



We Need Time In Nature

by Jean Colvin,
Communications Director, Wisconsin Youth Company

Last week I got a photo of my great-nephews, Liam, 5, and Finn, 3. They were sitting side by side on a rock with their baseball caps on eating bags of Goldfish snacks. Their mom had taken them on a hike. The boys and their parents live in Massachusetts not far from the Appalachian Trail. Family outings to go hiking and pick apples or ride bikes are frequent. They are lucky to live close to so many beautiful places. Their small town with little traffic makes it easy to get outside and go.

Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods* coined the term “nature deficit disorder” to describe the effect of so much time spent indoors watching TV or playing video games on our children. My hope is that Liam and Finn won’t develop this thanks to a lot of family time spent outside. Louv’s book talks about the research that connects lack of time in nature with childhood obesity, attention-deficit disorder and depression in children.

Louv writes: “Yet, at the very moment that the bond is breaking between the young and the natural world, a growing body of research links our mental, physical, and spiritual health directly to our association with nature—in positive ways.”

Playing outside and spending time getting close to nature is no longer just a nice way to occupy kids. Kids need this exposure to the natural world and so do we adults. How can families make time for outdoor activities when so many other things are competing for their attention?

- Involve the kids in outdoor chores and turn them into opportunities to really experience nature. Raking leaves? Collect the prettiest for a table decoration. Talk about the colors or how they smell when crunched up in your palm. Rake up a pile and tumble into it.
- Take advantage of the many free and low cost family activities at nature centers in south central Wisconsin. Visit www.naturenet.com for dates and locations.
- Make sure that your response to nature is positive. Instead of complaining that the rain spoiled your plans for a picnic, put on your raincoats and walk in your neighborhood.
- Bring nature to you. Put up a backyard bird feeder and learn about urban birds. www.birds.cornell.edu is a great site for beginning and experienced birdwatchers.

Keep your connection with nature alive and share it with your kids. It’s easy. Just ask Liam and Finn. All you need is a bag of Goldfish snacks and a trail.