

Creating Nature Champions among Healthcare Providers Connecting Children with Nature for Better Health

A Proposal Submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by The National Environmental Education Foundation

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I Summary

This initiative links two issues - rising childhood health concerns and the need to reconnect children to nature. Its goals are to mount a multi-year campaign to train and assist key Pediatric Healthcare Providers (PHCPs) to

- “Prescribe” outdoor time for children in order to help address childhood health problems such as obesity, asthma, diabetes, hypertension and mental health conditions such as attention-deficit disorder;
- Link this advice to nature programming on public lands for children and their families that will help inspire a habit of connecting with nature to promote good health, enjoyment, and environmental stewardship.

II Background

The National Environmental Education and Training Foundation, also known as the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) is a non-profit organization, established in 1990 by Congress, which provides objective environmental information to enable Americans to protect and enjoy the environment and take positive action on environmental issues in their daily lives. Its programs are designed to catalyze trusted professionals who work in fields that influence public opinion, such as healthcare and education, to reach the public on a national scale. NEEF provides these intermediaries with clear, current and expert information which they bring to millions of Americans every day. Our health program is central to our work, and it has earned the respect of many major medical groups. Thirty-four leading medical and educational institutions have signed on to NEEF's position statement on the importance of environmental education in healthcare, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Medical Association, and National Association of School Nurses.

The proposed program fits seamlessly with NEEF's strategic orientation: the most effective way to reach the largest audience with limited resources is to educate the professionals who influence the target audience. NEEF's groundbreaking Healthcare Provider Initiative is changing the way the healthcare

community views the environment. For example both the Pediatric Environmental History Initiative, which aims to make environmental history-taking a routine practice for healthcare providers, and the Pediatric Asthma Initiative, which aims to integrate environmental management into asthma care, have received support from several important medical organizations. Kaiser Permanente, for example, has integrated NEEF's Asthma Guidelines into its national asthma guidelines with the potential to reach Kaiser's 139,000 employees and 8.4 million members. NEEF's relationships with the many government agencies, NGOs, and businesses that already support NEEF programmatically and financially have helped NEEF take leadership on the issue of connecting children with nature.

NEEF has been a key partner in The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's "Let's Go Outside!" Initiative. Leyla McCurdy, Senior Director of the Health & Environment Program, has played an advisory role for the program. She collaborated with US Fish and Wildlife Service staff, participated in conference calls, reviewed materials and participated in meetings on healthcare providers' role in connecting children with nature. NEEF reached out to its network of partner organizations to ensure members of health professional organizations such as American Academy of Pediatrics, American Nurses Association, National Association of School Nurses were represented in these meetings. NEEF, along with US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management helped organize and cosponsored a Society of Public Health Educators (SOPHE) webinar entitled "Reconnecting Kids with Nature for Health Benefits" in April 2008. The event offered continuing education credits and 150 health professionals participated. The webinar discussed the sponsoring organizations' environmental education activities and how they can be used to improve child health. Dr. James Roberts, a leading pediatrician and NEEF ex-officio board member, presented a session highlighting links between improved health and the natural environment on behalf of NEEF.

NEEF's "Prescribing Nature: Connecting Children with Nature for Health Benefits" project was endorsed by the Conservation Fund's National Forum on Children and Nature. NEEF was among 30 organizations selected from 500 applicants to receive the endorsement.

III Scope of Work

A. Objectives

The target constituencies for this project are: PHCPs (pediatricians, pediatric nurses and school nurses) and children and their families. NEEF will educate 2,000 PHCPs to "prescribe" outdoor time for children in order to help address childhood health problems and link this advice to nature programming on public lands for children and their families. PHCPs are highly respected by families, and having them "prescribe" unstructured time outdoors and educate families on its importance gives weight and credibility to the issue. NEEF will train 26 PHCPs as Nature Champions who will in turn train 30 PHCPs in their communities, for a total of 780 PHCPs trained through three pilot sites. We will reach an additional 1,220 PHCPs across the U.S. through mailings, outreach at conferences and meetings, and websites

We estimate that the trained PHCPs will reach over half a million children over two years. On average, pediatricians see approximately 750 patients per year. If 20% of the children and their families seen by these PHCPs are reached with education materials and incentives, we will have educated 300,000 children and their families on benefits and local availability of unstructured time in nature. We will also reach countless other children and their families through our national outreach channels. Overall this project will reach millions of children over the course of this multi-year project.

Specific objectives include:

- Train 26 PHCPs to become Nature Champions who will each train 30 PHCPs in their communities, for a total of 780 trained PHCPs on this issue
- Educate 1,220 PCHPs through outreach and conferences
- Connect tens of thousands of families and children with Nature Sites for programs and informal activities

B. Methods

In order to accomplish the objectives described in section A, we will undertake the following activities:

- **Form Advisory Committee- Winter 2010**

The project will be designed with the guidance of an Advisory Committee of experts from major medical institutions and leaders in environmental education. Representatives of FWS will serve on the committee. In addition, we will invite representatives of the American Academy of Pediatrics, National Association of School Nurses, National Hispanic Medical Association, National Medical Association, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, Association of Clinicians for the Underserved, Children's Environmental Health Network and other key groups to the National Advisory Committee. Due to our existing relationship with these organizations we expect that they will agree to serve. We will also invite key pediatricians who are currently serving on NEEF's advisory committees, who are also current or former members of the American Academy Pediatrics Committee on Environmental Health. Those include James Roberts, MD, MPH (Medical University of South Carolina), Ruth Etzel, MD, MPH (George Washington University, Washington DC), Sophie Balk, MD (Children's Hospital at Montefiore, NY), and Joel Forman, MD (Mount Sinai Medical Center, NY). We will also extend invitations to two key leaders of the Children and Nature movement, Richard Louv and Howard Frumkin (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), both of whom have close working relations with NEEF. Additionally, we hope to include a representative of the National Audubon Society who is actively involved in efforts to connect nature sites with healthcare providers.

The Advisory Committee will provide guidance for the overall initiative, as well as help with the messaging, and the development of the tools and the training workshop agenda. They will also assist with the selection of the PHCPs who will be invited to participate in the train-the-trainer workshop and to serve as Nature Champions.

- **Create Nature Kits- Winter/Summer 2010**

NEEF will provide PHCPs with the training and the tools they need to "prescribe" outdoor time for children and serve as Nature Champions in their communities. We have already created a variety of resources for healthcare providers on this issue, which have been very well received by the healthcare community. These are available at www.neefusa.org/health/children_nature.htm. We will build upon these resources to create the additional tools and materials for this project. A key resource will be the Nature Kits we provide to the PHCPs to use in their clinics and their trainings. The Nature Kits will include NEEF's Fact Sheet and Pediatric Environmental History Forms (English and Spanish), brochures for the patients, posters for PHCP offices, and "nature prescription" pads.

- **Determine FWS Pilot Nature Sites, Create Corresponding Programming, and Identify Nature Champions- Summer 2010**

We will partner with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and their regional offices. Selected regions will each identify pilot FWS nature sites in their region and will create nature programming for children and their families that will be linked to a "prescription", and provide

the setting for the experience and appreciation of nature. We will work with FWS to determine the number and location of pilot nature sites in the regions. We will select PHCPs who will serve as Nature Champions in each of the FWS regions and work with the selected FWS pilot nature sites.

The pilot sites will be strategically-selected based on the economic and cultural diversity of their populations; their connection to local communities (includes schools, healthcare providers, and community leaders); and the expertise of the nature sites' staff and volunteers in working with children and families. NEEF is working with the National Audubon Society to connect healthcare providers to Audubon Centers and Sanctuaries. Where Audubon sites are in close proximity to FWS pilot sites, FWS sites will be encouraged to collaborate with Audubon nature providers.

We will create programs to work intensively with 3-6 clinics and schools near each pilot nature site to make it easier for families who have received the "nature prescription" from their PHCPs to develop the nature habit.

- **Hold Train-the-Trainer Workshop- Summer/Fall 2010**

We will hold a train-the-trainer workshop to educate 26 PHCPs about the nature concept and prepare them to serve as Nature Champions in their communities. This effort will replicate NEEF's highly successful Children's Environmental Health Faculty Champions model (www.neefusa.org/health/champions/index.htm) which trained close to 2,000 pediatric healthcare providers within 12 months. The Nature Champions will, in turn, each train 30 PHCPs in their communities, for a total of 780 trained providers within two years. We will provide Nature Kits to the PHCPs to use in their clinics and their trainings. The Nature Kits will include NEEF's Fact Sheet and Pediatric Environmental History Forms (English and Spanish), brochures for the patients, and "nature prescription" pads.

We will hold the train-the-trainer workshop for the 26 Nature Champions in late summer/early fall of 2010 at the NCTC in Shepherdstown, WV. FWS regional representatives will also participate in the workshop. During the first part of the workshop, we will provide an overview of the Initiative and invite two national leaders of the nature movement, Richard Louv (author of *Last Child in the Woods*) and Dr. Howard Frumkin (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) to give presentations. The rest of the workshop will be hands-on training on how to use the tools and the resources to educate other PHCPs and serve as Nature Champions in their communities.

- **Program Support to Nature Champions and Trained PCHPs-2010-2012**

Following the workshop, NEEF will provide the workshop's PowerPoint presentations electronically, to be used by the trained Nature Champions in their trainings of other PHCPs. NEEF will also provide multiple copies of all the tools and resources to be distributed to the PHCPs to be trained by the Champions. In addition, we will provide ongoing technical support to the Nature Champions throughout the project period.

- **Program Outreach-2010-2012**

We will publicize the program through health professional conferences and meetings, online, and through mailings and publications widely read by PHCPs. We will reach an additional 1,220 PHCPs by these means.

- **Program Evaluation-2010-2012**

We will evaluate the knowledge of the Nature Champions pre- and post-training; track the number of "prescriptions" and brochures the PCHPs distribute to families; and, through the

prescriptions which will be stamped at the nature sites, we will evaluate the number of times families use the sites. Additionally, we will create a survey instrument on our website to track usage of our tools by the broader network of health professionals and others. Furthermore, we will track the number of healthcare providers reached through conferences and other means of publicity and outreach. We will also track the number of families reached through our public outreach efforts.

In the following years, with additional funding, this project can be replicated and expanded nationwide to involve all FWS regions. Additional train-the-trainer workshops can be organized for PHCPs to create additional Nature Champions. The first group of Nature Champions could be invited to these workshops to share lessons learned and to serve as mentors for the new group of Nature Champions. Furthermore, this NEEF/FWS program can serve as a model that can be expanded and replicated in partnership with other agencies that manage public lands.

IV Deliverables

The deliverables for this project include:

1. Establishment of Advisory Committee
2. Development of Nature Kit for PHCPs
3. Train the trainer workshops for 26 PHCP Nature Champions
4. Training of an additional 780 PHCPs by Nature Champions
5. Outreach to and training of an additional 1,220 PHCPS through publications on- and offline and presentations at professional conferences
6. Evaluation of program

V Budget

Attached