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From: Jim Blankenship [jblanken@bsamail.org]
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To: Jim Blankenship
Subject: Kids, Scouting, and Nature

[Grand Columbia Council](#)

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Chief Scout Executive Bob Mazzuca's Blog: Kids, Scouting, and Nature

Recently, I had a great discussion with Frank Reigelman, our director of camping and conservation, about the importance of diverting our young people away from filling their time with the "indoor life" of TV, video games, and computer keyboards and introducing them to the wonders of nature and exploring the great outdoors. The long-forgotten yell of "I'm going to play outside" has often been replaced by "Has anyone seen my iPod?" Below are Frank's thoughts on the topic as this week's guest blogger:

In his 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv coined the phrase "nature deficit disorder" to describe the impact on children of not playing out of doors. This book served notice to the outdoor community that many negative outcomes would result from the disconnect between children and nature. There is tremendous debate in the outdoor recreation industry about the decline of children participating in outdoor activities. The shift has taken place in a generation. As recently as the 1960s and 1970s, children would play outside with few restrictions and with great spontaneity. Today's youngsters are routinely scheduled and seldom have an opportunity to simply play simply for the sake of fun. Attendance at our national parks has declined during this period, and the hunting, fishing, and boating industries are experiencing a decrease in young people and families participating in the outdoors.

Some of the circumstances influencing this turn of events are:

- The typical young person today spends six and one-half hours in front of a screen (computer, game, television, or cell phone) each day-over 45 hours per week!
- Children today have "play dates"-scheduled in advance and carefully monitored-not likely to result in creative play.
- Single-parent and two-working-parent families limit free-time activities.
- Obesity is becoming an epidemic, and for the first time, life expectancies are predicted to decline by the middle of this century.

In the conservation movement, land managers wonder who will follow them as stewards of our natural resources. Because young people are not connected with nature, they are less likely to pursue careers in natural resource-related fields. In addition, there is a real possibility that this disinterest will carry over into public policy decisions affecting the future of public lands.

The Boy Scouts of America is in a position to have a positive impact on this trend. Scouting has always connected young people with nature and continues to use nature as its primary classroom for fun and adventure. With thousands of Scouts in long-term resident summer camp and attending weekend outings during the year, our members experience nature firsthand. They learn to appreciate nature, to adapt to changing conditions, and to leave the land better for the next camper. Scouts perform countless service hours for parks and public lands annually, often providing labor that otherwise would not happen without Scouts doing a Good Turn.

Scouting is the perfect antidote to "screen time." On a weekend outing, a boy may spend 36 to 48 hours in nature, more than balancing his time in front of a screen. This same outing will keep him active and improve his fitness, thereby addressing obesity rates. Most important, he is in an environment where he and his patrol members set the structure with ample time to explore the wonders of nature in an unhurried setting.

Ironically, safety is a concern cited by parents as a factor limiting outside play for their children. However, judging from the content of television and most video games, perhaps staying indoors is not a safe sanctuary after all. In fact, unsupervised use of the Internet carries a certain risk factor as children view adult-only Web sites or have contact with online predators. Factoring in the decline in fitness, the long-term impact of avoiding nature is profound.

For 98 years, the BSA has been the gateway to outdoor adventure for over 115 million members. More than any single organization, the BSA is in a position to "leave no child inside." Through our many chartered organizations and relationships with federal, state, and local land agencies, we can reverse this trend and deliver the promise of Scouting to future generations and maintain the important role nature plays in the healthy development of our children.

I want to thank Frank for his excellent summary on this topic. The approach of our 100th Anniversary Celebration reminds us of our commitment to encourage our young people to embrace the excitement of outdoor activities and strive to be as "physically strong" as possible to lead healthy, productive lives. As Frank indicates in his guest blog, the importance of "leaving no child inside" to our future generations is tremendous. I encourage all of you "guest bloggers" to offer topics of discussion for this space to keep this great exchange of ideas flowing!

More later.

Chief Scout Executive Bob Mazzuca

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