

**US Forest Service, National Environmental Education Foundation  
connect kids with nature through prescriptions for fun, better health**

**WASHINGTON, March 28, 2012** —The [U.S. Forest Service](#) is offering its 193 million acres of forests and grasslands as a prescription for healthier kids through an initiative of the [National Environmental Education Foundation](#) that connects children to nature.

The foundation's [Children & Nature Initiative](#) trains health care providers to take a child's environmental history and give patients and their guardians a written prescription for outdoor activity, connecting them with a particular forest, park, wildlife refuge, nature center or other public land near their neighborhood. Outdoor activity can help prevent serious health conditions like obesity and diabetes but also can reduce stress and serve as a support mechanism for attention disorders.

“Our nation's forests and grasslands offer tremendous physical, psychological and spiritual benefits to an increasingly urbanized populace,” said [U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell](#). “We hope kids and parents alike will follow the doctor's orders when given a ‘prescription for fun.’”

The initiative gives health care providers the technical support, tools and resources they need to be effective in prescribing outdoor activity to patients. Providers are trained to become “nature champions” for children in their communities.

“There are wonderful and inspiring places managed by the U.S. Forest Service for children and their families to explore, while also benefiting from being active outdoors,” said Leyla McCurdy, senior director of the foundation's Health & Environment Program. “We are excited to work with the Forest Service in making the *Children & Nature Initiative* even more accessible to families around the nation.”

Disadvantaged children are at higher risk because they are often more cut-off from nature and their environment, in part because of conditions such as poor housing and less access to green space.

Dr. James R. Roberts, a pediatrician at Medical University of South Carolina and chair of the *Children & Nature Initiative* Advisory Committee, said the initiative is vital because “with competing priorities and numerous entertainment options available to kids today, they are spending less time outside. A nature prescription gives kids something to take home and reminds them turn off their electronic gadgets and get outdoors to play when they can.”

The Forest Service has a long history of environmental education for children and adults. This year, the agency continued to expand its availability of *Children's Forests* and *More Kids in the Woods* programs, both of which provide young people with the knowledge and skills to become future land stewards. Those same programs complement President Obama's [America's Great Outdoors](#) program and First Lady Michelle Obama's [Let's Move Outside](#) initiative, both of which outline the need for children to engage in more unstructured outdoor activity.

Last summer, the Forest Service and the [Ad Council](#) began a public service announcement campaign to “unplug,” an effort to motivate families and their children to disconnect from their electronics and reconnect with nature. Viewers are directed to [DiscovertheForest.org](#), where they can search for areas to explore and ideas on what to do outdoors.

Chronic conditions associated with a more sedentary lifestyle and physical inactivity have greatly contributed to the numerous health problems children face today. Conditions such as asthma, attention-deficit disorder, vitamin D deficiency, as well as childhood obesity have all increased the past few decades. These same conditions could lead to adult pulmonary, cardiovascular and mental health problems.

The nonprofit National Environmental Education Foundation provides knowledge to trusted professionals who, with their credibility, amplify messages to national audiences to solve every day environmental problems. The foundation partners with professionals in health, education, business and public land management.

The mission of the U.S. Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. Recreational activities on our lands contribute \$14.5 billion annually to the U.S. economy. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to state and private landowners, and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world.

USDA works with state, local, and Tribal governments and private landowners to conserve and protect our nation’s natural resources – helping preserve our land, and clean our air and water. President Obama launched the America’s Great Outdoors initiative in 2010 to foster a 21st century approach to conservation that is designed by and accomplished in partnership with the American people. During the past two years, USDA’s conservation agencies — the U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Farm Service Agency — have delivered technical assistance and implemented restoration practices on public and private lands. We are working to better target conservation investments: embracing locally driven conservation and entering partnerships that focus on large, landscape-scale conservation.

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The National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) provides knowledge to trusted professionals who, with their credibility, amplify messages to national audiences to solve everyday environmental problems. Together, we generate lasting positive change. NEEF partners with professionals in health, education, media, business and public land management to promote daily actions for helping people protect and enjoy the environment. Through our primary programs—Classroom Earth, National Public Lands Day, National Environmental Education Week, Business and Environment, Earth Gauge and Health & Environment—we offer Americans knowledge to live by. [www.neefusa.org](http://www.neefusa.org)