



Executive Summary:

National studies reveal a troubling trend: People are losing their connection with nature. Even in Florida, with great weather and a wealth of outdoor recreational opportunities, people are getting outside less and less. This trend has serious repercussions to our health, society and natural resources. The *Get Outdoors Florida!* coalition will unite public and private partners to address these concerns. The coalition includes federal and state land managers; state conservation, health, and education agencies; educators; health care providers; and nonprofit organizations, and businesses. These groups realize that it is vital to reconnect communities, families and individuals with nature.

Richard Louv, in his seminal book "Last Child in the Woods," termed the growing disconnect between people and the outdoors and the resulting mental and physical health problems "nature deficit disorder." Problems include obesity, vitamin-D deficiency, attention deficit disorder and poor classroom performance. Many groups and individuals that are excited about the coalition have programs to get Floridians back to nature but want to become more effective because of the impact of these concerns.

The *Get Outdoors Florida!* coalition engages communities, families and individuals in outdoor experiences to achieve healthier lifestyles and to sustain Florida's natural resources. By connecting communities with nature, we enhance opportunities for greater environmental education, public health, child welfare, tourism, fish and wildlife conservation and land management.

The coalition will create a social marketing campaign to reflect the community benefits of being active and getting outdoors. By establishing a *Get Outdoors Florida!* brand with a library of key education messages and guiding principles focused on the coalition mission, we will greatly strengthen the overall impact partners have and achieve mutual goals more effectively. Regular communications and www.GetOutdoorsFlorida.com will allow us to share information and build partnerships. By providing a central source for information promoting healthy outdoor recreation events and programs, we will better serve the public and strengthen local programs.

A key issue will be removing barriers to participation and increasing access. We will also expand the diversity of participants, to become more inclusive of all demographics.

Get Outdoors Florida! will evaluate progress on key health, societal and conservation issues associated with coalition activities.



Mission Statement:

"Engaging communities, families and individuals in outdoor experiences to achieve healthier lifestyles and to sustain Florida's natural resources."

Vision:

"A healthy Florida community that is connected with nature, reflects social diversity and exhibits a conservation ethic enhanced by enjoyment of safe and sustainable outdoor recreational opportunities."

As we document the scope and impact of our message, we will attract additional funding and sponsor opportunities.

More specifically, our approach uses a two-tier system to bring together existing education and outreach events and programs statewide that connect children, families and communities with nature. Tier-I events/programs share our common mission and agree to abide by our guiding principles. In return, they will be able to incorporate our logo, promote their events on our Web site and distribute consistent messages pertinent to getting outdoors and developing recreational skills and conservation experiences that enhance their health and stewardship of our resources.



“If we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered, then let us allow them to love the earth before we ask them to save it.”

– David Sobel

Tier-I events can be as simple as an interpretive nature hike in a park, a horseback ride in the country, kayaking on a stream, a fishing clinic, a beach cleanup, or bird watching activities. The idea is not to overwhelm participants with educational messages but to give them a fun nature-based experience and acquaint them with safe and sustainable outdoor recreation. Tier-I opportunities will be available statewide by channeling existing efforts and promoting them on our Web site. In return, we will compile a comprehensive inventory of who is conducting eligible events and the venues that are available. We will also collect names and e-mails of participants who want to receive follow-up information and surveys pertaining to future *Get Outdoors Florida!* activities and reminders about the health and societal benefits related to outdoor recreation.

Tier-II events include week-long day camps or intensive overnight weekend events that thoroughly acquaint participants with the outdoors. Some of these opportunities exist but others will evolve to meet local demand. These events will be hosted at a variety of locations managed by participating agencies (e.g., Florida’s Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Forestry and water management districts; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Forest Service; universities; and the private sector.

Florida’s Department of Health and Department of Education will help refine curricula based on best education practices to encourage sound decision making skills. Tier-II events will include active follow-up with participants and an effort to create community support to reinforce positive behaviors. A scientific evaluation will determine long-term effects on participants’ behavior and continually make us more effective and efficient. Research shows that Tier-II type events, combined with social marketing and community support, will generate the results we are seeking.

Please join us in this critical effort. Visit GetOutdoorsFlorida.com for information on scheduled events, how to tips for enjoying the outdoors, to become a partner or to make a donation.