection and enhancement of everyone's right to health and happiness through recreation.*

# NEWS

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### **NEW RESEARCH EFFORT WILL EXAMINE YOUTH/OUTDOORS/TECHNOLOGY CONNECTION**

Washington, D.C. (January 26, 2007) – Candid comments by a panel of young people active in the outdoors at the January 2007 Partners Outdoors national conference have sparked a research effort to better understand the relationship of the outdoors to today's American youth and the possible roles for technology in attracting them to, and improving their experiences while in, the outdoors. The research will combine resources of the Forest Service, the Los Angeles City Department of Recreation and Parks and the American Recreation Coalition (ARC) and will be field tested in Los Angeles in mid March 2007.

According to ARC President Derrick Crandall, the youth panelists at Partners Outdoors delivered two clear messages to the public and private recreation leaders gathered at Lake Arrowhead, California. First, parents should plan actions which increase young people's contact with the outdoors, even in the face of resistance and expressed preferences for time at malls and on computers. Second, federal, state, local and private recreation interests must assist by helping find ways for youth to enjoy time outdoors, whether pursuing traditional activities or utilizing new gadgets and technology.

Forest Service researchers and engineering staff reacted promptly, designing a pilot research effort to look closely at the relationship between pre-teen children and the outdoors. The Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks will arrange for and host a diverse group of young people at Griffith Park in Los Angeles, an urban wilderness and recreation complex. Forest Service social science researchers out of the Pacific Southwest Research Station are developing research protocols and will be there to observe the activities. They believe that such observations, here and elsewhere, will have long-term national implications for providing

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## **New Research Effort Will Examine Youth/Outdoors/Technology Connection**

### **Add One**

outdoor recreation experiences that will make young visitors into lifelong outdoor recreationists. Debbie Chavez, lead researcher, said that these efforts build upon traditions of the Forest Service in the region, including the Children's Forest in the San Bernardino National Forest. The research is especially relevant in southern California, she noted, because of the multi-cultural nature of communities near the forests and the tradition of visitor interest monitoring for the four national forests ringing Los Angeles.

The Forest Service's San Dimas Technology and Development Center (SDTDC), a premier engineering cadre long assisting the Forest Service to develop emerging technology for natural resource management, fire fighting and other tasks, will play a central role in the research efforts. SDTDC Director John Fehr noted, "I've reviewed countless national forest plans and observed lengthy discussion of alternatives for habitat and natural resource management. I've never seen a discussion of alternative means to challenge the growing disconnection between youth and the outdoors." Fehr went on to say that if getting youth into the outdoors is a national priority, then forest plans need to address it and the SDTDC can assist in this effort by "exploring ways to reach kids with technology before and during their forest experiences and then provide practical guidance to forests on alternative approaches and new strategies, from podcasts to geocaching."

Jon Kirk Mukri, General Manager of the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, a participant and panelist at Partners Outdoors 2007, has enthusiastically embraced the efforts of the Forest Service and the American Recreation Coalition to move forward in Los Angeles with recommendations for action developed at the three-day conference. He hopes that the "March 17 pilot program will lead to a sustainable national research effort equipping both the public and private sectors to better understand how to develop a strong link between America's youth and the outdoors in the Twenty-First Century."

The Partners Outdoors program was initiated in 1992 to draw together tomorrow's leaders from federal recreation-providing agencies and the recreation industry in order to accomplish two goals: (1) to reinforce an awareness of shared customers and interdependence of the public and private sectors and (2) to catalyze partnership-based actions to better serve recreation visitors to public lands.

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## **New Research Effort Will Examine Youth/Outdoors/Technology Connection**

### **Add Two**

This year's conference theme, "Unlocking the Fun and Benefits of the Outdoors to Urban Americans, Especially Urban Youth", is especially relevant in light of recent national publicity about decreases in national park visitation, a childhood obesity epidemic and the 21st century's changing American demographic. And making visits to the outdoors enjoyable and memorable by providing appropriate, diverse opportunities for healthy fun and learning for children and families is now a major focus of federal land management agencies.

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