

LIGHTS and SHADOWS

from the
Dishman Hills

November 2007

KID CONCERNS

The weather is getting colder, the days shorter, and some of us are catching the season's first case of cabin fever. A couple of months of this daylight deficiency and our moods may turn as gray as the cloudy skies of February. Children of our times are experiencing another condition similar to this called "nature deficiency", a result of modern times that is seriously separating our youngest generation from contact with natural environment.

For most of human history children were free to play and experience nature. Given the opportunity, kids often fled to the nearest wild place, whether it was a big tree, a nearby woodland, a bushy area in the yard, or a nearby watercourse. Work for them was on the farm, in the garden, or mowing the lawn. By the late 20th century, many of the children's environments were becoming urbanized, but as late as the 1970's and 1980's they had good access to nature. They spent the bulk of their recreational time outdoors, using sidewalks, playgrounds, parks, green spaces, empty lots, and other places "left over" from the urbanization process. There was freedom to play, explore and interact with the natural world with few restrictions.

Today things are different. Childhood and a regular contact with the natural world are no longer synonymous due to a number of factors. Our 'culture of fear' has parents afraid to allow their kids to roam outdoors and organizations are worried about liability and cost of outdoor nature activities. Spokane District 81 suspended its Camp Spalding adventures for 6th graders in the 1990's and other schools have exchanged their field trips for supervised indoor activities. Open lots and green spaces are disappearing at an accelerating rate and "no trespassing" signs and fences are everywhere. It comes at no surprise that between most kids and the real world sits a television, a computer, a I-pod, or a cell phone. While all these indoor activities are safer, easier, and more controllable, some feel that we are paying a terrible price and have referred to this change as the "childhood of imprisonment" or the "extinction of experience."

So what is the change for this indoor generation. The obvious effects include such things as obesity from less physical activity, apathy towards environmental concerns, and the loss of the sheer fun of playing in the woods. Children are being disconnected from nature with experiences coming predominately from the media and visual images; the visual is replacing the real. Kids are thinking that nature is exotic, in National Geographic magazines and TV programs, not in their own neighborhoods and backyards.

Psychologists are now recognizing many other, more subtle, changes attributed to this nature deficiency condition. Children that have more contact with natural environments show better ability to concentrate and have self-discipline. On the physical side they have better motor fitness, coordination, balance, and agility. This contact improves imagination and creativity that fosters language and collaborative skills, while improving awareness, reasoning, and observational skills. Besides just having fun and adventure out there in the woods, kids can better deal with stress, adversity, and social interaction problems. Maybe the most important is the sense of wonder that one receives from the nature experience. Wonder is an very important motivator for education and a life long learning desire.

*In every walk in nature
everyone receives more that he seeks—John Muir*

Yet, Spokane, with the help of places like the Dishman Hills Nature Area, has bucked this national trend by fighting to keep it's parks, nature areas and open spaces available for public education and recreation. Approving the Conservation Futures Program in the last election was a fabulous commitment by our community to retain our natural heritage. What we really could use is a nature education center where children could visit to discover the wonders of nature. Think about it, we have parks for picnics, off-the-road vehicles, all types of recreation, and even, yes, for dogs. How about one for our children's future.

BEAR FACTS



On a recent hike into the frosty forest on the Associations land holdings on Tower Mountain, we ran into something very interesting. We found a bear tree where the bark had been, very recently, scraped by the bear claws. The height of the scrapings suggest a small to moderate sized bear. There was a bear sighting on Tower Mountain about seven years ago. It's good to know that these critters have found a home in our forest.

ASSOCIATION NEWS

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to saving nature areas in the Spokane region for public enjoyment and education. Call Michael Hamilton, 747-8147, if you have questions. We meet every other month on the third Tuesday of the month at 7pm, at Opportunity Elementary School, S. 1109 Wilbur. Our next meeting will be in 2008, January 15th. This will be our annual members meeting to elect officers and board members

The following are our October donors that have consented to be listed: Nancy Cashon, Lila & George Girvin, Kenneth Gudgel, The Hobnailers, Dan Iyall, Camille Kovarik, Gloria Krebs, Cynthia Langlois, Jan Strobeck, Margaret Mortz, Leo Middendorf, Mike Ormsby, Ambrose & Willene Priestley, Norma Rosenberger, Adin & Cindy Smith, Kenneth Swedberg, Jude Wiebmer, Jeanne Wilson, Hershel Zellman, and one anonymous donor. Thanks to you in this season of Thanksgiving.

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