

News Release
For Immediate Release, Wednesday, April 26, 2017

Contacts:
Dave Case or Daniel Escher, Ph.D.
DJ Case & Associates
(574) 258-0100
info@natureofamericans.org
NatureofAmericans.org

New Study Shows Americans' Deep Appreciation for Nature, Barriers to Connection

Contact with nature is an important part of growing up and linking Americans to one another; competing priorities and other factors impede getting outdoors.

The findings from an unprecedented national study of Americans' relationship to nature reveal an alarming disconnection, but also widespread opportunities for reconnecting. The results are prompting nature conservation, environmental education, and outdoor recreation leaders to rethink how they work to connect people with nature.

The Nature of Americans National Report: Disconnection and Recommendations for Reconnection reveals important insights from a study of nearly 12,000 adults, 8 to 12 year old children, and parents, and provides actionable recommendations to open the outdoors for all.

Americans encounter a number of society-wide forces disconnecting them from nature. Americans face competing priorities for their time, attention, and money. They live in places that often have more concrete than green space. It is increasingly normal to spend little time outside.

- More than half of adults report spending five hours or less in nature each week, and most are satisfied with this minimal amount of time. Many parents and older adults lament that children today are growing up with limited opportunities to experience nature.
- Parents say their 8 to 12 year old children spend three times as many hours with computers and TVs each week as they do playing outside.

Despite these challenges, there is opportunity. Americans of all backgrounds recognize that nature helps them grow healthy, be happy, and enjoy family and friends. Adults and children enjoy their time in nature. They feel affection for nature, are attracted to its beauty, appreciate its resources, and value its role in intellectual and spiritual development.

- Over three-quarters of adults rate contact with nature as very or extremely important for their physical health and emotional outlook.
- One-quarter of parents surveyed say contact with nature has improved their child's weight, attention span, energy, anxiety, asthma or other health outcomes.
- Three-quarters of adults support increasing the number of programs for Americans to enjoy nature, the outdoors, and wildlife. More than one-half think programs for Americans to enjoy nature and wildlife are underfunded.

- Seven out of 10 children surveyed would rather explore woods and trees than play on neat-looking grass. Eight out of 10 like activities such as climbing trees and camping.

Restoring Americans’ connection to nature requires overcoming the gap between interest and action.

The Nature of Americans National Report details recommendations for restoring Americans’ connection to nature, including:

- Pay close attention to—and respond to—adults’ existing concerns about younger generations’ disconnection from nature.
- For adults and children, promote nature not only as a place for experiences, but also as a place for involvement and care.
- Assure adults and children that time in nature can be (and even ought to be) social.
- Support mentorship that extends beyond the parent–child relationship.
- Carefully consider how different sectors promote what “good” connection with nature is or ought to be.
- Deepen local experiences in nature near home.
- For children and adults, use geographically local or familiar activities as a bridge to geographically distant or unfamiliar activities.
- Provide socially safe and satisfying places outdoors, especially for urban and minority adults and children.
- Promote experiences in nature that match Americans’ multidimensional values of nature.
- For adults, promote conservation efforts as a way to improve their overall community and quality of life.
- Join parents, children, and adults alike in recognizing that expenditures on children’s engagement with nature are fundamentally important investments.
- Build partnerships among professionals in healthcare, education, urban planning, conservation, community development, and other sectors.

The core premise of these recommendations is that connection to nature is not a dispensable amenity but, rather, is essential to the health, economic prosperity, quality of life, and social well-being of all Americans.

The Nature of Americans is led by DJ Case & Associates. It builds on the late Dr. Stephen R. Kellert’s research on the importance of contact with nature to human well-being. This unique public–private collaborative is sponsored by the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Disney Conservation Fund, Morrison Family Foundation, Wildlife Management Institute, and Yale University.

More information and reports are available at NatureofAmericans.org.

Following are quotes from collaborators:

“This study will be of great importance to us as we look for ways to best engage Americans of all backgrounds in nature, wildlife conservation and their public lands. It’s our job not only to help friends and families connect their passion for the outdoors with their great National Wildlife

Refuge System heritage, but also to ensure that this unparalleled American legacy of public lands stewardship for the benefit of all continues long into the future.”

Jim Kurth, Acting Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

“Americans clearly care about nature and recognize its benefits for their health and wellbeing. Yet alarmingly, The Nature of Americans research findings show it is becoming normal to stay indoors. Our challenge is to work together to reverse that trend and ensure that more of us experience the natural world. These results will help fish and wildlife agencies across the nation encourage more Americans to get outdoors and enjoy fish and wildlife resources.”

Nick Wiley, President, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

“We are proud to have helped support The Nature of Americans study, which reinforces the importance of developing compelling content and experiences that connect people to the magic of nature. It is so critical that we all work together to help the next generation live happier and healthier lives – while inspiring them to care for the environment.”

Kevin Callahan, Vice President, Corporate Citizenship, The Walt Disney Company

“The Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida is a proud partner in this ground-breaking research. Floridians clearly shared how important their connection to nature is, and how vital it is to continue efforts to instill in our children a love and respect for the out of doors. The results of this remarkable project will have lasting effects for generations to come.”

Richard “Dick” Corbett, Chairman, Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida

“The vitality of our state’s efforts to conserve our wild things and wild places depends on the connection Texans have with the natural world around them. For us to be successful engaging our diverse and burgeoning communities, it is imperative that we understand how people from all ages, backgrounds, and geographies view nature and how they choose to experience the outdoors. The Nature of Americans study helps answer these fundamental questions, giving us much-needed insight about how best to tailor future outreach, programs, and services to meet people where they really are, not where we assume they are.”

Carter Smith, Executive Director, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

“The results and recommendations of this unprecedented study chart a clear path towards happier, healthier lives. Parents and organizations must make outside activities a priority in their lives. Whether at a national park, wildlife refuge, state or neighborhood park, or in the backyard, Americans must connect to nature to fully develop socially and physically.”

Steve Williams, President, Wildlife Management Institute

“We live in a world more and more disconnected from nature, but the growing question—and perhaps the one of most concern—is why. This groundbreaking research delves into the depths of this disconnect with nature to give conservation organizations a glimpse of the hard work that needs to happen to keep conservation relevant in the 21st century. This is a call to action and we must act!”

Sara Parker Pauley, Director, Missouri Department of Conservation

“I’m proud that during my tenure as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service director, we provided major financial support for this incredibly important research. Now, as president and CEO of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, I’m heartened to see that zoos and aquariums rank among the favorite, most popular, and most memorable nature activities of parents and children, but especially children. Because America is increasingly urban, it is clear that zoos, aquariums, and nature and science centers will become increasingly important opportunities for people to connect to and enjoy the benefits of nature. AZA’s 232 accredited members are ready to run toward this opportunity.”

Dan Ashe, President and CEO, Association of Zoos and Aquariums

“This study illuminates what many of us have known to be true for years — that we enjoy and benefit from our time outdoors, but don’t get outside nearly enough; that access to, and comfort in, nature is divided along racial lines; and that we develop a love for nature when we are able to experience it regularly and socially. Now — armed with data affirming these statements — I am hopeful that we will all take more seriously the importance of connecting children and adults with the natural world. We look forward to supporting the creative and thoughtful programming that this data demands of us.”

Lois Morrison, Executive Director, Harold H. and Adeline S. Morrison Family Foundation

“As one of the foremost non-profit conservation organizations focused on protecting and restoring habitat, Ducks Unlimited is very interested in the results of this important study of Americans and nature. We have long recognized the benefits of the natural world to people and our society, and this outstanding study not only reinforces how important it is, but also informs Ducks Unlimited about how to design our work to help contribute to Americans living healthier and happier lives.”

Dale Hall, CEO, Ducks Unlimited

“The extraordinarily insightful Nature of Americans study illuminates both the longing for and barriers to the natural world, and offers new documentation that will help those who connect children, families and communities to the natural world. For example, the insight that nature experiences are so often intensely social activities, a reminder of a sometimes forgotten key to connecting children to nature. Congratulations to the late Steve Kellert and DJ Case for such fine work.”

Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods* and chairman emeritus of the Children & Nature Network