

Kids in Nature - a new initiative from Saskatoon Nature Society

I am very pleased to announce a new initiative by Saskatoon Nature Society to support programs aimed at getting kids outdoors into nature.

Too many children lack contact with the natural world. Television, computers, the internet, electronic games, the busy schedules of working parents and organized sports – all have combined to produce a generation of children losing contact with nature. Richard Louv, in his eloquent and provocative book, *Last Child in the Woods*, coined the term “nature deficit disorder” to describe the human costs of alienation from nature: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses. From our perspective as naturalists and conservationists, we also have to wonder where future stewards of nature will be found if we fail to reconnect children with nature and outdoor play. So much has changed since we were kids. Children today know more about the global threats to the environment but have less opportunity to learn about nature from intimate, physical contact with spaces and species close at hand.

Fortunately there are outdoor educators, teachers and recreation leaders who offer programs designed to counteract this trend. But as fast as their programs are announced, they are full and there’s a waiting list. Some teachers in our school systems find ways to get students out into nature, but there are not enough such opportunities to reach all children - inner city and suburban, Canadian-born and newcomers.

We think more can and must be done to reconnect kids with nature. For that reason we have taken steps to establish a grant program we’re calling “Kids in Nature” to strengthen existing programs and encourage new initiatives. Starting in 2014, we will annually draw \$2000 from our Conservation and Education Fund, and aim to at least match that with donations specifically earmarked for the SNS Kids in Nature Program. Each spring we will invite applications from existing or new programs, and select one or more for financial support. More details about this grant process will be announced in the fall.

Meanwhile, if you share our concern for reconnecting kids with the natural world, for the sake of their physical and mental health as well as the future stewardship of our precious natural heritage, we invite you to make a donation to Saskatoon Nature Society, specifically for the Kids in Nature Program. All donations are eligible for a receipt for tax purposes. (See www.saskatoonaturesociety.sk.ca for contact information.) The Fund has already started to grow! I hope you will join in support of this investment in healthy kids as tomorrow’s naturalists.