

Louv, Richard. (2005). *Last child in the woods: saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. 323 pages, \$13.95, ISBN 10-56512-522-3 (Paperback).

Reviewed by

David Todt, Ph.D., Associate Provost  
Shawnee State University

Richard Louv makes a strong case that contact with nature is essential for healthy development of children and physical and mental well-being of adults. He suggests that, "By taking nature experience out of the leisure column and placing it in the health column, we are more likely to take our children on that hike—more likely to, well, have fun." In building the case for outdoor experiences for children, Louv presents a well-documented and easy to read story that includes numerous personal stories with his own two sons interwoven with anecdotes of other adult/child/environment relationships. Some of his examples of child/environment interactions are from famous leaders of the parks and recreation movement like John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt. Others are from the thousands of school children, parents and environmental educators that he interviewed in preparation for this book, like the clarifying comment from Paul, a fourth-grader in San Diego: "I like to play indoors better, 'cause that's where the electrical outlets are."

The author argues for the teaching of natural history at all levels. He argues that natural history is becoming a lost discipline as the field of biology increasingly rewards research and teaching done at the molecular and cellular level. Park and recreation organizations have an important role to play in the teaching of natural history through interpretive programs and outreach to the general public. Louv calls for a rebirth of interest in natural history not only in higher education, but in public schools and parks as well.

Solutions are suggested in the subtitle of the book, "saving our children from nature-deficit disorder." The author points to the importance of outdoor experiences that should be provided by parents, grandparents, relatives, youth leaders, teachers, and park employees. To counteract the digital separation of children from nature, Louv suggests nurturing constructive boredom by disconnecting the electronic attachments we have become dependent on. Use the disconnected time in nature helping children learn to be aware of nature and build confidence in exploring new environments while reducing children's fear of the unknown.

The author has some suggestions for the larger society, too. He advocates legal reform to overcome the fear of liability that separates children from many experi-

ences in nature. While solving the legal tangle surrounding outdoor play is a huge challenge, Louv wants to rewrite bad laws and regulations to make nature welcome everywhere and natural play in outdoor environments the norm. Increasingly rare experiences like building tree houses, damming up small streams, and digging for treasures in the earth should be a part of every child's outdoor play.

Louv promotes environmental design in urban landscapes. He points to numerous examples, especially in Europe, of cities adopting green strategies. Chicago's plan to reclaim its 165 year old motto, "City in a Garden," is described. Louv wants easily accessible natural areas where children can play, wildlife can survive, and environmental experiences are routine.

The day before submitting this book review, I received the March 2006 issue of the electronic newsletter from The George Lucas Educational Foundation, eduTopia. Richard Louv's notion of nature deficit disorder seems to be taking hold as seen in the lead article by Susan Brenna, "Take a Hike: As gaming devices supplant games of catch, schools counter nature-deficit disorder with outdoor experiences." The importance of childhood time spent in nature is being recognized more and more, and organizations like the National Wildlife Federation, the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, and the Sierra Club are mounting programs to do something about looming nature-deficits.

*Last child in the woods* is an important book for anyone concerned about children and our collective future. As other reviewers have noted, this is a must read for parents. I would hasten to add that it is also a must read for professionals in parks, recreation and leisure education. The issues addressed by the author and his tentative solutions are on the horizon for all professionals in the field, if not already in our backyards.