

children & nature NETWORK Building a Movement to Reconnect Children and Nature

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### Our view: C'mon out and play—God didn't make Alaska to celebrate the great indoors

Anchorage Daily News – December 10, 2008

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Anchorage youngsters would rather Twitter and text than ski and climb? Rather sprawl on a couch to watch a movie than risk leaking waders in a salmon stream to hook a humpy? Rather play Grand Theft Auto than scramble up to Bird Ridge? That was the message at last week's "Get Outdoors, Anchorage!" summit. Civic

leaders and experts talked about why so many kids stay inside, a habit that creates "nature deficit disorder."

We could do without the buzz phrase, but staying indoors is a truancy for people who live in one of the greatest places on Earth to get outside, summer and winter.

Why aren't more of us taking advantage, particularly our kids?

This time of year, we can think of three reasons. Outdoors, it's cold, dark and expensive. Sports like skiing, snowboarding or snowmobiling require money that not everyone has. Sometimes Alaska demands a lot of good gear.

But sometimes Alaska just demands a little gumption.

We can think of three keys to getting people, especially young people, out in Alaska.

• Parents. If Mom or Dad tends to stay inside, so will the kids. Alaska parents should be the first to introduce their kids to Alaska's outdoors. Early days on skis, trail shoes, running shoes, bicycles or skates begin a connection with the outdoors that can last a lifetime. Maybe the "Get Outdoors, Anchorage!" summit held last week would have sent a stronger message if held on skates and skis at Westchester Lagoon with brown-bag lunches and burn barrels for warmth.

That's good, but as city planner Tom Nelson pointed out four years ago, in the newer parts of town there's a shortage of parks that are easily accessible on bike, ski or foot by families. Voters aren't eager to approve bonds to buy land for these smaller, neighborhood parks. Unlike many other cities, Anchorage doesn't require developers to set aside park land or pay impact fees to provide for land purchases. That's something the city should change in land-use code revisions still under way.

Neighborhood parks are key because they make getting outdoors easier. You don't have to pack up the kids, get in the car and plan a day around visiting them. Got a notion to get the kids outdoors or ski through your park to a nearby trail? Go for it.

• Places to walk. Too many Anchorage neighborhoods lack decent sidewalks and trails, and that discourages walking. We have more than 100 miles of bike trails and more miles of unpaved trails in our parks. But getting to a neighborhood park sometimes still requires a drive when decent ways to walk would keep the car in the garage and the family afoot. Current regulations don't require sidewalks in subdivisions with fewer than about 100 homes. Sidewalks should be automatic in all city subdivisions, at least in the Anchorage Bowl.

Anchorage doesn't make it as easy as it should be for young and old to get outside. But the city nestles in too much nature to allow a deficit to last.

**BOTTOM LINE:** First step into the outdoors is the one out of the house.

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As part of our ongoing efforts to build the movement, the Children & Nature Network has published two new resources for leaders, organizers, and participants at the local, national, and international levels:

***Children and Nature 2008: A Report on the Movement to Reconnect Children to the Natural World***

[>] [Download PDF \[2.2MB\]](#)

***C&NN Community Action Guide: Building the Children & Nature Movement from the Ground Up***

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