
Physicians for Healthier Americans Through Fun Outdoors

1225 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 450
Washington, DC 20005

June 17, 2010

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior

The Honorable Nancy Sutley
Chair, Council on Environmental Quality

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture

The Honorable Lisa Jackson
Administrator, U.S. Environmental
Protection Agency

Dear Secretaries Salazar and Vilsack, Chair Sutley and Administrator Jackson:

We are writing to urge a national town hall and listening session on Health and the Great Outdoors as a part of the President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative. We feel that this session will prove invaluable to defining ways to combine healthy people and healthy lands in new and beneficial ways. The proposal is endorsed by more than 90 key conservation, recreation and medical organizations listed below and is described in the attached document.

Our nation faces great challenges in sustaining traditions of conservation of our lands and waters and in combating lifestyles which have caused skyrocketing rates of obesity and stress. Happily, the America's Great Outdoors Initiative provides a forum for discussing creative means to combine energies and resources to combat all of these challenges in a sustainable way, connecting more people to the Great Outdoors, making them both healthier and more committed to safeguarding this treasured legacy. The town hall described in the attached document embraces the vision set forth in the President's Great Outdoors Month Proclamation (attached) as well as the First Lady's Let's Move Outside Initiative.

All of the groups listed below and more offer our support and assistance in both conducting the town hall and in pursuing the recommendations it helps to generate.

Sincerely,

Michael Suk, M.D. J.D. MPH FACS
Chair

Daphne Miller, M.D.
Vice Chair

Attachments (2)

Supporting Organizations:
American Recreation Coalition
Institute at the Golden Gate

National Wildlife Federation
National Environmental Education Foundation

Sierra Club
Children & Nature Network
National Association of State Park
Directors/America's State Parks
Choose Outdoors
American Horse Council
ARVC – National Association of RV Parks and
Campgrounds
Association of Marina Industries
Camp Fire USA
National Recreation and Park Association
Recreation Vehicle Industry Association
Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association
Good Sam Club
American Hiking Society
Best Parks in America
National Ski Areas Association
National Park Hospitality Association
Igloo Products Corporation
Salt River Tubing
Get Fit Great Falls
Splore – Open for Adventure
National Association of Recreation Resource
Planners
National Ski & Snowboard Retailers Association
Openlands
National Sporting Goods Association
US Play Coalition
America Outdoors
Hiking Along: Science & Hiking for Kids
National Marine Manufacturers Association
International Snowmobile Manufacturers
Association
Council for Environmental Education
Boy Scouts of America
Student Conservation Association
The Trust for Public Land
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
National Association for Interpretation
Association of Children's Museums
Freedom to Roam
International Mountain Bicycling Association
SnowSports Industries America
The Corps Network
National Parks Conservation Association
Tread Lightly!
American Council of Snowmobile Associations
Motorcycle Industry Council
Specialty Vehicle Institute of America
California Academy of Family Physicians
Americans for Responsible Recreational Access
Safe Routes to School National Partnership
American Forest Foundation
Izaak Walton League of America
National Parks Promotion Council
Alliance for Climate Education
Northwest Youth Corps
Be Outdoors Arizona
No Child Left Inside of Cache Valley, Utah.
Iowa Wildlife Federation
Wagner Conservation Coalition (Iowa)
Johnson County Chapter, Izaak Walton League
(Iowa)
Conservation Federation of Missouri
BlueRibbon Coalition
American Trails
Collaborative on Health and the Environment
(CHE)
National Forest Recreation Association
Partnership for the National Trails System
Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association
Western States Tourism Policy Council
Southeast Tourism Society
Campaign for Environmental Literacy
Colorado Youth Corps Association
Appalachian Mountain Club
Alaska Geographic
Maryland Recreation and Parks Association
Wisconsin Environmental Education Board
The Freshwater Trust
Environmental Education Association of Oregon
Discover Your Northwest
Get Outdoors Florida!
Minnesota Association for Environmental
Education
Cascades Raptor Center
American Motorcyclist Association
Trout Unlimited
Back Country Horsemen of America
Equine Land Conservation Resource
Professional Trailbuilders Association
National Scenic Byways Foundation
Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine
Southwest Conservation Corps
Alliance for Childhood

PROPOSED SESSION ON THE PRESIDENT'S AMERICA'S GREAT
OUTDOORS INITIATIVE: **HEALTH AND THE GREAT OUTDOORS**

In April, at the White House Conference on America's Great Outdoors, President Obama established the America's Great Outdoors Initiative to develop a conservation and recreation agenda worthy of the 21st century and to reconnect Americans with our great outdoors. The President understands that protecting and restoring the lands and waters that we love and reconnecting people to the outdoors must be community driven.

The America's Great Outdoors Initiative provides an opportunity to address a factor which will shape attitudes toward the outdoors: the level of participation in outdoor activities that are increasingly understood as significant to public mental and physical health. Many indicators exist, underscoring the point that participation in active outdoor pursuits has declined. The Kaiser Family Foundation has documented a dramatic surge in time devoted to "screen time" by America's youth to 7.5 hours per day, on average, up by an hour a day in just five years. Obesity nationwide, and especially among youth, is labeled as an epidemic and is connected to increases in early onset of diabetes and other chronic health problems. And chronic illnesses which are lifestyle-induced are now linked to 70% of national health costs and rising, a major factor in the escalation of healthcare costs to more than 16% of GDP and some \$8,000 per capita. The Administration and many other institutions are working to arrest this trend, including through the First Lady's Let's Move program. In addition to the physical consequences of more sedentary lifestyles, the medical community is concerned about mental consequences of lifestyles with limited contact with the outdoors, linking this decline to increased stress and depression. We believe that the America's Great Outdoors Initiative presents a unique and valuable opportunity to unite future-focused conservation strategies with future-focused healthcare, uniting leaders in both communities and making possible a synergy that will serve both movements, and the nation, well.

The proposed town hall/listening session will explore innovative ways to combine the healthcare and public lands interests to achieve healthier Americans and a new relevancy for conservation and recreation programs in the minds of the public. The session will have significant participation by healthcare interests, including physicians and public health agencies, and will showcase: (1) existing pilots and demonstration programs which seek to increase the amount of healthy, active use of parks and other public spaces; (2) systems in place and in development which increase awareness of attractive places for outdoor physical activities; (3) systems in place and in development which provide the medical community with information regarding patient use of prescribed places and provide patients with incentives for outdoor activities; (4) strategies for use of funds from doctors, hospitals, health insurance providers and others to build and operate infrastructure supporting healthy outdoor fun.

We believe that three cities offer especially attractive options for this session. One is Atlanta, where the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is based. In addition, there are numerous urban park outreach efforts and nationally prominent medical and healthcare entities within the metropolitan region. Atlanta is also home to regional offices of key federal land agencies, including the National Park Service, USDA Forest Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Similarly, Chicago is an appropriate venue for this topic. Its parks and preserves are not only invaluable conservation assets but wonderful public health opportunities, and many of the leading community organizations involved in conservation have shown a strong interest in health issues.

Finally, Washington, DC, is an attractive venue for the session because (1) national leadership of AGO's principal entities and such key organizations as the US Department of Health and Human Services are located in the Nation's Capital and (2) the costs of a Washington event are likely to be lower, since use of a site such as the Interior auditorium would be possible. A Washington venue may also stimulate interest in Congress, which is now searching for common ground on healthcare issues and new concepts for underwriting the costs of 21st Century conservation strategies.

Proposed Health and the Great Outdoors Town Hall/Listening Session

When: Week of September 13, 2010 (September 14 suggested)
Where: Chicago/Atlanta/Washington, DC
Who: The event is free and open to the public, but participation will be limited and approximately half of the capacity will be by invitation.

Proposed Program

Opening Remarks by Session Chair Tom Vilsack (USDA Secretary)
Comments by First Lady Michelle Obama (*live or videotaped*)

The Health/Great Outdoors Connection Panel Presentation #1:

What do we know about benefits from outdoor activity? What further research is needed? Moderator: Michael Suk, M.D.

Howard Frumkin, M.D., CDC

Dr. Stephen R. Kellert, Yale University

Robert Sallis, M.D., Family Medicine/Sports Medicine, Kaiser Permanente

Richard Louv, Author, ***Last Child in the Woods***

The Health/Great Outdoors Connection Panel Presentation #2:

What does it take to make use of the Great Outdoors standard practice in health care? Moderator: Daphne Miller, M.D.

Victoria Maizes, M.D., Director Medical Education, Integrative Medicine Fellowship,
University of Arizona

Ruth Coleman, Director, California State Parks

Delos Cosgrove, M.D., CEO, Cleveland Clinic

Lori J. Heim, M.D., President, American Academy of Family Physicians

The Health/Great Outdoors Connection Panel Presentation #3.

Health Disparities: Can exposure to nature help close the gap? Moderator:
Surgeon General of the United States Regina Benjamin, M.D.
Stephen Lockhart, M.D., Chairman, NatureBridge
Debbie Chavez, USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station
Zachary Taylor, M.D., Region VIII Health Administrator, U.S. Public Health Service
Martin LeBlanc, National Youth Director, Sierra Club

The Health/Great Outdoors Connection Panel Presentation #4:

How can technology link public lands and healthcare and encourage healthy lives? Moderator: Jon Jarvis, Director, National Park Service
Jack Dangermond, President, Environmental Systems Research Institute
Sally Jewell, President, REI
Rebecca Moore, Director, Google Outreach
xxxxxxxxxxxxx, iTunes by Apple

The Health/Great Outdoors Connection Panel Presentation #5:

How do we provide sustainable funding for our outdoor healthcare infrastructure? Moderator: John Berry, Director, Office of Personnel Management
Martin Watson, CEO, SeeChange Insurance
CEO, Kaiser Permanente
CEO, Aetna
USDA Under Secretary Harris Sherman
Kevin Coyle, Senior Vice President, National Wildlife Federation

Leading the Charge: ***Examples from around the nation*** (5 minute video presentations) Short presentations on programs in Albuquerque (Park Prescriptions), Fresno (Park Prescriptions), C&O Canal (NPS Health and Recreation pilots), Little Rock (Medical Mile) and Brooklyn (NEEF program with pediatricians), ED OUT (outdoor classrooms and fun in Prince William County, VA), and Safeway's Employee Wellness Program

Break Out Groups (**on the panel topics**)

Reporting Session Chaired by HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar

END



GREAT OUTDOORS MONTH, 2010

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

America's vast and varied outdoor spaces are a source of great national pride, and we have long strived to protect them for future generations. Our lands and waters provide countless opportunities for exploration, recreation, and reflection, whether in solitude or with family and friends. During Great Outdoors Month, we renew our enduring commitment to protect our natural landscapes, to enjoy them, and to promote active lifestyles for ourselves and our children.

Our outdoor spaces include the farms, ranches, rivers, forests, and working lands that are integral to our culture and economy, as well as our National Parks, local parks, fishing holes, beaches, and other favorite spots that provide space for us to stay active and healthy. These places are especially important today, as an increasing number of Americans, especially children, fall into unhealthy sedentary lifestyles.

This year, I launched the America's Great Outdoors Initiative to foster innovative, community-driven strategies to protect our natural spaces, and to reconnect Americans with our great outdoors. We are addressing the conservation challenges and opportunities of the 21st century through partnerships with ranchers, farmers, sportsmen, and conservationists; State, local, private, and tribal leaders; educational and service programs like AmeriCorps; and business representatives and other stakeholders. To learn how you can join this effort, visit: www.DOI.gov/AmericasGreatOutdoors.

The America's Great Outdoors Initiative also builds upon *Let's Move*, First Lady Michelle Obama's effort to help our children eat more nutritious foods, lead healthier lives, and increase their physical activity. Exploring beyond the walls of their homes and schools will help inspire our children to move, run, play, and thrive. I encourage all Americans to visit www.LetsMove.gov to learn more.

In these difficult economic times, renewing our commitment to our natural places will foster jobs in the tourism and recreation industries while conserving our great outdoors. Moreover, as Americans, we are responsible for protecting our heritage, including the raw beauty of our lands and waters. Together, let us rise to meet that responsibility and safeguard our cherished outdoor spaces for our children and grandchildren.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim June 2010 as Great Outdoors Month. I urge all Americans to explore the great outdoors and to continue our Nation's tradition of conserving our lands for future generations.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-eighth day of May, in the year of our Lord two thousand ten, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-fourth.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Barack Obama", written over a horizontal line.