

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

Location: Los Angeles, CA

Date: July 8, 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

1. What works: Please share your thoughts and ideas on effective strategies for conservation, recreation and reconnecting people to the outdoors.
2. Challenges: What obstacles exist to achieve your goals for conservation, recreation, or reconnecting people to the outdoors?
3. Federal government role: How can the federal government be a more effective partner in helping to achieve conservation, recreation or reconnecting people to the outdoors?
4. What additional tools and resources would help your efforts be even more successful?

QUESTION	ORGANIZATION	COMMENT
1	Friends of LA River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LA transportation center: Largest piece of real-estate in the central city. Piggy back yard study. Huge opportunity for looking at parkland for flood control.</li> <li>• Missing piece of conversation is role of railroads. How can we work with railroads? How can the Dept. of Transportation. work as a park agency?</li> <li>• Example: The 6<sup>th</sup> st Bridge replacement. Dept. of Transportation gave LA \$200M to rebuild the iconic bridge. Should have a design competition to have an iconic new bridge for aesthetics. Dept. of Transportation is not geared toward dealing with aesthetics. EPA and Dept. of Transportation need to work more closely.</li> </ul>
1	Tetra Tech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tremendous leverage opportunity with high speed rail. Underground rail/collaborate with putting culverts in the tunnels.</li> <li>• How to integrate the rails into part of the outdoors? Need Joint</li> </ul>

		line items for agencies and more collaboration: E.g. ACOE does not do clean up of toxicity and can be cost prohibitive for local gov. ACOE cannot spend other federal money for cost share. Only their own and local funds. EPA provides money for clean up.
2	Natural History Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From limited number of studies—scaffold’s experience to get folks out to the rural park areas. Staffing will be a large issue for the parks. Parks should be able to add wildlife habitat to urban areas.</li> </ul>
1	Kayaker/journalist UCLA professor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A river park can have a great impact on a community—e.g. Kernville CA, the river park is a great example. Also, Downtown Reno on the Truckee River is another example.</li> </ul>
2	LA Co. Flood control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of integration in agencies for offstream amenities. Risk management vs. recreation needs. Recreation and access opportunities are not recognized by federal partners as a mission because of risk issues. Need to provide a method to allow for outdoor experience and accept risk at the same time. ACOE does not have money to provide for recreation near the flood control projects. Federal agencies need to look at watershed management approaches. ACOE does not have granting authority or the authority to enter into agreements with local jurisdictions for maintenance agreements/joint powers of agreement to allow their projects to provide access and recreation beyond flood control.</li> </ul>
2, 3, 4	Wildlands Conservancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whitewater Preserve/Palm Springs Public cannot access lower portion of the Whitewater River ½ of the year because of fire closure.</li> <li>Federal Role: No staffing is available by the BLM, so no public access. Upper part is staffed by the Wildlands Conservancy. Lower part should be staffed by BLM.</li> <li>Challenge: Spent &gt; \$40M to partner with Feds to purchase 650K acres in the Mojave and gave it back to the Feds for preservation. The same land is now under threat of development. CA Desert Protection Act is supported by the WC. We need to protect lands first before we can restore them.</li> <li>Tools: Push for solar energy in the desert. Legislation brought different stakeholders together for protecting the Mojave Desert. CDPA 2010.</li> </ul>
4	Mojave Trails Group—Lifelong Republican and OHV enthusiast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Met with Senator Feinstein. Was given the opportunity to prove claim and share ideas. CDPA 2010 allowed opportunity for recreation for OHV. Tools: CDPA 2010 should be used as a national model for collaboration.</li> </ul>
1, 2	Children’s Nature Institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustained a 25 year organization. Located in a park-poor area. Forming collaborations and getting people excited about Park Plaza. Own two “Wonder Mobiles” for kids that contain pelts,</li> </ul>

		<p>skins and other educational materials etc. for education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What works: We get kids excited about nature then take kids on field trips.</li> <li>• Challenge: Our efforts often feel like “drops in the bucket” compared to the needs of educating our youth about nature.</li> </ul>
2	Office of Mark Ridley Thomas—Supervisor, 2 <sup>nd</sup> District of LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenge: The environmental issues that her clients deal with are in a negative context because of fines etc.</li> </ul>
1, 4	Off-road Vehicle Watch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What Works: Partnering with Sheriffs has worked to help purchase off-road vehicles for them to patrol OHV areas.</li> <li>• What has not worked: BLM said they were going to monitor, but they have not.</li> <li>• Tools/Fed Role: Need more maps and kiosks for responsible OHV operators to see where to go.</li> <li>• Need to use rail from LA to Palm Springs to get kids out to Joshua tree. Rail to Palm Springs not used. A bus takes people from Palm Springs out into the basin.</li> </ul>
1, 2	MRCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Converting areas to parks with local, state and federal \$\$ .</li> <li>• Greatest Challenge is identify federal \$\$ to fulfill requirements in unique LA situations where land acquisition is expensive! Non-pristine lands.</li> <li>• Linking green areas together is a challenge too.</li> <li>• We look for under-utilized land.</li> <li>• Challenge: We do not always have control of land, so we cannot qualify for certain grants to develop the parks. For example, one brownfield, could not be improved because of owner’s liability. Owner did not want to take the risk. Also, LA cannot compete with pristine lands for grant monies.</li> <li>• How do we get resources for multiple agencies to work on joint projects?</li> <li>• What works: HUD Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) money has been useful.</li> </ul>
2	RCD/Sierra Club OHV user too.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lived next open space with irresponsible OHV use. Challenge: how to figure out how to allow access and appreciate natural resources simultaneously. Companies that build OHVs should pay for places for people to go to for offroading, so pristine areas do not get destroyed. Need a method contain the bad actors of OHV use.</li> </ul>
1, 2	Pacific Crest Trails Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part of partnership for all National Historic or Scenic trails. National Trails system. There are 11 national Historic trails—5,343 miles. Only 1/30 of these trails is fully open--The Appalachian.</li> <li>• Need funding for these trails as well as parks.</li> <li>• Having appreciation of parks at young age can translate to appreciating trails later on. Cultural and historic preservation</li> </ul>

		of trails are important and they can provide corridors.
2	Wilderness Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working in collaboration is a difficult challenge. Need a strong focal point, such as the San Gabriel Mountains National Recreation area. Would require the NPS and USFS to work together. USFS could provide technical support to the effort.</li> </ul>
1	LA Conservation Corps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building parks along the river (i.e. pocket parks), will add more connectivity for young folks to access wilderness.</li> <li>We build new parks, but we have nobody to maintain them, and they become taken over by gangs. Once people see the LA River as a river and not a drain, it is amazing how they change their perception.</li> </ul>
1	Watershed Conservation Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified 7 high priority parks. Flier from Whittier Narrows session shows this. Urban nature in the cities. E.g. Duck Pond near San Gabriel River—90 acres in size. It is also an energy corridor—Southern California Edison (SCE).</li> <li>Lots of transitioning lands that are along our corridors to provide movement of wildlife of people and nature. How to work with SCE on license lands to promote wildlife and conservation. Need help to smooth through the difficulties with SCE and others.</li> <li>Schools: lack of green in schools in the inner city. Bring nature to the schools. Onsite water capturing. Gates are closed on weekends. Risk management.</li> <li>Sometimes thresholds for grants are too high to meet the funding requirements for our projects.</li> </ul>
3	Citizen and forest service volunteer for 14 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Federal Role: Need to give a higher tax break for personal use vehicles for volunteers rather than the current. \$0.14/mile!</li> </ul>
Federal Role, Challenges	Director, unit with LA Unified School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need assistance from federal gov't integrating curriculum and physical education standards so teachers can justify getting children outdoors in parks and exposed to nature. Need outdoor education programs</li> </ul>
Challenges	Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children are being denied opportunities to connect with nature the way they should. Physical education is not required by many districts. Students are overweight. They score better on tests if they do physical activity outdoors. Students need a connection to the natural world.</li> </ul>
Tools	Student from Buffalo, NY doing internship in LA for summer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agree with need to get children outdoors. Organizers should have the US Dept of Education involved. Consider getting Michelle Obama involved in promoting the outdoors to help combat obesity. Give credit to college students for working with children outdoors. Hire H.S. and college students to work in parks outdoors. Think about partnering with the Big Brother, Big Sister program.</li> </ul>
Challenges	Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Her organization works collaboratively to build gardens and parks. It is difficult for non-profit organizations to get federal</li> </ul>

		<p>funding. Look at mechanisms to make it easier for NGOs to access funding – they can help accomplish federal goals.</p>
Challenges	No Organization Available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Took kids on field trips last year from El Centro. Each busload of kids was \$1000. The program involves science in motion. Part of problem is that there is no money to pay for buses. It cost \$18,000 to take 400 kids on a field trip. Busing kids is a huge problem that doesn't have the visibility of other problems. It would be nice to get some funding from foundations. USFS has good student oriented programs, but it is difficult to get students to them. Once her program got funding from the local water district.</li> </ul>
What Works, Challenges	Independent LA educator working in outdoor education – teaches primitive living skills, emphasizes Native American mentality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Speaking as an educator, he thinks what works is not having pressure to pass standards. It is important for kids and adults to have fun so they get a "Huck Finn" type experience. Then they are interested in field guides, etc. Students and adults need immersion experiences e.g. getting dirty, hands-on. There is a need to connect people's hearts through direct exposure to the outdoors. Don't get too hung up on meeting curriculum standards. Experiences are the seed to passion for the outdoors. Challenges include too much administrative paperwork.</li> </ul>
What Works	Not provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For LA, important to focus on spaces in people's backyards. Neighborhood parks. Focus on things like water conservation, community gardens. A small park can demonstrate some of these concepts. Prioritize low income, populations of color</li> </ul>
Challenges, Federal Role	Off road motor vehicle enthusiast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People are interested in recreation. Laws focus more on conservation. Regulatory focus should include motorized vehicle access. People need off pavement access – fishermen, off road vehicle enthusiasts. These type of people are often stigmatized. Many are willing to volunteer. These folks are a large untapped resource. They feel that some gov't employees are hostile. The federal gov't should allow more back country access to unpaved road systems and existing systems should be allowed to continue. Such roads can also be used by bicyclists and pedestrians.</li> </ul>
Tools	Boys and Girls Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>80% of kids are in low income households. This is an organization nationally that could be tapped into. He would like to see getting more kids in the outdoors. The organization could provide a great avenue to accomplish goals of this initiative, especially for economically disadvantaged kids. Federal planning and implementation needs to be on a macro level.</li> </ul>
Tools	City of Santa Clarita	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there are best practices models that could be adapted rather than reinventing the wheel? In terms of funding, are there some pots of money that are easier to apply for (not ARRA funding)?</li> </ul>
What Works	Ultramarathoner with six	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Don't underestimate the influence of parents. Many nonprofit</li> </ul>

	children	organizations give money for children. He also has issues with power lines in backcountry areas of San Diego area – Cleveland Nat'l Forest, BLM lands.
What Works	Shoshone Native American Gov't	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look at how indigenous people deal with issues like climate change, mineral extraction. They have stories about desert areas that used to be green and lush. Mining and water extraction are degrading to the landscape. Their ancestors have seen many impacts – talk to indigenous people to learn from past. He gave Yucca Mountain as an example. They look at protecting the land.</li> </ul>
What Works	West ____ environmental group. Works in US Mexico border region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is important to be able to communicate bilingually. Need to reach out to different audiences.</li> </ul>
	Not provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wants to talk about the importance of rivers. Need to stop building around the Santa Clara River in natural hazard areas.</li> </ul>
Federal Role, Challenges	Not provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trash in public areas is horrendous. Hopes teachers and others taking children outdoors will teach them not to leave trash. Fires – wants to know who is responsible for fires. How many millions of dollars does the USFS spend on predator control? Feels that predator control only benefits ranchers. The money could be better used, especially when we are talking about getting children outdoors.</li> </ul>
Challenges	Eight county organizations in the desert.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>He welcomes renewable energy. But there are tremendous costs associated with it. Not much public land left for energy developers. They have to mitigate for endangered species. Tax base is being diminished by land being put into wilderness areas and public areas. For example a huge number of acres were lost by San Bernardino County. Even if everyone negotiates around the table, lawsuits are a big problem.</li> </ul>
Challenges, Tools	_____ Conservancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lots of funding is locked up, especially in CA. She wants to see enhanced funding for land acquisition. No local land trusts are in San Gabriel Mojave area. Should focus on existing infrastructure rather than destroying habitat.</li> </ul>
What Works, Federal Role	Represents several organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National parks are a tremendous success. They have a great program for hiring college interns. She has been involved in examining a renewable energy initiative in the Mojave Desert. The desert is a tremendous biodiversity hotspot. Renewable energy could ruin it. Build renewable energy projects in brownfields. Federal gov't intervention is needed.</li> </ul>
Federal Role	Sierra Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The room for listening session does not reflect the Los Angeles population. Get more inner city people.</li> </ul>
Tools	Metropolitan (LA?) YMCA board of directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) YMCA impacts 10 million kids annually. 35 million kids live within 10 miles of a YMCA. The gov't should partner with nonprofit groups. They have access with lots of programs already in place to help get kids outdoors. What is the most efficient method to get kids outdoors? 2) Would love to see</li> </ul>

		Michelle Obama include an outdoor component. Read book Black Swan. World doesn't move in a straight line. Gulf oil spill is a black swan – embed “black swan” into planning process. Great job in parks.
Tools	Made a documentary about the LA River – want it to be part of this	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gave information about the documentary to session facilitators.</li> </ul>
Tools, Federal Role	Conducts tours of the LA River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transitioning now. Wants to know if there is place to call to learn how to partner with others in the future. Suggested a hotline to answer questions like where to get money, who to partner with. It would be a very good tool.</li> </ul>
Challenges, Federal Role	Conservancy – San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles (?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Station Fire consumed forest and funds. Parts of the forest are closed for an indefinite time. They have an office in lower Azusa. Their office helps guide visitors – more than a million per year. The forest is severely underfunded. More visitors per year than Yosemite.</li> </ul>
Federal Role		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would like to see more federal funds reallocated to recreation.</li> </ul>
Tool	Your Community Garden Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They want to build edible gardens in schools – interested in partnering.</li> </ul>
Tools	Santa Monica Mountains Foundation (?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding is vitally important to get kids outdoors.</li> </ul>
Challenges		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worried that working to get kids/people to visit public lands might become an inappropriate advertising venue</li> </ul>
Challenges	Student at Occidental College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A component of education not discussed is the influx of people into remote areas. There is an increase in rescues of people who go into remote areas without sufficient water or survival gear. Also noticed graffiti in remote areas. Yes, we need to get more people out, but we need to give proper education.</li> </ul>
What Works	No Organization Available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When people experience gardens and flowers firsthand, they are more likely to appreciate. Good to cross pollinate gardening, recreation</li> </ul>
Challenges	No Organization Available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LA has the largest equestrian population in the country. People purchase burros and horses from the BLM. Very few wild horses remain. Roundups are inhumane. Methods for roundups need to change. Consider birth control for wild animals.</li> </ul>
What Works, Challenges, Federal Role	No Organization Available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works with LA Mayor's million tree program. Link kids to nature by turning concrete in front of their homes into trees. She talked about urban forests. She related a story about a young man who didn't conform to neighborhood mores. Neighbors worked together to plant trees. They included the nonconforming young man who became part of neighborhood. The experience changed the dynamic of the neighborhood. Tree planting helps connect and reconnect people. It is good for kids that can't get to parks. They need money for the</li> </ul>

		maintenance of trees. Could employ kids if there is money – from federal gov't? Urban forestry is too expendable in public budgets.
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