



Richard Louv hikes on Laguna Mountain in California.

The New Nature Movement

Quintessential Barrington connected with Richard Louv in its first issue, in Fall 2005, when his first book was released. His message spread across the world, and we are happy to connect with him again in this 15-year anniversary issue. Our long-time nature writer, April Anderson, led the conversation.

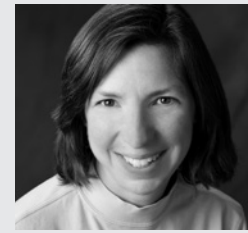
What progress has been made since the publication of "Last Child in the Woods" ?

The barriers between people and nature remain challenging. But we're seeing change. In the U.S. we're beginning to see progress among state legislatures, schools and businesses, civic organizations, and government agencies. Family nature clubs (multiple families that agree to show up for a hike on Saturday) are proliferating. Regional campaigns are bringing people from across political, religious, and economic divides, to connect children to nature. In September 2015, the new White House initiative called "Every Kid in a Park" went into effect, where all 4th-grade students and their families have free admission to National Parks and other federal lands and waters. That has been extended under the current administration. In terms of cities, Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN), is a partnership between the Children & Nature Network and the National League of

Cities, which represents some 19,000 mayors and other urban leaders...to better connect children to nature, particularly children who have had little access previously.

A recent study in the U.S., "The Nature of Americans", suggests that we appear to be more knowledgeable than a decade ago about the connection between nature experience and health; but are somewhat less aware of the connection to cognitive functioning and education—and that the barriers to nature experience are still substantial. We now need to move more quickly into a mode of greater action.

And internationally, in September 2012, the World Congress of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) cited "adverse consequences for both healthy child development ('nature deficit disorder') as well as responsible stewardship for nature and the environment in the

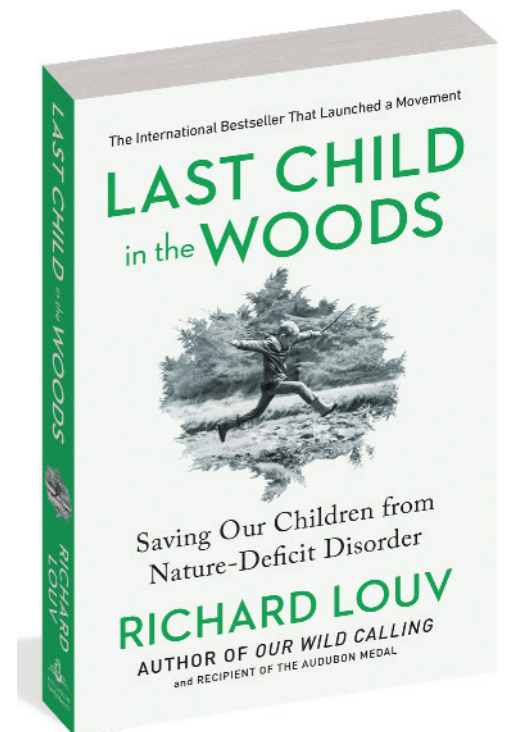


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future," and then passed a resolution titled "The Child's Right to Connect with Nature and to a Healthy Environment." This connection is, indeed, a human right. And the acknowledgement of that is progress.

What if, any impact, has this had on the short- and long-term physical, mental, and social well-being of children and society?

The evidence indicates that experiences in the natural world may reduce the symptoms of ADHD, serve as a buffer to depression and anxiety, help prevent or reduce obesity and myopia, boost the immune system, and offer many other psychological and physical health benefits. Time spent in nature may also improve social bonding and reduce social violence, stimulate learning and creativity, strengthen the conservation ethic, and even help raise standardized test scores.



Most of the studies of the impact of the nature connection on health, well-being and cognitive functioning show correlations rather than cause. In part, this is because the research is so new, but some longitudinal studies are showing encouraging results in schools. In Massachusetts, a long-term study of 950 schools indicated, after factoring socio-economic issues, that schools with more natural learning environments produce higher test scores than traditional schools. For people interested in the research, the Children & Nature Network website has compiled an online library of studies, reports, and publications that are available for viewing or downloading. <http://www.childrenandnature.org/research/>.

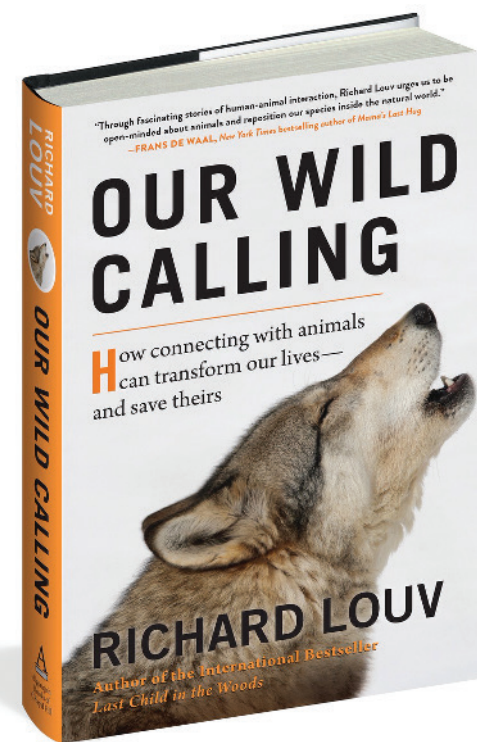
How are Leave No Child Inside programs changing to address the needs of people of all ages to get outdoors?

Over the past decade, a movement has emerged to reconnect children, families, and communities to the natural world has emerged. It includes educators, pediatricians (who are now, increasingly, prescribing nature experience), urban planners, businesspeople and policymakers. Because this movement includes people of all ages, I call it the New Nature Movement. The Children & Nature Network is a nonprofit that grew out of “Last Child,” and it offers the largest database of research information on this topic; it also brings people from around the world together as leaders in the movement. At our most recent annual gathering, in Vancouver, B.C., over 900 people from 22 countries attended. As you’ll see at www.childrenandnature.org, this is one of the few issues that brings people together across political and religious divides. And the movement is growing.

What do you see as “next steps” for engaging people in long-term positive relationships with the natural world to address current issues such as public health, overconsumption, pollution, and climate change the year of Earth Day’s 50th Anniversary? What can be done immediately? What can be done over time to help paradigms to shift and create a more caring world?

Every region is different. So, if we’re going to imagine a future, why not imagine a movement—what I call a New Nature Movement—that includes but goes beyond traditional environmentalism and sustainability, a movement that can touch every part of society. A first step might be to convene the politicians, policymakers, partners, volunteers,

as well as educators, landscape architects, urban designers and architects, physicians, and other professionals to plan the best approaches to re-nature the city or community. The common purpose: a reunion between humans and nature that will create or enhance human and economic potential. There could be discussion of the scientific evidence in support of nature contact, to include the recognition a healthier habitat increases the human-nature social capital for everyone’s benefit. These professionals can write a health prescription for a city that will evolve into a rebuilding plan that makes practical sense. They might consider how to rebuild local food webs, how to establish an urban forest to help clean the air and provide shade,



or how to encourage urban wildlife. They can talk about how to naturalize bicycle and pedestrian paths, how to offer cleaner public transport, how to develop policies to encourage the design of green roofs, green walls, and green schoolyards. Cities can become engines of biodiversity. As the designer William McDonough, who has done extensive work in China, would suggest, communities should be created that not only reduce our carbon footprints, but create wetlands and other wildlife habitat, even in densely populated cities. Such a movement might create a regional scorecard to include the economic benefits of greening the city, with consideration to the way a green city

can reshape health care, tourism, and law enforcement in positive ways.

My book, “Vitamin N”, includes 500 actions that people can take to enrich the health and happiness of their families and communities and to help create a future that we’ll all want to go to.

Animals and Imaginative Hope

One of themes of my new book, “Our Wild Calling”, is the increasing prevalence of human loneliness. Even before the pandemic, social isolation rivaled smoking and obesity as a risk to health. The rise of human loneliness is caused by many factors, but it may also be rooted in species loneliness. We are desperate, as a species, not to feel alone in the universe. And we are not, if we pay attention. At the same time, it’s important to remember that this isn’t just about us. Animals have a right to exist, even if we didn’t benefit from them. In environmental ethics, this is called “existence value”. Still, I do think that, as a society, we should talk more about those benefits, including ways to make sure the good is reciprocal, for us and for other animals.

In “Our Wild Calling”, I suggest a new ethic toward the natural world, what I call the Reciprocity Principle. Here’s description of that principle, from the book: “For every moment of healing that humans receive from another creature, humans will provide an equal moment of healing for that animal and its kin. For every acre of wild habitat we take, we will preserve or create at least another acre for wildness. For every dollar we spend on classroom technology, we will spend at least another dollar creating chances for children to connect deeply with another animal, plant, or person. For every day of loneliness we endure, we’ll spend a day in communion with the life around us until the loneliness passes away.” U

Richard Louv is co-founder and chairman emeritus of the Children & Nature Network and author of “THE NATURE PRINCIPLE: Reconnecting With Life in a Virtual Age”, “LAST CHILD IN THE WOODS: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder”, and “VITAMIN N: The Essential Guide to a Nature-Rich Life”. His most recent book is “OUR WILD CALLING: How Connecting with Animals Can Transform Our Lives—and Save Theirs.”