



August, 2013

In 2010, the Texas Children in Nature partnership was formed along with the *Texas Children in Nature Strategic Plan* that was designed to guide the network as it grew. Today, we are three years into working towards the goals and objectives of the plan. It is worth celebrating some amazing accomplishments that have taken place around the state over the past three years, and it is equally important to revisit some of the areas that still need attention or a re-focus.

The goals and accomplishments are listed for each focus area of the strategic plan. In each category the accomplishments are either a direct result of a partner taking action, or are the results of contributions made towards an outcome. We know that we cannot possibly capture all of the impact that the research and movement has had on each organization, but we have tried to accumulate the highlights. Thank you for all you do to connect children with nature.

Health Goals:

Goal 1: Utilize healthcare and related professionals to educate families about the benefits of nature to children’s physical health, emotional well-being and cognitive function; the importance of nature and outdoor activities for healthy child development; and safety precautions.

Goal 2: Encourage Texas-specific research to describe the causal relationship between nature and children’s health and development, including the therapeutic benefits of nature.

Goal 3: As appropriate, encourage integration of nature opportunities as a health strategy in existing health and childcare guidelines.

Goal 4: Promote health considerations in urban and community planning.

Accomplishments:

- Texas pediatricians promote outdoor play: The Texas Pediatric Society and Texas Department of State Health Services published the *Pediatric Obesity: A Clinical Toolkit for Healthcare Providers* including the importance of outdoor play.
- Texas pediatrician appears on promotional video with Texas Parks and Wildlife on the importance of outdoor play and nature.
- American Academy of Pediatrics Obesity Section, Chairman and Texas Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Obesity Medical Director broadcasts a news segment on the health benefits of nature on the Good Day Austin.
- The Dell Children’s Hospital features the “healing power of Art and Nature” throughout the hospital and in the healing gardens that encircle the building. They are currently installing a community garden for the long-term patients to grow their own food and connect with the power of gardening.

- *Let's Move Outside*, part of First Lady- Michelle Obama's initiative to get kids to be more active outside, has raised attention nationally for the prevention of obesity. This national program has been adopted in many Texas schools as a fun method to help young people understand how they can take charge of their own health and be outdoors safely.
- In 2011, Parker Centennial Professor Emeritus at University of Texas, Dr. Joe L. Frost, and authors Sue C. Wortham and Stuart C. Reifel, published *Play and Child Development* which looks at the relationship between nature play and the developmental stages of a child. Dr. Frost continues to speak to raise awareness and advocate for children's healthy development through play in the outdoors.
- The Austin Children in Nature Collaborative launched a multi-year study working with elementary schools and natural play areas to measure health benefits.
- HB #1018 passed. "Relating to the establishment of the community partnerships and the development of the policy recommendations for increasing physical activity and improving fitness among public school students." The bill encourages joint land use and community partnerships that will lead to more connection between outdoor classrooms and physical activity. Representatives from National Wildlife Federation, Active Life, UT Health, Get Outdoors Houston! and Children at Risk worked with Representative Lois Kohlkorst and Representative Diane Patrick on the bill. Effective September 1, 2013.
- Get Outdoors Houston! in collaboration with American Diabetes Association is piloting a school-based health literacy program called Family Adventures which engages families in nearby nature outings.
- Southern Obesity Prevention Summit Physical Activity workgroup is being co-led by Get Outdoors Houston! and Michael and Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living. The effort will result in a showcase of innovative approaches to physical activity in the 16 southern states.
- Get Outdoors Houston! is engaged in a citywide obesity prevention taskforce called Healthy Living Matters which will provide a blueprint for community action in November 2013. The blueprint will focus on access to public green spaces.

Education Goals:

Goal 1: Increase the understanding, appreciation and use of experiential learning outdoors within the formal education system.

Goal 2: Develop quality outdoor classrooms, wildlife habitats and natural play areas on every Texas schoolyard.

Goal 3: Develop integrated and collaborative partnerships between the formal education and informal systems and resources to benefit Texas youth.

Goal 4: Assess the effectiveness of natural resource literacy education in Texas.

Accomplishments:

- Created Green Ribbon Schools which now has 520 Texas schools participating and continues to grow.
- The TCiN Education team facilitated the development of the *Texas Natural Resource/ Environmental Literacy Plan*. In January 2013, the *Texas Natural Resource/ Environmental Literacy Plan* was rolled out and presented at the Texas Natural Resource/ Environmental Literacy Summit in San Antonio. Former

First Lady Laura Bush gave the key note presentation to endorse the plan. The Texas Association for Environmental Education and a task force continue to work on pursuing the goals of the plan.

- Over 250 pre-service teachers at UT-SA, A&M-SA, and Trinity Universities attend workshops facilitated by TPWD staff on *ProjectWild* and *Growing Up Wild* each fall and spring. The workshops are offered in English, Spanish or dual language.
- In December of 2012, representatives from National Wildlife Federation and Real School Gardens offered an outdoor classroom webinar that was attended by over 85 people from around the state.
- National Wildlife Federation worked with Austin and Houston school districts to encourage schools to have their student bodies create wildlife habitats on their campuses.
- *Nature Play at Home*, a guide for creating natural play area in backyards, was created by the National Wildlife Federation and the Natural Learning Initiative.
- Texas Outdoor Family was created by TPWD to educate and introduce families to camping and outdoor skills. A grant from the National Recreational Foundation allows the program to support underserved families in the Houston area. The grant helps expand the capacity of the program.
- The San Antonio River Authority, a new *ProjectWET* sponsor, hosted a facilitator training workshop for area TCiN partners.
- TCiN partners worked closely with the Texas Parent Teacher Association to give presentations and host booths at conferences around the state.
- With a grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield, CINCA has undertaken efforts to promote and fund campus greening projects in East Austin. They made small grants (ranging from \$1400 – \$3800) to five AISD elementary schools to undertake a greening project such as adding an outdoor classroom, creating a “school yard habitat,” constructing a loop trail including natural play features, or a nature trail. The grant also supports building out a new website for educators, parents, and students.
- The Green Schools Consortium merged with CINCA adding a strong vision and agenda for green building systems, as well as curriculum in Austin area schools.
- “More Kids in the Pineywoods,” Angelina-Sabine National Forest, Texas is an in-depth conservation education program that provides science field trips for 3,200 kindergarten to fifth-grade public school children, weekly outdoor experiences for at-risk youth, monthly field trips and outdoor activities for underserved families. This program is part of the US Forest Service “More Kids in the Woods” project.
- Each organization of the collaborative continues to offer outdoor and environmental educational opportunities to the youth and families they serve.

Access Goals:

Goal 1: Optimize access to natural areas to make them safe and convenient.

Goal 2: Partner with government agencies, nonprofits and the private sector, in coordination with youth, to provide increased access to Texas lands and water.

Goal 3: Encourage creation and expansion of natural areas that provide varied and recurring nature-based experiences.

Goal 4: Plan, develop or expand built environments to include natural areas with interpretive elements.

Accomplishments:

- Nature Rocks Texas website was created in 2010 and continues to grow to support families trying to find nature adventures and spaces. The website allows partner organizations within the regions to promote their programs, events and access to natural places.
- Impact Austin, a foundation that supports the Austin area, chose to fund the concept of Family Nature clubs by selecting the Camp Fire Family Nature Club program that fostered and supported short, local nature based outings for underserved families in the Del Valle, TX community.
- The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center broke ground on their 4.3 million dollar family garden designed to be the center's effort to "solve the nature deficit disorder problem." The Luci Baines Johnson and Ian Turpin Family Garden will be 5 acres of native gardens that will allow children to explore and play.
- The Dallas Arboretum created a multi-million dollar Rory Miller Children's Adventure Garden based on the principles of informal science learning and connection with nature.
- The San Antonio Children's Museum has contracted with architecture firm Lake Flato to design a museum that also connects children with the outdoors. At their annual luncheon they asked Richard Louv to be the guest speaker to help complete the message that children need nature to be healthy, happy, empowered citizens that care about their future and the future of the natural world.
- The 2012 *Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan* (TPWD) included the TCiN strategic plan as integral in the state plan especially in chapter 4- Inventory of Outdoor and Recreation Lands, and chapter 8- Sustainable Park Design.
- TPWD changed how the Annual Youth Park Pass can be applied for and used to accommodate any non-profit serving youth.
- TPWD Trail Grants continue to create access to nature for people with full and limited abilities.
- The Co-Op and Local Park Grants that will be reinstated in 2014 are designed to help create access to local and state parks.

Community Goals:

Goal 1: Raise awareness and action among adults and children through consistent and unified communications.

Goal 2: Create community-based regional partnerships throughout Texas to increase "children in nature" activities.

Goal 3: Promote the cultural and economic gateways and benefits through nature-based opportunities.

Accomplishments:

- The Texas Partnership for Children in Nature formed and created a state strategic plan. Over 300 people attended the state launch of the plan and crafted an action plan.
- Texas Children in Nature formed to implement the plan through a state steering committee, action teams and regional groups.
- Seven regional collaboratives have been formed and continue to grow with supporting partners and through participation in events to raise awareness.

- The Texas A&M Forest Service created *Nature Realized: Connecting Your Children to the Land*. The program was designed to be a seminar series with a workbook for adult family members who are the gate keepers to children’s exploration of their environment.
- Westcave Preserve hosts their annual Celebration of Children in Nature Award Dinners with over 400 in attendance to recognize all those in the community that focus on getting their local children out into nature.
- Texas Nature Challenge was developed and is supported by AgriLife Extension and Texas A&M Forest Service. The regions are using it as a means to get families outdoors.
- Natural Leaders was test piloted in Austin and is being reviewed for how it can be modified and scaled to be used by other regions.
- CINCA’s Natural Leaders team helped host the annual *Outdoor Nation* conference for youth ages 15 – 29 in the summer of 2012. They have also laid out a 12 month schedule of events and activities and a goal of growing the group to 200 youth over the coming three years.
- Service Learning Texas, along with key partners such as Encana and TPWD issued Healthy Habitats grants to support learning, leading and participating in community projects involving local conservation issues.
- A video shot at Westcave Preserve of Richard Louv speaking about the importance of connecting children with nature was distributed around the state and through social media.
- TPWD implemented the GeoCache challenge to promote getting kids and families outdoors.
- The Junior Ranger program was piloted at 30 state parks during the summer of 2013. The program includes a backpack loaded with activities and tools to explore the park and record their observations.
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine published a special issue about “50 Ways to Hook kids on the Outdoors.” The magazine also included youth activities in the monthly publications for several issues. The message of TCiN is also woven into the articles when relevant.
- The TCiN part-time coordinator was hired to support the regions and the movement in January 2013. TPWD facilitated a summer intern to work with the TCiN coordinator to support TCiN projects to help build capacity, 2013.

Marketing Goals:

Goal 1: Formalize a structure for the state to facilitate development and implementation of state marketing campaign. (Structural Phase)

Goal 2: Conduct specific research to better understand the awareness, perceptions, barriers, cultural considerations and motivations of the stakeholder targets in Texas. (Discovery phase)

Goal 3: Develop the brand and marketing plan. (Development Phase)

Goal 4: Launch a two-year integrated marketing campaign strategy. (Implementation Phase)

Goal 5: Evaluate effectiveness. (Evaluation Phase)

Accomplishments:

- A logo, brand, website and print materials have been created and continue to be developed to support the network.

- The top ten reason children need nature was developed and used for posters and flyers. Over 800 posters were distributed in the spring of 2013 alone.
- Houston Region has developed and implemented the Get Outdoors Houston! initiative to be the sister website to Nature Rocks Texas in that region.
- Outdoor Activity of the Month was designed by TPWD and the TCiN marketing team to give families a focused option to get outside and play each month. That campaign targets five major markets in English and Spanish, and is supported through TV spots, magazine ads, email blasts and newsletters, on the TPWD and TCiN websites, and Facebook and Twitter.
- TPWD hired a nature tourism coordinator to promote outdoor tourism that includes the message of the benefits of nature on children and families.
- The TCiN blog, Facebook page and social media systems continue to grow.
- In 2013, several articles appeared in publications such as *Texas Wildlife Association*, *Parents* and *Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazines* that presented the TCiN messaging to raise awareness.
- The TCiN coordinator and intern are conducting a survey to gain a better understanding of perceptions, barriers, cultural considerations and motivations of the stakeholders and who they serve in July 2013. The results of the survey will be reviewed by The University of Texas- School of Advertising professor and class to make recommendation for marketing strategies.

Regions:

Austin- continues to highlight the important work of the region through the Children in Nature Awards Gala. CINCA has recently adopted a new strategic plan and elected a new leadership team with new leadership structure. CINCA also hosts booths at several events in the Austin area. Regional Contact: Hayden Brooks, hayden@naturerockstexas.org

Houston- has formed a root partnership with Katy Prairie, Houston Wilderness, Houston Zoo, Houston Audubon, TPWD, US Fish and Wildlife and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. They are engaging teachers through the Original Classroom series, connecting families with healthy outdoor adventures and working on their website and marketing strategies. Contact: Margaret Lamar; gretalamar@gmail.com

Lubbock- is in process of forming their regional leadership and meetings. Contact: Susan Rowe, susan.rowe@ttu.edu

North Texas – hosts monthly meetings, has created a newsletter and formed a leadership body to guide them. Recently they collaborated to host a booth at Prairie Fest and other outdoor events. They created collateral materials to promote the Nature Rocks Texas and TCiN websites to families. Contact: Amanda Stone Norton, Phd, amanda.s.norton@gmail.com

Rio Grande Valley- is making headway with forming their regional leadership and meetings. Contact: Dr. Reynaldo Ramirez, reynaldo.ramirez@utb.edu

San Antonio- hosts monthly meetings, hosted booths at multiple events during March and April including the San Antonio Rodeo and continues to increase participation. They are developing a speaker's bureau tool kit to get the word out. Koy Coffey, KCoffey@texas-wildlife.org

South Texas- continues to grow and recently was added onto the Nature Rocks Texas website. They hosted a booth at Earth Day, Bay Day and are utilizing the Texas Nature Challenge to connect families. Contact: Coleen McCue, colleen.mccue@mail.utexas.edu

On the Horizon:

- Engage the healthcare community as advocates for the message and call them to action, through speaking and engagements at professional conferences or media.
- Engage local civic and government leaders to use messaging and be advocates.
- Continue to increase grassroots regional collaboratives in areas of the state that are not currently being represented.
- Create marketing plan and strategies based off survey results and recommendations from the University of Texas - School of Advertising.
- Engage faith-based communities who champion so many family and youth activities and causes to be active partners.
- Encourage formal education settings to increase outdoor time.
- Increase access to natural spaces where play and learning can take place.
- Connect with civic and transportation leaders to increase public transportation to local and state parks and natural spaces.

For more information please contact:
Jennifer Bristol, Texas Children in Nature, Coordinator
Email: info@texaschildreninnature.org,
Phone: 512-389-8143