

Preserving past traditions, creating new connections



governor's outdoor task force report

Edward G. Rendell, Governor



introduction and executive summary

www.connectoutdoors.state.pa.us



introduction and executive summary

Once a place whose people lived close to the land and attuned to the seasons, America is becoming an “indoor” nation. Urbanization consumes forests and farms, children spend more time watching television than playing outdoors and obesity rates are climbing. In his landmark book *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv called the growing isolation of Americans from outdoor experience “nature-deficit disorder.” Louv's book explored how the destruction of natural landscapes by urban sprawl, community design that denies access to nature, and the explosion of electronic distractions are cutting contact with the natural world from American childhood. “Baby boomers—Americans born between 1946 and 1964,” he wrote, “may constitute the last generation of Americans to share an intimate, familial attachment to the land and water.”¹

Louv's book focused on children but, increasingly, Americans of all ages are insulated from contact with woods, fields, streams and wild living things. The implications of this widening gulf are enormous, threatening our physical health, emotional well being, and the environmental quality of our communities and our world.

In March 2007, Pennsylvania Governor Edward G. Rendell convened a two-day conference to address these trends. This first-of-its-kind exchange on reconnecting Pennsylvanians with the outdoors assembled experts and organizations with various perspectives on the relationship between people and the outdoors. Leaders from conservation groups, government, business, health care, recreation, academic institutions, and local municipalities sought strategies to encourage meaningful contact with the natural world and physically active lifestyles.

Speakers from the outdoor recreation industry, environmental and conservation organizations, government, health care, universities and the press discussed realities in modern life that present obstacles to contact with nature. Presentations and large and small group discussions called on participants to consider the influence of diminished outdoor experience and sedentary, indoor lifestyles on human health and the future of environmental stewardship.



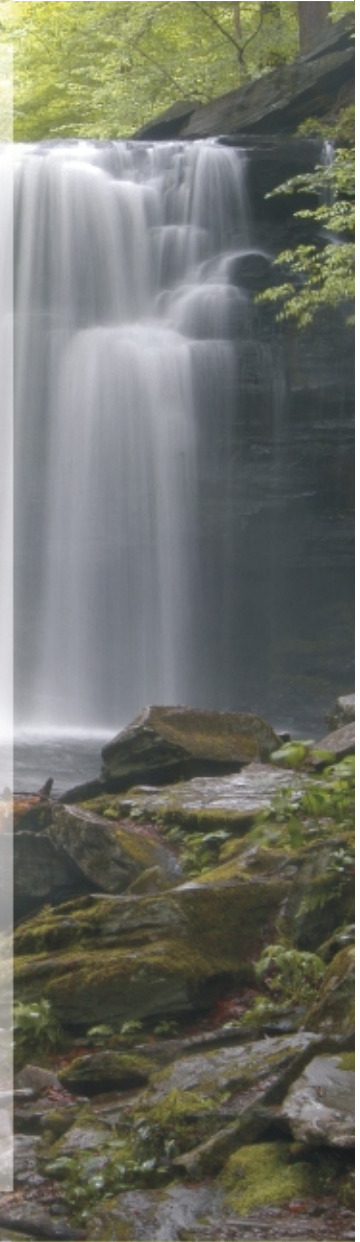
National Wildlife Federation President and Chief Executive Officer Larry Schweiger related a story that distilled these concerns into a few sentences. Schweiger told about sitting next to a young boy on an airliner as the plane flew over the Grand Canyon while the morning sun struck across the canyon walls, igniting them with color and stark contrasts in shadow and light. The boy, Schweiger explained, was furiously fingering the controls of a hand-held electronic game while the pilot's voice invited passengers to look out the cabin's left windows and enjoy the view.

"His eyes never left that Game Boy," Schweiger said. "Not for a single second."

Schweiger said he could not stop thinking about the incident. It's alarming, he said, because, "We only save what we love and we only love what we know."

This sentiment was echoed by Pennsylvanians across the commonwealth who were unable to attend the Governor's Outdoor Conference, but attended a series of public meetings held throughout the summer of 2007. Co-chairs of an appointed Governor's Outdoor Task Force presented the original conference findings and invited citizens to share their concerns and propose solutions.

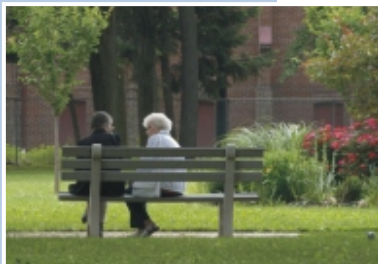
During the months that followed, the 16-member Task Force met to forge this final report, summarizing input from the conference and public meetings, and offering the recommendations on the next three pages to reconnect Pennsylvanians with the outdoors in their schools, communities and beyond.





connecting in schools

- Promote resource materials that integrate outdoor environmental learning with other subjects
- Provide teachers with curricula relevant and accessible to minority populations
- Create and support opportunities for outdoor physical play on school property and in the neighborhood
- Encourage co-location of school playfields and community recreation areas, and assure that both are walkable from residential areas and connected to other open spaces and natural areas
- Use school-based wellness campaigns to inform parents, school boards and PTAs about the health benefits of outdoor recreation
- Train teachers how to teach outdoors
- Encourage use of school grounds or nearby lands as outdoor, nature-based learning resources
- Help Pennsylvania schools evaluate land holdings, develop school ground master plans and implement nature-based education
- Bring private and non-profit partners into schools to share their unique outdoor recreation equipment and enthusiasm



connecting in communities

- Celebrate open space as a positive aspect of cities and towns
- Distribute information on green, healthy communities and the benefits they provide
- Inform and train municipal officials, civic groups and developers on benefits of and demand for walkable communities
- Reward planning for sustainable communities through state funding criteria
- Link civic, religious and community groups with organizations already engaged in outdoor volunteer efforts
- Enlist nontraditional partners to promote outdoor destinations and attract a broader audience
- Provide resources and training for the professionals who teach outdoor skills to youth and the general public



- Identify and develop connectors between communities and outdoor resources like trails and rivers
- Provide technical assistance and training to recreation providers, homeowners and businesses
- Develop local public transportation routes to nearby parks, outdoor areas, nature centers and trails, especially those near urban areas

connecting in nature

- Develop a “master” web portal to cross-reference the diverse outdoor resources available
- Encourage media outlets to adopt more positive slants in weather forecasts
- Engage media professionals by recognizing coverage that highlights Pennsylvania’s outdoors
- Develop and convey consistent messages about stewardship of our natural resources
- Redefine outdoor experience to embrace technologies that may have greater relevance for younger generations, like geocaching and podcasts
- Develop and support mentoring programs that encourage fishing and hunting
- Develop messages about hunting to better communicate factors such as ecosystem management, environmental stewardship, and eating fresh, natural “locally produced” foods
- Connect people to wildlife through wildlife-based nature tourism and events and programs on wildlife viewing, wildlife photography, etc.
- Compile a master database of wildlife programs and events offered by parks and nature centers throughout the state
- Expand commonwealth business support programs to include the many businesses that make up the outdoor economy
- Explore ways to reduce the liability exposure of outdoor recreation providers
- Connect youth with the variety of outdoors careers by investigating current opportunities and communicating them to students
- Engage professional associations, sustainable business networks, employment advocacy organizations and others in exploring strategies to support and grow our green economy





- Survey Pennsylvanians to understand how they use outdoor resources and how they would like to use them in the future
- Add new public lands of significant natural value, particularly tracts that connect people to existing public lands
- Assess interpretive and directional signs and printed materials to make sure that the invitation to enjoy the outdoors is extended to all
- Identify opportunities to keep private lands open for public use
- Establish greater river access for fishing and non-powered boating in our large cities
- Develop a guide to public access, with model permits and hold-harmless agreements for private landowners
- Explore development and distribution of model signage that would enable landowners to permit some activities of their choosing while restricting others
- Explore establishing a liability or insurance fund, or tax credits for private landowners who permit appropriate public use
- Examine and test adjustments to fishing and hunting seasons that make it easier to participate in the sports
- Consider starting the school year one week later to give families an additional three-day weekend to enjoy the outdoors and one another



Recognizing the imperative to Pennsylvania's future and the complex challenges, the Task Force recommends establishment of a Governor's Commission on People and Outdoor Connections, representing these private and public perspectives, to motivate, guide, and promote implementation of the recommendations set forth in this report.



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