

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 like to garden. I go out and weed, harvest, plant seed. I have a garden in my backyard now, with green beans and beets.
Y1	I go to the beach, because it is very environmental because there are lots of creatures and animals. While I like going during the day, I also like going at night because the moon and stars are so bright, and you can't see them in the city. I really appreciate the natural light and stars.
Y1	Mountains and forest. Likes plants; plant biology creates foundation for the environment. Also likes seeing plants here because they are so different from California. You can see the differences in plants at different altitudes.
Y1	I like hands on activities, where I can interact with the environment. For example, Norry Point trail, where I work to restore wetland marshes.
Y1	I like hiking on rail trails in the Mohonk region and preserve (in Hudson Valley NY) and swimming in lakes and natural swimming holes. I like biking as well.
Y1	I like to hike and I live right next to a trail. I am from Albany but now live in the country. Used to be from the city, nice change. Jogs in the mornings. No open spaces in city.

Y1	I like to hike in the forest, where you can lose yourself. I like to find areas where you can't find evidence of where humans have been, especially old forests.
Y1	I like to go to parks because they have nice scenery. Woodland Park is a nice park. I like to hang out there with friends.
Y1	Growing up in Brooklyn, you don't see much nature. Here (in mid-Hudson) you have trees; it makes you feel motivated to think positively.
Y1	Feel cramped inside so I like the openness of space outside. I feel a rush of energy when I go outside.
Y1	I like to go out with my dogs to walk for 2-3 hours. I live in Beacon. I enjoy looking at trees and different paths. This way, I get exercise and they get to see different things.
Y1	Likes to observe nature itself; it reminds you not to be selfish and reminds that humans are not the only thing on the planet.
Y1	Being indoors can make you feel depressed, but when you breathe in fresh air it calms you and gets rid of the toxins.
Y1	I feel more relaxed when I am outside.
Y2	I detest littering. I tell people to not litter. Trash cans are everywhere. I tell my friends that they shouldn't litter. People shouldn't be disrespectful. We have a beautiful world.
Y2	Keep environment clean. Treat it as our room. Recycle. We have a generator (motion sensor) to shut off lights when we're not there.
Y2	One of the big things people can do is compost. 40% of what is in landfills is compostable. It's F.B.I. -- fungus, bacteria and invertebrates. Composting is nature's recycling. I have an area on the side of my house which is compost area. It works! You can see it working like a corn cob that I have seen decomposing over weeks. At work, we get compost from worm bins that are inside. Compost is an amazing fertilizer.
Y2	In high school, I worked for student conservation commission and Americorps. This was a huge life changing experience. I now work for Parks Service which has also changed my life. All of this taught me to be a leader. I feel that teaching others is my way of helping. Small organizations are connecting people to the environment and teaching others.
Y2	Pay attention to the environment. Notice what changes are happening, so you can respond to them. For example, there are less and less deer because of development in my area. If you pay attention, you can find the root of the problem.
Y2	I work for the Green Team and everything that we do, we learn about the environment. We plant and eat the food and you actually see how food is grown. Growing organic is a better way to utilize what is here and we have learned how. We have also learned different ways to recycle.
Y2	People, especially in urban areas, should be responsible consumers, know where your food comes from. For instance don't buy BP gas. Start with yourself.

Y2	Our group is taking abandoned lots in Albany and cleaning them up. We have planted areas and worked with local churches, etc. We need tools to better this activity. We work with young people like Danielle to teach them about these things and we need schools to do better and teach more.
Y2	Using less electricity and less water helps the outdoors because it preserves resources.
Y2	We waste a lot of energy and water.
Y2	The less we use, the less we need.
Y2	I stopped speeding on the freeway because it wastes gas. Now that I don't speed anymore, my car is much more efficient.
Y2	In Brooklyn we have tons of cars and I carpool.
Y2	Organics grew up on organic farms. Education is needed to tell people how to eat local and support sustainable farms. Need to get it out there. We here are all educated and many people don't know, so we have to educate them. She did some teaching and farm work with little kids.
Y2	The best thing we can do is to be a good example. I lead interpretive hikes. If the kids see you, they will see you as a role model. It's easy and simple.
Y2	We can lead by what we do in our own homes. People get used to certain human comfort and that disconnects people from the outdoors, i.e. it's "hot outside, and not the perfect temperature."
Y2	We do need to teach the community what is morally correct letting them know what is good and what is not.
Y2	Consumerism - always told to buy stuff, and lots of stuff. It is important to get high quality stuff and less of it. Lasts longer. Saves money. Having something last and is high quality.
Y3	I used to live in the city. Moved from city to suburbs. The city environment is limiting people from seeing nature. Parks are not being kept up. No use if not kept up.
Y3	Upkeep of environment. If it is dirty, you would rather stay inside. If you are from the city, you are not used to being out in nature. The first experiences are not good experiences because it is new.
Y3	Technology is a big reason people don't go out. They are worried about getting the best technology like the newest iPhone.
Y3	One obstacle is that people don't know where things (good outdoor spaces) are. People in the city are often far from places.
Y3	Culture is not helping. Parents are afraid to have kids outside. They think and are told it is not safe. Everyone needs to be so connected all the time and youth is looking to this. We are not bringing people to nature.
Y3	Lack of education. Adults and children don't know there are areas you can go to be in nature. Common Ground Farm at Stonykill was almost shut down. Kids and Families can go out and run in fields, etc.

Y3	Educational structure prevented me from being outdoors. Get up go to school, sports, etc. No time for outdoors. There is no extra time for outdoors except night, and going outside at night is not as much fun.
Y3	Parents raised me hiking biking etc. Others don't do this. It is a cycle. If you are raised in touch with the environment it is easier to pass on. Parenting and exposure are important.
Y3	You, yourself are the biggest obstacle. If you leave your society for 3 days you would collapse. Kids kick and scream for what they want but they don't do this to go outside.
Y3	Parenting and education at the same time keep people from the environment. You have to look out for yourself to get out. A lot of kids don't know about composting in the inner city. If parents and kids don't know, it will not be passed on.
Y3	Communication is big obstacle (I am from Harlem) my mom won't leave me outside. Don't have the community base. Moved up to this area but still don't have that community. Neighbors don't talk. People would feel more comfortable in environment if communication was better.
Y4	Find a connection to the environment, where food comes from, where there is fresh air. Putting funding into programs that train leaders and let people know what the agencies/organizations do.
Y4	Get kids out and educate on the ground at farms. More focus should be on hands on education, not on test scores.
Y4	Get over apathy toward the environment.
Y4	Get past human narcissism. Get people in the environment.
Y4	Agricultural education should be taught in elementary school. They are our future. I just learned a lot of this. Pesticides and Herbicides should be made illegal.
Y4	More funding for programs for Fresh Air, etc. More media coverage so kids can learn.
Y4	Spent week at camp upstate. I have seen kids who are afraid of bugs and the outdoors be transformed. Programs like that are suffering from funding cuts. Need to understand that those programs are important.
Y4	We need more environmental education. Fresh Air Fund hosts local schools to come and do overnights and other programs. Budget cuts, have resulted in EE being cut out of their programs.
Y4	To graduate from HS you should have some type of class on environmental education. Like math, etc.
Y4	Maybe environmental classes can be a mandatory credit like health. Should be universal knowledge. I went to DEC camps as well. I have also seen others who were not interested learn and get excited. We need more funding for these types of camps.
Y4	Exposure is important. Education as well. Get people to understand they can make a difference. We need to expose kids to what is wrong with the environment so they understand what's wrong with our environment.

Y4	A basic class may make kids hate the environment. We should have random club nights in parks so people can have a good time in the park. Music, planting things exploring. Not forced to do it.
Y4	All schools should have composting across America. Recycle in lunch room. Education programs would teach people why it is important.
Y4	More funding for programs like Green Team. We are leading the mission. Need to keep us and others alive with funding. Local garden programs would help as well.
Y4	Transportation is important. People in city don't even know you can take subway to beach. Fares keep increasing. We need to get people out there.
Y4	Transportation is important. If there was a bus that took me to the Hudson valley area from the city I would do it. Kids need to be able to do retreats for a weekend. I drive but gas is not good right now. When in the city you start to think that there is nothing out there other than buildings.
Y4	There are a lot of awesome programs out there. People are full of innovative ideas. What if there was a green council nationally that was connected to grass roots groups and could help with funding and transportation, etc.?