

**America's Great Outdoors**  
**Notes from Youth Listening Session**

Location: Hyde Park, New York

Date: August 5, 2010

*President Obama launched a national conversation about conservation in America at the White House Conference on the Great Outdoors on April 16, 2010. The President understands that protecting and restoring the lands and waters that we love and reconnecting people to the outdoors must happen at the local level. Therefore, President Obama directed the principal leaders of the Initiative to travel across the country to listen and learn from people directly involved in finding grassroots solutions to conserve our lands, waterways, historical and cultural resources and to reconnect Americans with the Outdoors. The President indicated that the sessions should engage the full range of interested groups, including tribal leaders, farmers and ranchers, sportsmen, community park groups, foresters, youth groups, businesspeople, educators, State and local government, recreation and conservation groups and others. The President placed a special priority on engaging with America's youth. Below are notes from the breakout groups at the Listening Session sorted by Discussion Question. Please feel free to use the ideation tool at <http://ideas.usda.gov/ago/ideas.nsf/> if you would like to share your thoughts.*

Discussion Questions

Y1. Where do you go when you are not indoors?

Y2. What do you do personally to protect the environment?

Y3. What are some obstacles and challenges that prevent young people from spending time outdoors?

Y4. What recommendations would you make to President Obama to get more young people engaged in, and connected to, the outdoors?

N/A. Not available.

Discussion Question Y1-Y4	Comment
Y1	I go everywhere outside. I sleep in a hammock in my yard. I love going on the Hudson River. I'm part of a group that takes kids out on the Hudson, finished the Hudson river paddle. I'm always outside; there isn't anything inside that's all that appealing to me.
Y1	I work on a reservation in Ossining, NY. It's 900 acres of what was once farmland, now forest. Do lot of hiking there, learn about animals. I try to learn from there. I live a 15 min walk from the Hudson. There are a bunch of parks in Croton. Anywhere there is a park that's free I try to go there.
Y1	We just came back from camping a week ago or so. My family and a couple of my family's friends. We do crabbing, mussels. I like to fish. And I also like to canoe. Fascination for me in camping is that I can write and I can draw there and I can feel the atmosphere and write to my heart's content. It usually calms me down.
Y1	I live in the city so I'm not an outside all the time. We have gone snowboarding with my family in Colorado. There was no outside world influence. In terms of my job, this morning we went to Norrie Point and we were out in the water identifying fish.
Y1	I like to be in the water or at the beach or at the pool swimming. Me and my brothers really like to do that. Today we went to Norrie Point in the Hudson River and played with fish. I really like the water.

Y1	I do pretty much anything and everything that is outdoors. My family has a farm, we hike a lot in the back country. I sketch outdoors. Whatever I can get into.
Y1	When I go outside I like to go hiking, kayaking.
Y1	I live in Albany. Me and my best friends go bike riding, go swimming in a pool and ride back.
Y1	I live in the city. Go to a public pool or go to a park or to the church or something.
Y1	I go outdoors; I like to play soccer, go swimming, take hikes
Y1	I waterski, I like to go swimming. Me and my friends go on the walkway a lot. The railtrail. My family goes camping, too, in the Adirondacks.
Y1	Most of the time, during the summer, I play basketball. During the school year, I go to the community center. It kept me out of trouble.
Y1	I like to do a lot of things outdoors. Walking dogs, tennis, camping. Enjoying a local stream, park, gardening. Just sitting outside. We have a picnic table outside our house, so I eat there.
Y1	I'm a painter and I go outside to paint. I have an outdoor studio, which I prefer. There are places like pavilions where I go to set up and work.
Y1	I like to play basketball and volleyball and walk with my friends and talk and relax.
Y2	I recycle.
Y2	I keep trash picked up.
Y2	I go to school up in Ithaca. It's difficult living on a campus & still being green. I try to compost and recycle, take buses or walk. Hydro fracking is a big issue. Most of the campus is very against it. I know it has done some terrible damage in W. Virginia and other places. A lot of people at Cornell are against it.
Y2	I go to school in Vermont. I'm an eco-rep. I teach kids who live in the dorms to save energy by turning off the lights, keeping showers shorter, reusing a water bottle. I am an environmental engineering major. Sustainability is my life right now. We have all the time in the world, but the earth doesn't. Taking a solid look at everything – food that you waste, raw materials that we can't just be greedy all the time. I spend a lot of time thinking about that.
Y2	I like to take materials that people throw away or recycle and turn them into art. Last year I taught an art class at the Beacon Community center and we made masks using recycled newspaper and flowers and other resources that we found around the campsite. We also made a huge turtle that represents the creation story from many cultures around the world.
Y2	I run a small farm about 30 min north of NYC. We're a small organic farm. Everything we practice is about protecting the environment. Composting, irrigation. We encourage people in the community to bring their compost to us rather than to landfills. A big problem in Rockland county is development. Turned a great deal of land to housing.
Y2	In my city in Albany there is a lot of garbage. Our summer job is to go around our town and clean up the garbage, the weeds. Make parks.
Y2	During the year I live in Houston. In Houston, there is no recycling. In my house, I take little steps. I've changed out all the light bulbs, try to do my laundry in the off-peak hours. I decided to go with an electric company that uses wind power. My apartment complex does recycle. I try to get my children in the habit of taking things to the other dumpster for recycling. When I'm able to use recyclable bags of that sort.

Y2	What I personally do is I don't idle my vehicle when I'm driving and I try to remind others. And I also recycle everything that's possibly recyclable and I encourage everyone in my family to be mindful about the environment.
Y2	I really love to grow food. I love to maintain a garden and I love to buy food from people who live in my area. It's hard to farm. I've learned a great respect for it. I have an honor for that profession now. I know that there is a lot of waste that goes along with industrial farming. I try to use my food wisely. I see a lot of misuse of public lands. Where there is a lot of green space, but people aren't able to use it.
Y2	I do recycling and I like to remind the younger youth that we are using 25% of the world's natural resources in the United States but we are only 5% of the world's population and we need to think about the other 95%.
Y2	In my school we have a backyard for playing. There are wrappers, straws, everything even though food is not allowed there. Students are supposed to pick up all the stuff, but there is so much trash, even cigarettes. Smoking is a problem.
Y3	Where I live in Albany, it's a lack of transportation and influence. I see young kids doing the same thing every day. They go to school, come home, do homework. If they had the influence to go outdoors.
Y3	Number one obstacle would be technology. I can listen to my iPod or I could play with this tree.
Y3	I do agree with technology. People have Facebook, computers, sidekicks, the Wii. I feel that there are not enough parks, not enough green space, not enough gardens. I think a lot of teenagers are focused on what they wear and who has the new technology. People are not thinking about "Let's go to Central Park." People are focused on what they have. Teenagers are not aware of it. They don't get information about it. And how critical is what our earth is going through, they're not going to care. Teenagers need more awareness about our earth, rather than the media and Hollywood and what is "in." Let's love our earth.
Y3	Our society has gotten used to things coming to us, rather than us going to things. We have a computer that can bring us any information in the world. We've gotten lazier as a people. People are used to getting waited on; buying food instead of growing. As opposed to us going out there and being the change. A lot of people have gotten into a rut. It's not easy to bring people out of that pattern.
Y3	We find that kids love the social networking, iPods, etc. But once we get kids outside, once they get outdoors to a farm or go hiking or fishing or do a nature study, once they've experienced that, they walk away with a positive outlook on nature and the environment. We need to work all together to make kids feel comfortable outside.
Y3	I think sometimes it's just the kids themselves. They don't want to go outside – in the summer it's too hot, in the winter it's too cold. They all have sports, but most of it is pretty competitive. There is nothing to it, but what they are doing right there. They don't open up. Like my mom says to think out of the box. When they are on the computer, I think they feel pretty content with themselves.
Y3	How much technology is used in schools is frustrating. In half of my classes I'm watching a video and homework is on the computer.

Y3	I think the biggest problem is transportation and access. There are kids that don't have the computers and tech, but they aren't being exposed to the programs. The problem is being able to bring those programs that allow access into the schools to recruit the kids. Maybe talking to city council and saying this is what we want – we want our kids to have access. If there are enough young people who say make it happen. Kids don't go outside sometimes they are afraid.
Y3	Things that take place outside in the world are things that really exist and things that take place inside the classroom, exist in a textbook. We need to be able to connect, especially in science classes that what we're learning about actually exists. Being outside is a real experience as opposed to textbooks in classrooms
Y3	Information isn't getting out there. Violence makes kids afraid to come out.
Y3	I go out to schools on LI and educate kids about what's in the outdoors. We go into the classroom and talk to kids. The biggest obstacle is funding. We don't get to go out to as many schools, the schools budgets have been cut so they can't do as many field trips. It's all about funding.
Y3	We need a philosophical change of what the great outdoors is. We don't need to go out west or to some faraway place. It can be a little stream, outside your door, even if it's in the city. It exists where we exist.
Y3	Another thing is that the people that have the money to give us buses don't know that we want it. Where I live, they put a bike lane because they saw people riding bikes on the street. They put the bike lane on a part of the street that nobody rides on. People of color aren't saying what they want.
Y3	It is about disproportionate funding for the youth. We don't have the community center anymore. That comes down to a lack of resources, a lack of money. We don't see each other in the same way anymore, we don't have the same access. We have a partnership with Clearwater. Our biggest challenge is access. Fresh Air Fund can't take all the kids that apply. What about kids that don't have access to be able to leave the city? There are community gardens in the city, but they aren't provided access. Government and private industry are pushing on opposite sides. It doesn't always come out to benefit the people in the middle who lose the garden because it becomes a parking lot or a 7-11.
Y3	As someone who lives in the city, we all know that organic food is good for us, but it's too expensive. The majority of NYC schools have cut down money and stuff. It's hard for my family when we go to the supermarket, we're going to buy what's cheap. We need more access to healthier food that's cheaper. I think we need more camps. Going to camp with Fresh Air Fund was a great experience for me. It is true that there is a limit on how many kids come there, but there are not enough things for getting young people outdoors. We have a lack of resources and I think it's sad to see. We are the next generation and there are not enough things for us. There are too many restaurants in NYC, everything has been industrialized. Central Park is not enough. We need more places in the Bronx and Queens. I'm Hispanic. I know that blacks and Hispanics have the highest poverty rates. We need cheaper places for teenagers to go. If I wasn't at the Fresh Air Fund, I would be doing nothing. My family can't afford camp.

Y3	I think that in the school, our curriculum, science is not as global as history. It's not a big priority. In the school they are not pushing us and telling us to go out and study this tree or this piece of grass and asking us how we can make the soil more fertile. We have a science test once every four years. On a day to day basis, it starts at the school. What kids learn at school, they take home. You take people from Fresh Air Fund and you bring people into the school. Science needs to be taken more seriously in the schools and kids tested more often. I think it would help motivate the kids more.
Y4	A lot of schools, my high school, have a national wellness day or week. School or community could have a national "Nature Day or Week" Not everyone would have to take a science course, but a day a month or something, but where the school could go out and take a hike or go someplace outdoors.
Y4	I'm on a sports team, but I see a lot of kids excluded from sports. I think involving everyone, including from the inner city could be networking with sports.
Y4	Partnerships between schools and non-profits. Maybe there needs to be a contract between people getting Recovery Act money is to partner with a school by adopting a school. Some of these big companies could pay it back in the form of community service. Giving it back to the community or sponsor outdoor programs.
Y4	I think we need to embed conservation, character education, and environmental standards in new national curriculum.
Y4	I came here for one main reason because I used to work for the Beacon Community Center and it closed. Working with kids from 6-12, we provided a lot of those things for the kids. We gave them that parent, that attention. We were the reason they might want to do better than that. We provided so many activities for these children that no other center was doing. I also mentored teenagers. I had kids coming outside. We reached out to every teen. The reason I'm here is because my main goal is to search for a helping hand, another organization, that can lend a hand and refer me to somebody because I see the same teenagers that I was mentoring on the streets drunk or high. We opened the doors to the youth and elderly. I recommend to Obama to single out, focus on these organizations that are in the communities by themselves. Between 7-10 towns there was only one community center. It needs enough funding, enough money. We all need to work together. It gave kids a reason to get out of the house and off of the computer, to do outdoor activities. Focus on community organizations, provide resources for community centers to help youth and the elderly. Things can be done. I came here today to try to find help. I hope somebody understands that what I'm trying to say that these people need somebody. We were that somebody and we want to branch out.