

Florida Fish Busters'

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## **Get Outdoors Florida!**

By Bob Wattendorf, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

“Nature deficit disorder” is a growing concern, but a new initiative by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and numerous partners endeavors to make the problem obsolete.

Coined by Richard Louv in the book *Last Child in the Wood*, nature deficit disorder refers to the growing disconnect between people and the outdoors.

To address these concerns over the disconnect, the “Get Outdoors Florida!” coalition is bringing together highly energized staff from state and federal conservation and land-management agencies, state and county health organizations, non-government organizations dealing with youth, conservation education or health organizations, universities, and commercial businesses. The coalition’s mission is “Engaging communities, families and individuals in outdoor experiences to achieve healthier lifestyles and sustain Florida’s natural resources.”

The Center for Disease Control reports that more than one in six youth ages 2-29 were obese, creating risks for heart disease, diabetes, respiratory problems and



*Research shows that for young children every extra hour of daily television can increase the risk of attention deficit disorder symptoms by 2 percent.*

more. Meanwhile, daily participation in school physical education programs dropped from 42 percent in 1991 to 33 percent in 2005. Studies also demonstrate that children between the ages of 8 and 18 spend an average of 6.5 hours per day with electronic media. For young kids, every hour of extra TV increases the likelihood of their developing attention-deficit, hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) by age 7, by 10 percent. Remaining in modern, sealed buildings all day also increases the prevalence of allergies and asthma because of molds, mildews and allergens that aren't "aired out."



*Whether it is playing hide and seek outdoors, exploring a trail or going fishing, time spent outdoors provides big benefits to youth.*

some creative free play and recreation isn't enough, research shows there are many benefits to the individual, family and society when young people engage in outdoor activities.

Studies have clearly demonstrated that children who spend time outdoors perform better academically, play more creatively, have less stress, and are more imaginative. In addition, they experience fewer symptoms of ADHD, have healthier immune systems and develop a greater respect for themselves, others and nature than their peers who do not recreate outside.

Many parents want their kids away from the electronic babysitters – the television, DVDs, iPods, Nintendos - and instead want them engaged in play outside. Not all of those kids may realize it, but they may be wishing for the same thing.

If just the joy of getting outdoors for

These connections with nature not only address health and education issues but also societal issues, such as sustaining fish, wildlife and their habitats in the face of unprecedented development.

Many of the groups and individuals most excited about the coalition have been actively creating programs to get Floridians back to nature. The “Get Outdoors Florida!” coalition provides an opportunity to bring these dissonant efforts together to be more productive. One of the first efforts by the coalition will be to seek the support of Florida’s state government.

The time is right for this initiative. Government programs at federal, state and local levels have emerged in response to the deficit of nature experiences citizens are suffering. From Connecticut’s “No



*Taime enjoying nature from a tree,  
escapes from his electronic tether.*

Child Left Inside” to California’s “Children’s Outdoor Bill of Health,” state programs are budding with the hope of rekindling a relationship between their residents — especially the children — and the land. Awareness of the problem and calls-to-action are sweeping the nation because society feels the urgent need to address these health, societal and conservation issues at their roots.

To learn more visit, [www.MyFWC.com/Fishing/GetOutdoorsFlorida](http://www.MyFWC.com/Fishing/GetOutdoorsFlorida), where you can make a donation or your group can request to become part of the evolving coalition. With your help, we can build a community that is connected with nature,

reflects social diversity, and exhibits a true conservation ethic. Such a healthy community will ensure a sustainable future for our wildlife resources and residents whose participation in safe outdoor recreational opportunities enhances their health and happiness.

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