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Quick Facts

Demographic Change

Since 1900, the U.S. population has grown from about 76 million to more than 303 million, and the proportion living in the countryside has declined:

- 1900.....60% rural (U.S. Census Bureau 1995)
- 2000.....80% metropolitan (Hobbs and Stoops 2002)

The number of Americans will reach 571 million by 2100 (Cordell and Overdevest 2001).

The United States is diversifying. By 2050 (Cordell and Overdevest 2001):

- Two in 10 Americans will be Hispanic;
- One in 10 will be African American; and
- One in 10 will be Asian, American Indian, or from some other nonwhite ethnic group.

Many rural areas are urbanizing:

- At current rates of development, from 1997 to 2030 housing density will increase on 44.2 million acres of private forestland, an area the size of New England (Stein and others 2005).
- From 2000 to 2030, housing growth is projected on about 22 million acres of private rural land within 10 miles of a national forest or national grassland (Stein and others 2007).
- From 1990 to 2020, retiree growth in states with high amenity values (such as national forest land) is expected to range from 33 percent for South Carolina to 447 percent for Arkansas (Cordell and Overdevest 2001).

Disconnect from Nature

In a single 6-year period (1997–2003), the proportion of American children aged 9–12 who spent time on outdoor activities such as hiking, gardening, and fishing fell by 50 percent (Hofferth and Curtin 2006).

On average, American children aged 8–18 spend:

- almost 6-1/2 hours per day with electronic media, including more than 3 hours watching TV (Roberts and others 2005); and
- 30 minutes per week on unstructured outdoor activities (Doherty 2004).

National undergraduate enrollment in natural resource science programs has declined by 40 percent since 1995 (Mason 2005).



Impacts on Health and Well-Being

In 1999, 13 percent of American children aged 6–11 and 14 percent aged 12–19 were obese, rates that have tripled since the 1970s due to “inactive lifestyles” (Office of the Surgeon General 2007).

Children deprived of the spiritual, emotional, and psychological benefits of exposure to nature (Faber Taylor and Kuo 2006; Louv 2005):

- are more prone to depression and attention disorders, and
- miss out on improved cognitive development, creativity, and cooperative play.

Symptoms of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder in children are relieved after contact with nature (Kuo and Faber Taylor 2004).

Green views and access to green spaces in urban areas can help strengthen community relations, relieve the everyday pressures of living in poverty, and reduce crime (Kuo 2001; Kuo and Sullivan 2001).

Forest Service Outreach: Selected Examples

In fiscal year 2005, almost 17.7 percent (34 million) of the visits to the national forests and grasslands were accounted for by children under 16 (USDA Forest Service 2007a).

In 1944, the Forest Service and the Ad Council launched Smokey Bear primarily to teach children about wild-fire prevention (The Ad Council 2007). In 1954, the Forest Service launched its Junior Forest Ranger program to promote Smokey, reaching more than a million children within 3 years (USDA Forest Service 2006).

In 1970, the Forest Service launched Woodsy Owl primarily to engage children in learning about and protecting the natural environment (USDA Forest Service 2007b).

In 1970, the Youth Conservation Corps was established to allow young people, ages 15–18, to “work, learn, and earn” on projects that further the development and conservation of America’s natural resources (USDA Forest Service 2003).

In 1998, the Forest Service launched The Natural Inquirer to help school children in grades 5–8 learn about conservation research (USDA Forest Service 2007c).

In 2006, the Forest Service relaunched its Junior Forest Ranger program to enrich the understanding of ecology and land management among children aged 7–13 (USDA Forest Service 2006a).

From 2004 to 2006, the Forest Service’s conservation education activities and programs rose (USDA Forest Service 2007d):

- in number from 655 to 1,335, and
- in number of people served from 2.1 million to 4.4 million.

In 2006, educational projects entered into the FS accomplishment reporting system reported engaging more than 1,000 partners and were leveraged by more than \$12 MM in partner cash and in-kind contributions (USDA Forest Service 2006b).



In 2007, the Forest Service, the National Forest Foundation, the American Recreation Coalition, and Re-serveAmerica launched “More Kids in the Woods,” a challenge cost share program designed to help reconnect children to nature (USDA Forest Service 2007e).

- The program awarded \$510,000 in matching funds to leverage more than \$1 million in partner contributions for two dozen projects across the country.
- Twenty-four out of 254 proposals were selected for funding.
- The projects reached about 25,000 children.

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