

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center Challenges Nature Deficit Disorder
Nonprofit Group Announces 2014 Celebration of Children in Nature Winners

May 7, 2014 – AUSTIN, Texas – The term “nature deficit disorder” refers to the fact that kids, lured by the multimedia and constrained by lack of open space, are spending less time than needed outside, enjoying nature. The Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center is working to change that, however, and is recognizing four supporters of its mission with its 2014 Celebration of Children in Nature Awards. These recipients represent the most innovative and successful initiatives to get kids in Central Texas out into nature more often.

Award Recipients:

E. Lee Walker Award for Collaboration – EcoRise Youth Innovations is a school-based program that teaches environmental literacy, social innovation and hands-on design skills. To date, EcoRise has trained and served over 40 teachers in 21 middle and high schools and organized over 500 green professionals to serve as guest speakers and project mentors.

John Covert Watson Award for Vision – Since 1995 The Buffalo Soldiers Program at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has worked with youth in Austin and across the state to share the story of the first black professional soldiers. Instructors remove barriers to outdoor recreation by drawing personal connections between youth audiences and Buffalo Soldier history.

John Arhns Award for Environmental Education – Mrs. Lauren Maples, a second grade teacher at Cunningham Elementary, serves on every “green,” sustainable task force in AISD and in the Austin area. Maples has developed the PEAS farm model (Partners in Education, Agriculture and Sustainability). The farm helps children understand the origin of their foods and promotes healthy eating choices to children.

Westcave Award for Enduring Dedication – Since 1992, Austin Youth River Watch’s high school students have collected and published water quality data from stream and river sites throughout Austin. Landowners, managers, and government agencies rely on the students’ data to understand and make decisions about Central Texas’ waterways. As the river watchers learn and practice scientific water quality monitoring, they acquire skills and knowledge from fellow students, visiting scientists, and professional educators. Most river watchers become mentors and many stay in the program throughout high school.

Awards Ceremony

Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center will shine the spotlight on these recipients at The Children in Nature Awards Dinner scheduled for 6 PM on September 28, 2014 at the Austin Country Club. Evan Smith, father of two and editor and CEO of the Texas Tribune will be the Master of Ceremonies for

the event. Proceeds from the dinner will help fund the Children in Nature Collaborative of Austin, a core program of Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center.

About the Children in Nature Collaborative of Austin (CiNCA)

A regional partnership among environmental educators, health professionals, and a broad base of community leaders, CiNCA is dedicated to nurturing a love of nature among children right here in Central Texas. Our programs and support for new green spaces greatly increase opportunities for kids to play and learn in nature. The benefits of doing so go far beyond developing future ambassadors for natural conservation. Through CiNCA's programs and activities, we can help kids gain confidence, reduce stress and overall improve their wellbeing. We believe in the power of nature in improving health and quality of life for kids that explore, interact and feel confident in the natural environment.

About Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center

We are advocates for protecting and taking pleasure in nature, and believe wholeheartedly that frequent interactions with nature result in happier, healthier and smarter kids. Our preserve in southwest Travis County serves as an outdoor classroom for visitors to explore, discover and appreciate our extraordinary natural surroundings and by doing so, to make it part of people's daily lives.

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