



## **Improving Children's Health through Nature: *How National Wildlife Refuges, Nature Centers, and Parks Can Help***

As a naturalist, educator or interpreter, you know the rewards that come from hiking in the woods, exploring trails, or seeing wildlife in their natural habitats. Growing evidence now supports what many of us have experienced first hand—going outside is vital for our health and well being, especially for children.

Research shows that outdoor activities—including hiking, visiting a park, bicycling and sports—not only increases children's physical activity, but also reduce stress, and serve as a support mechanism for attention disorders.

Yet many young people never visit natural areas, as the lure of computer games, television, Web surfing and instant messaging keeps them focused on their gadgets and distant from nature. This trend places our children at increased risk for physical and mental health disorders and threatens the future of environmental stewardship. **Be part of the solution. Join the *Children and Nature Initiative!***

### **❖ What is the *Children and Nature Initiative*?**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF), and the National Audubon Society have joined forces to address two important issues— preventing chronic conditions, like obesity and diabetes, and reconnecting children to nature. The Initiative trains pediatric healthcare providers to be Nature Champions to prescribe nature for their patients.

### **❖ How does the Initiative get kids outside?**

Using NEEF tools and resources, healthcare providers educate families about the physical and mental health benefits of spending time outdoors and refer them to a local nature site. Nature sites can include Audubon Centers, National Wildlife Refuges and/or hatcheries, city or state parks, or other easily accessible outside areas.

### **❖ What does a nature site do?**

Nature sites provide age appropriate programs, so children can safely explore the outdoors. Programs should increase children's activity and connect them with nature. Existing programs can be used or adapted to make them more physically active. If requested, medical professionals can provide suggestions on how to increase the physical health benefits of current programs. Nature sites may also be asked to display and distribute *Children and Nature Initiative* materials and collect and any prescriptions that are "redeemed" at their site.

### **❖ How can my site become involved?**

Volunteer to be a nature site! The *Children and Nature Initiative* will link you with participating healthcare providers in your area and help you get started. For more information, visit: [www.neefusa.org/health/children\\_nature.htm](http://www.neefusa.org/health/children_nature.htm)