



CHILDREN AND NATURE: RECONNECTING YOUTH WITH THE OUTDOORS



BACKGROUND:

The No Child Left Inside (NCLI) and Moving Outdoors in Nature (MONA) Acts were introduced in the 111th Congress with the shared goal of reconnecting children with nature. Both bills are anticipated to be reintroduced in the 112th Congress.

NCLI seeks to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to include environmental education. An unintended consequence of NCLB has been the loss of instruction time for environmental education as schools have been forced to devote more resources to improving standardized tests scores in reading and math. NCLI addresses the problem by authorizing funding for the development and implementation of state environmental literacy plans, teacher professional development grants and an Environmental Education Grant Program.

The NCLI bill introduced in the 111th Congress defined park and recreation agencies as eligible funding partners ONLY for the Environmental Education Grant Program. NRPA asks Congress to strengthen the bill by ensuring that parks and recreation agencies are eligible funding partners for ALL three grant programs.

MONA seeks to improve our children's health, support economic growth and strengthen the future of conservation in America by incentivizing states to develop and implement innovative strategies to reconnect our youth and families with the natural world. The bill also directs the President to develop a similar federal strategy by bringing together federal agencies and national action plan.

WHY CONGRESS SHOULD ACT:

Children today spend less time outdoors than any generation in human history, devoting just four to seven minutes a day on average in unstructured outdoor play while spending an average of seven and a half hours every day in front of electronic media.

Parks Improve Our Children's Health

A lack of physical activity has led to serious health problems for too many of our children and put them on a fast track for chronic disease. Not only are today's youth at risk of having a shorter life-span than their parents, our national security is also threatened as nearly one in four applicants to the military is rejected for being overweight or obese—it's the most common reason for medical disqualification.

Parks are Vital to Education

Many local and state park agencies currently work with school systems to provide environmental education programs. They have trained and knowledgeable staff, such as interpretive naturalists and wildlife biologists who provide benefits to students and teachers through "field" learning experiences at nature centers, science centers, demonstration farms, and in park and wildlife refuges. Additionally, research has shown that outdoor activity reduces attention deficit disorder, which is negatively impacting America's competitiveness and performance in the classroom.

Parks Preserve America's Conservation Legacy.

Those who do not spend time in nature are less likely to protect it, leaving the future of conservation, our nation's immense natural resources and America's hunting and angling legacy at risk.

