

Conservation Connects News

Fall 2012



Dear Reader:

Conservation Connects celebrates three years this fall! They say good things come in threes and it certainly has been a good three years. And speaking of good things and threes, I'd like to introduce three important members of the Conservation Connects team:

- Jennifer Martino, after more than a year of contractual work, has joined Conservation Connects as a permanent employee providing administrative assistance, graphic design and generally keeping the business up and running.
- Nate Grosse, a recent graduate student from SUNY Brockport provided seasonal biological and technical assistance this past spring and summer surveying wildlife along the Buffalo River, building the first phase of the Alexander Outdoor Classroom and assisting landowners with natural resources management.
- Our newest member, Charlotte Brett joins the Conservation Connects team as a Senior Environmental Planner. Charlotte has been an environmental planner for over a decade, providing planning, impact assessment and permitting services on large-scale transportation, energy, and telecommunication projects, as well as airports, municipal, and private development projects. Charlotte's focus will be on the development of natural resource and sustainability plans, permitting, general project management, and business development.

Working with a team is an exciting change as Conservation Connects continues to grow and develop into new areas and opportunities. Check out our website for an overview of new and ongoing projects (www.conservationconnects.com/projects.html). I personally continue to enjoy the journey and I learn something new each day. For example, I used to think that I just liked being outside. Now I learn through our work on the Alexander Outdoor Classroom that our health, sanity and sense of well-being may in fact depend on it! Sound a little dramatic? Read on! Better yet, take this outside and read it (oh come on, I know you have a laptop, iPad, iPhone, android or at least a printer and recycled paper). And don't let the weather stop you either. I recently heard someone say there is no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing. And by the way, this came from a preschool teacher, not a wilderness survival instructor. No excuses. See you outside!

~Sheila Hess

Something to think about:

"The future will belong to the nature-smart—those individuals, families, businesses, and political leaders who develop a deeper understanding of the transformative power of the natural world and who balance the virtual with the real."

—Richard Louv

Conservation Connects helps corporations and communities balance development plans with natural resource conservation. It is possible to achieve economic vitality while preserving a healthy environment and a high quality of life.

Conservation Connects is woman-owned small business. Visit our website to review certifications.

The Outside Scoop

Please be advised, the next few paragraphs are meant to distress you with some alarming facts, reassure you that there is a solution, and then motivate you to make a change. Enjoy!

Distressing Facts Meant to Alarm

The statistics are daunting - nearly one in three kids are overweight or obese in the United States - triple the number from just one generation ago. We hear about hypertension and Type II diabetes in kids as young as 5 years of age. We watch the number of kids diagnosed with ADD, ADHD, depression and anxiety go up and up. If you are an adult reading this article please resist the temptation to shake your head and think, "Oh those poor children." Instead, recall that obesity, heart disease, diabetes and mental illness are tracking similarly in adults, and think, "Oh poor us, whatever shall we do?" I also recently heard that the average child spends less than ten minutes outside in unstructured play compared to 7 hours in front of an electronic screen. Can that be right!? I wonder what the statistics are for adults. I'll let you look that one up. It can't be good. Had your vitamin D levels checked lately?

Reassuring Info and Solutions

While there may not be a single explanation for the dismal trends listed above, there might be a single factor that can help: Spending time outside in a natural environment. Sound too simple? Consider this: Children who spend time outside immediately experience lower stress levels, higher creativity, and reduced ADHD symptoms. These children develop increased strength and physical fitness, have more compassion for people and the environment, and score higher on standardized tests. Finding this hard to believe? Check out <http://www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Be-Out-There/Why-Be-Out-There/Benefits.aspx> for an excellent summary of the research. Richard Louv in his book "Last Child in the Woods" introduces the concept of nature deficit disorder citing parental fears, restricted access to natural areas and screen time as the main culprits. Mr. Louv makes a compelling case suggesting a correlation between the wide range of behaviors and conditions we are seeing in children and the fact that the vast majority of their time is spent indoors. Research continues to support this correlation and documents the benefits of getting kids outside...and adults too! In his newest book "The Nature Principle," Louv correlates a relationship with nature to health and well-being in adults, sustainable economies and strong communities.

This "nature deficit" is being addressed in Alexander, NY (Genesee County) by Alexander Central School District's Outdoor Classroom (see links below). This past year Conservation Connects worked with Alexander School and Nature Explore (<http://www.arboday.org/explore/>) to develop the first certified outdoor classroom in upstate NY. This has been a fascinating adventure with an inspirational learning curve! The purpose of this classroom is to facilitate learning in an outdoor environment. It provides a dedicated space for teachers to teach toward curriculum goals in an outdoor setting for all subjects. It is easy to see how a dedicated outdoor space could benefit other schools along with universities, adult and child day care facilities, assisted living complexes, hospitals, training centers, libraries, museums, and countless other facilities, organizations and programs. Outdoor spaces increase the amount of time children and adults spend outdoors realizing the inherent benefits of being outside and spontaneously reconnecting us to the natural environment.



Now it's Your Turn - Motivation

So, what should you do? Learn more of course (links below) and support projects like the one at Alexander in your own community. Also, support natural resource conservation and sustainable development projects that provide access to natural areas. But most importantly, and this might be the simplest motivational step ever...you should just go outside. Just do it. Go now. Don't wait. Walk out the door. Add an hour of outdoor time to your day every day. Try it. Trust me. Take someone with you. Take a kid with you. Take ten kids.



Links and References:

- Last Child in the Woods (updated and expanded version) <http://richardlouv.com/books/last-child/>
- The Nature Principle <http://richardlouv.com/books/nature-principle/>
- National Wildlife Federation summary of research - <http://www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Be-Out-There/Why-Be-Out-There/Benefits.aspx>
- **Alexander Outdoor Classroom – more info:**
 - <https://sites.google.com/a/alexandercsd.org/outdoor-classroom/>
 - <http://www.wgrz.com/news/article/182486/13/Alexander-Outdoor-Classroom-First-of-its-Kind-in-WNY/>
 - <http://thebatavian.com/dan-crofts/ribbon-cutting-ceremony-alexander-outdoor-classroom-introduces-first-new-york-state/34347>
- Nature Explore, connecting children with nature - <http://www.arboday.org/explore/>
- US Fish and Wildlife Service Let's Go Outside page - <http://www.fws.gov/letsgooutside/families.html>

