



GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK
First Wyoming Youth Congress On Children And Nature Held

Grand Teton National Park recently partnered with Teton Science Schools (TSS), and several federal and state agencies and conservation foundations, to host the first Wyoming Youth Congress on Children and Nature. In mid-October, approximately 80 eighth graders—from Wyoming's 48 school districts—gathered to contemplate their relationship with nature, share opinions and information, and brainstorm ways to increase connections to the outdoors in their home communities.

Their mission? To become fully engaged as they venture into the natural world and to focus their observations and thoughts about people and their relationships with nature. By getting in tune with their own feelings about nature, the participants will serve as emissaries, communicating ideas and "action plans" to kids back home and encouraging others to explore nature. The young participants heard presentations at the TSS campus and broke into groups to experience the natural wonders of Grand Teton National Park. They visited with park interpretive and law enforcement rangers, as well as people in outdoor-oriented agencies and industries: Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Rendezvous River Sports, the National Outdoor Leadership School, and the National Museum of Wildlife Art. They also pitched in to do some Grand Teton and Bridger-Teton National Forest service projects such as fence removal and historic ranch preservation work.

Inspired by Richard Louv's popular book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, the Wyoming Youth Congress was designed to seek new steps in reversing the dwindling bonds between modern youth and the natural world. By bringing young people into the conversation, attempts are being made to incorporate their ideas and their voices. Louv's book spawned a movement of parents, educators, outdoor industry professionals, and public land managers concerned about the negative effects of children who have disconnected from nature; the Youth Congress attempts to answer a "call to action" on this issue.

During a mock press conference, the kids crafted themes they wanted to share with an audience. Here are some of their ideas, in their own words:

"Nature sparks our imagination. It fuels our creativity."

"We feel that other people who don't get the chance to see nature on a daily basis... lose their love and respect for everything around them."

"Spending more time in nature as a child will help you live a healthier and more successful life."

"Nature provides essential life-giving insight for us & our posterity."

"...nature is a friend and friends need to be respected. Friends help us to stay healthier, happier, relaxed, and joyful...It helps balance us in a world full of technology."

"...I believe in tall mountains that surround me in a wave of comfort...I believe nature is the source of happiness, health, & fulfillment."

Partner organizations engaged in the new initiative include Grand Teton National Park, the Teton Science Schools, the U.S. Forest Service, The Conservation Fund, Grand Teton National Park Foundation, The George B. Storer Foundation, Wyoming Governor's Task Force on Recreation, and the National Outdoor Leadership School.

Contact Information
Name: Jackie Skaggs
Phone Number: 307.739.3393
Email: jackie_skaggs@nps.gov

headline.cfm?type=Announcements&id=8378
[\[Back\]](#)

Posted: November 04, 2009