

Healthier,
Happier,
Smarter.

Strategic Plan 2016

Dear fellow Texans,

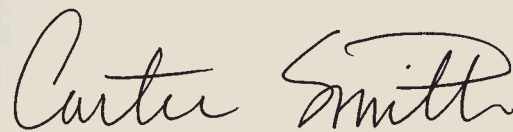
We all have fond childhood memories of a special place where play, imagination and wonder reigned. For most, that place was outdoors. Through these experiences, we gained understanding, appreciation and a personal relationship with the natural world.

Sadly, today's children are allowed less time for **unstructured, creative play in nature** than ever before. As the trend away from outdoor play and learning deepens, we are witnessing sobering consequences for children's health, well-being and quality of life. Additionally, this youngest generation is missing out on critical experiences that lay the foundation for future stewardship of our natural resources.

We can reverse this trend. One achievable solution is to restore active play and learning in nature. This issue has brought together an unprecedented coalition of partners from all walks of life who formed Texas Children in Nature. These experts from many disciplines thoroughly examined the issues and outlined their recommendations in this strategic plan. Their wisdom, insights and integrity are reflected throughout the plan. By design, the plan is concise, optimizes partnerships and focuses on implementation across multiple public and private sectors.

Please consider the recommendations in this plan and join us in restoring our children's well-being and their relationship with Texas's rich natural and cultural heritage. The trend is real, the problem is solvable and **the time to act is now.**

Thank you for caring for our wild things and wild places. They need you now more than ever.



Carter Smith
Executive Director
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Texas Children in Nature Strategic Plan 2016

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Executive Summary | 4 |
| Strategic Agenda | 6 |
| Health | 8 |
| Education | 10 |
| Access | 13 |
| Community | 16 |
| Marketing | 19 |
| About Texas Children in Nature | 20 |
| Steering Committee | 22 |
| Citations | 22 |



www.texaschildreninnature.org

Executive Summary

The evidence is clear and growing. Nature is not just a “nice-to-have” for people with the means. Nature is a “need-to-have” for all people, essential to our health, human development and in building stronger, more vibrant communities. Texas Children in Nature is dedicated to benefitting both nature and people.

We envision that all children and their families, from all walks of life, will spend more time outdoors, engaged with nature for a healthier, happier, smarter Texas.

The mission of the Texas Children in Nature network is to strengthen and leverage the work of the partners and regional collaboratives to improve the connection between nature and all children and their families in Texas.

Time enjoying nature is an investment in personal health and well-being. Children are more physically active and focused in school. Creativity and inventiveness increases. Groups tend to be more cooperative. Stress levels drop. Resilience rises. Experience in nature also contributes to the development of a conservation ethic and a better understanding of our natural resources.

The recommendations of the Texas Children in Nature (TCiN) network focus on the role of Health, Education, Access and Community to further engagement with nature and increased understanding of Texas’ natural resources. Based on research and relevant to Texas issues, the plan optimizes partnerships and relies on implementation across multiple public and private sectors. We believe that all Texans, regardless of age, will benefit from this plan.

The development of the original state strategic plan was directed by a bi-partisan group of Texas legislators who recognized the critical importance of nature in the health and development of children and the future of Texas’ natural resources. With leadership from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Education Agency, Texas Department of State Health Services and Texas Department of Agriculture, over 85 professionals from health, education, natural resources, community organizations and business drafted the 2010 plan.

Regional partnerships formed to implement the plan under the umbrella of TCiN. Over the years, TCiN has helped new regions form, share resources, leverage efforts on a state level, and tie into the international movement, including co-hosting its first international conference held in Texas in April 2015. In 2016 TCiN partners reported 3.1 million children participated in their outdoor, nature-based opportunities.

The TCiN Steering Committee updated the strategic plan to reflect the growth of the children in nature movement and lay the foundation for stewardship of Texas’ nature resources amid record population growth in the state.

Writers of the plan reviewed and vetted research before drafting the plan. The sobering statistics they found inspired them to take action. Today’s statistics remain compelling. Progress has been made; however, more needs to be done to reverse the devastating effects of nature deficit.

- Today’s children may be the first generation at risk of having a shorter lifespan than their parents.¹
- Texas ranks 5th among 43 states, for highest obesity rates among high school students.²
- 36.6% of Texas children ages 10-17 are overweight or obese.²
- The 2013 - 2014 Physical Fitness Assessment Initiative (PFAI) preliminary data, only 18.9% of Texas 3rd – 12th grade students achieved the “Healthy Fitness Zone” on all fitness components.²
- Obesity during early adolescence may be associated with an increased risk of high school dropout.³
- Children ages 8 - 18 spend an average of 7.5 hours a day, over 50 hours per week, connected to a television, computer, video games and other electronic media.⁴
- The average visitor to Texas State Parks is 44 years of age.⁵
- Texas is 96% privately-owned, leaving only 4% of its land accessible to the public.⁵
- Studies show that time spent in nature lays the foundation for conservation.⁶

Our Strategic Agenda

Health

A growing body of evidence points to the benefits of physical activity and play in nature to children's physical and mental health and development. For example, new research is revealing the negative affects of stress on heart health and emotional resilience, and the role that nature plays in reducing stress. Additional research indicates other physiological benefits of time spent in nature. We envision healthier children and families as a result of increased time spent in nature and more outdoor physical activity. Our goal is to improve community health by encouraging nature-based activity. To achieve this, we will:

- 1. Encourage and share sound research about nature and children's health and development, including the therapeutic benefits of nature.**
- 2. Through healthcare and related professionals, educate families about the benefits of time spent in nature to children's physical health, emotional well-being and cognitive functioning and the importance of nature and nature play and exploration for healthy child development.**
- 3. As appropriate, encourage integration of nature opportunities as a health strategy in health and childcare guidelines.**
- 4. Promote health considerations in urban and community planning.**

Education

Natural resource literacy is the ability to understand, analyze and address major natural resource opportunities and challenges. Our vision is that every child in Texas will be engaged in meaningful outdoor learning experiences and achieve natural resource literacy. The goals to achieve natural resource literacy through education include educating school administrators, educators and future educators; tracking students' outcomes and experiences; integrating local informal resources; involving parents; and assessing these processes and outcomes. To achieve this, we will:

- 1. Support the objectives of the Natural Resource / Environmental Literacy Plan.**
- 2. Support the integration of school outdoor areas with curricula.**
- 3. Develop integrated and collaborative relationships between the formal and informal education systems through TCiN partners.**
- 4. Support lifelong learning and community connections that offer experiences in and appreciation for nature.**

Access

Safety, convenience and multi-purpose design are essential to developing a connection with nature and a sense of place, the building blocks to conservation stewardship. We envision a Texas where children and their families have safe, convenient, sustainable and desirable access to the outdoors, where they can develop respect and appreciation for the natural environment. Our goal is to improve access to nature for children and families of all abilities. To achieve this, we will:

- 1. Optimize access to natural areas to make them safe and convenient.**
- 2. Partner with government agencies, nonprofits and the private sector, to provide increased access to Texas lands and waters.**
- 3. Plan, develop or expand built environments to include natural areas with interpretive elements.**

Community

Connecting with nature must be relevant and welcoming to all, including unifying messages, partnerships and efforts that are respectful to Texas' diverse peoples, cultures and economic needs. We envision that the message "Healthier, Happier, Smarter" Children in Nature is widely and mutually communicated and that communities inspire children to maintain a lifelong connection to nature. Our goal is to encourage communities to incorporate nature and nature-based activities in their everyday lives. To achieve this, we will:

- 1. Engage, recruit and educate new and diverse partners to support nature activities in communities.**
- 2. Raise awareness and action among adults and children through consistent and unified communication.**
- 3. Promote the cultural and economic impact and benefits of nature and nature-based learning opportunities.**

“ Today we have a viable network that is delivering the message that children and families who spend more time outdoors are healthier, happier and smarter. Educators, the health community, government, landowners, private and public interests are recognizing the physical and emotional benefits of nature. ”

Carter Smith, Executive Director
Texas Parks and Wildlife



Health Strategic Agenda

There is a growing body of research that clearly supports a positive relationship between contact with nature and physical health, emotional well-being and child development. Some of the strongest research to date indicates that children who spend time playing outdoors are more physically active than those in other settings. Additional research points to the physiological as well as restorative benefits of time spent in nature. We envision healthier children and families as a result of increased time spent in nature and more outdoor physical activity.

Key Focus Areas:

- Sharing sound research
- Outreach and professional development
- Nature-based activities as a health strategy

GOAL 1: Share sound research about nature and children’s health and development, including the therapeutic benefits of nature.

- Objective 1:** Work with C&NN and Texas-based experts to identify the most relevant research related to nature and health.
- Objective 2:** Share research through various communication avenues including TCiN, academic and professional organizations.
- Objective 3:** Encourage research to describe the relationship between nature and children’s health and development, including the therapeutic benefits of nature.

GOAL 2: Through health-care and related professionals, educate families about the benefits of time spent in nature to children’s physical health, emotional well-being and cognitive functioning and the importance of nature and nature play and exploration for healthy child development.

- Objective 1:** Engage health and wellness professional organizations to increase awareness and disseminate information about the relationship between nature and health.
- Strategy 1:** Create and distribute relevant educational materials for health and wellness providers.
- Strategy 2:** Provide presentations at health-related professional conferences and seminars.

Strategy 3: Encourage school and youth counselors to utilize nature as a tool to benefit children’s mental health.

Strategy 4: Explore tools for health care professionals to use with patients to encourage spending time in nature as a health strategy.

Objective 2: Work with existing statewide networks, universities and state governmental agencies to incorporate research-backed TCiN educational materials and messaging about the health benefits of nature into existing curricula and resources for children, students, families and teachers.

Strategy: Work with related state agencies, youth development organizations, child care centers, schools and universities to encourage and educate students, parents and communities to incorporate nature and wellness messages in their materials.

Objective 3: Work with academic institutions to incorporate training on nature and health into undergraduate and graduate coursework in education, child development, social work, counseling, kinesiology, health education, public health, medicine, nursing and other related fields.

GOAL 3: As appropriate, encourage integration of nature opportunities as a health strategy in health and child-care guidelines.

- Objective 1:** Work with TEA to identify strategies and opportunities to incorporate nature and health messages into coordinated school health programs.
- Objective 2:** Incorporate the goals and objectives of Texas Children in Nature into health related state and local plans and advisory group recommendations.
- Objective 3:** Work to incorporate “nature guidelines” into standards and regulations for public, private and residential child care facilities.
- Objective 4:** Add the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department as a member agency on the Interagency Obesity Council.

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

- Objective 1:** Increase the number of safe and accessible parks and playgrounds, particularly in underserved and low-income communities as a health strategy.
- Objective 2:** Promote and support programs and initiatives that increase active transportation to and from schools to enhance the walk-ability and bike-ability of a community.
- Objective 3:** Identify exemplary models of urban design and land use that encourage both nature-based physical activity and wise use of the natural environment.
- Objective 4:** Support the Cities Connecting Children to Nature initiative with C&NN and National League of Cities.
- Strategy 1:** Participate in the pilot project in Austin.
- Strategy 2:** Share the process and outcomes with other cities and regions.

Education Strategic Agenda

Educators and researchers recognize the growing body of evidence indicating that children who have outdoor experiences are more successful in school. The research is clear on the benefits of nature-based learning and unstructured outdoor play towards the readiness for and improvement in student learning.

Meaningful outdoor learning experiences that increase student awareness and understanding of Texas natural resources will also contribute toward conservation by building natural resource literacy. Natural resource literacy is the knowledge, skills and ability to understand, analyze and address major natural resource opportunities and challenges.

Key Focus Areas:

- Natural resource literacy
- Integration of campus natural areas to strengthen and enhance formal education
- Collaborations between formal and informal educators
- Lifelong learning

GOAL 1: Support the objectives of the Natural Resource / Environmental Literacy Plan (NR/EL).

Objective 1: Encourage all Texas public and private K-12 schools as well as colleges and universities to achieve related curriculum goals by incorporating instructional methods that allow students to learn with nature, foster environmental literacy and develop outdoor skills.

Objective 2: Through TCiN partner sites and resources, provide and/or support professional development training for informal and formal education administrators, teachers, and future teachers on the following research-based topics such as:

- the value and enhancement of free, outdoor spontaneous play and its benefits for fitness, health, brain development and learning.
- the importance of outdoor learning for the enhancement of structured learning in the classroom, interdisciplinary teaching and learning, and place-based education; and
- the role of outdoor skills education in health, community building and resilience.

Objective 3: Support and promote professional development training for informal educators to effectively meet the needs of formal education and lifelong learning.

GOAL 2: Support the integration of school outdoor areas with curricula.

Objective 1: Support the development of quality outdoor classrooms, wildlife habitats and integrated natural play/learning environments on every Texas schoolyard.

Strategy 1: Share design guidelines for outdoor classrooms, wildlife habitats and integrated natural play/learning environments using the Natural Play guidelines from Natural Learning Initiative and National Wildlife Federation.

Strategy 2: Encourage new school construction and renovation to include natural areas through educational materials, development of a model school board policy, and incorporation into voluntary certification standards.

Objective 2: Support schools with existing programs that promote school habitats and outdoor classrooms.

Strategy 1: Encourage and advocate for all school districts to provide daily recess that includes outdoor activities.

Strategy 2: Encourage outdoor play as part of physical education classes.

Strategy 3: Promote after-school programs that connect children with outdoor skills.

Objective 3: Support the use of existing and new curricula in outdoor settings.

Strategy 1: Encourage the application of the Texas Natural Resource/ Environmental Literacy Plan.

Strategy 2: Encourage the development of TEKS aligned curricula that promote student learning for all disciplines in an outdoor setting.

Strategy 3: Encourage the modification of current curricula to include student learning for all disciplines in an outdoor setting.

Strategy 4: Share with educators and students information about nature-based careers.

Strategy 5: Promote the use of media-based programming as a tool to educate students and educators about nature and natural resources.

GOAL 3: Develop integrated and collaborative relationships between the formal and informal education systems through TCiN partners.

Objective 1: Support communication between formal and informal educators and TCiN partners.

Strategy 1: Encourage the use of Web-based resources as a common point of communication.

Strategy 2: Identify and share best practices of successful formal-informal partnerships.

Strategy 3: Share resources and curricula on all Nature Rocks Texas and Texas Children in Nature websites.

Objective 2: Encourage non-public education providers such as private schools, home schools, faith-based organizations and after-school programs to address natural resource literacy.

Strategy 1: Identify and share resources, including the NR/EL, and best practices through related networks and organizations.

Strategy 2: Share opportunities for experiential learning and professional development.

Strategy 3: Encourage providers to align programs with the NR/EL.

GOAL 4: Support lifelong learning and community connections that offer experiences in and appreciation for nature.

- Objective 1:** Support and share educational and interpretive best practices for community education opportunities in nature-based settings.
- Objective 2:** Encourage TCiN partners to provide volunteer training and opportunities for parents and community volunteers in nature-based education.
- Objective 3: Encourage families and communities to engage in experiential learning.**
- Strategy 1:** Share resources about the benefits of outdoor learning experiences with families in multiple languages.
 - Strategy 2:** Provide information to families about the Nature Rocks Texas websites to connect them with local parks, nature centers and nature-based learning opportunities.
 - Strategy 3:** Encourage outdoor education based volunteer opportunities between partners, parents and volunteers.
 - Strategy 4:** Encourage creative technologies that integrate community-based and informal learning with nature.
- Objective 4:** Encourage the use of natural resource learning concepts when possible and appropriate in communications such as articles, web pages and graphics.

Access Strategic Agenda

As the state's population becomes more urban and disconnected from our lands, water and wildlife it becomes increasingly important to provide accessible, safe and enjoyable outdoor opportunities and to educate the public about the natural resources of Texas.

Access to parks, neighborhood green spaces and nature centers helps children and people of all ages develop a sense of place. A sense of place describes the relationship with where one lives, and an appreciation of its unique natural and cultural heritage. Experiencing nature as a shared heritage combats isolation and builds stronger communities.

Key Focus Areas:

Expand access to nature

- Increase inventory of nature spaces
- Improve safety
- Create partnerships
- Improve built environments in natural areas

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

Objective 1: Inventory and identify areas that provide experiences in nature.

- Strategy 1:** Utilize Nature Rocks Texas websites to curate, inventory and highlight the public and accessible private lands in a region.
- Strategy 3:** Encourage communities to include in their master plans parks and trails that create linkage between city services, neighborhoods and increase access to green spaces.
- Strategy 4:** Advocate for safe walking and biking routes in neighborhoods to and from natural areas and schools.

Objective 2: Encourage safe and convenient public access.

- Strategy 1:** Identify and encourage public transportation routes and public access points that allow for safe and convenient access to nature centers, natural areas and public lands.
- Strategy 2:** Encourage proactive law enforcement policies to protect public lands and waterways during peak use times.
- Strategy 3:** Develop partnerships between schools, park department's, neighborhood groups and parents to provide training for volunteer playworkers to facilitate safe play at park and/or school play and learning environments after school, weekends and during holidays.
- Strategy 4:** Encourage universal design for facilities and signage to ensure accessibility for all citizens.
- Strategy 5:** Encourage hiking, biking, walking, horseback riding, and paddling trails with universal access for multiple and diverse users.
- Strategy 6:** Encourage alternate pathways within natural areas that are short and easily accessible to accommodate young children and people with limited mobility.
- Strategy 7:** Encourage pathways to include rest stops and pocket play areas along trails with signage that indicates the length of the trail and the location of additional stops.

“ Experiences that bond children to the natural world sharpen their senses, inspire a sense of beauty and build emerging concept of biology, geology, physics and language. ”

Dr. Joe Frost, Professor Emeritus, College of Education
University of Texas at Austin



GOAL 2: Partner with government agencies, nonprofits and the private sector to provide increased access to Texas lands and waters.

Objective 1: Encourage the creation of more natural areas in schools, neighborhoods, communities and park systems.

- Strategy 1:** Support the establishment of outdoor classrooms on school, church or business campuses.
- Strategy 2:** Encourage the creation of local parks and community gardens in urban communities.
- Strategy 3:** Increase the number of safe and accessible parks and natural play areas, particularly in underserved and low-income communities.
- Strategy 4:** Encourage program development that incorporates outdoor experiences that considers multiple levels of fitness and abilities.
- Strategy 5:** Develop and consult with a youth advisory board to create natural areas appealing to youth.
- Strategy 6:** Encourage city transportation departments to establish bus stops at each park, nature center and green space in particular that facilitate use from low-income urban and suburban communities.
- Strategy 7:** Feature public access to waterways located near bridges on Nature Rocks Texas.

Objective 2: Encourage additional access to private lands and waters for recreation and learning experiences.

- Strategy 1:** Encourage wildlife management lands to host youth and family recreational activities and events.
- Strategy 2:** Collaborate with private landowners to increase public hunting, fishing and other outdoor opportunities.
- Strategy 3:** Encourage and support landowners to offer programming, establish youth camps, and provide experiential learning opportunities for youth and families.

Objective 3: Encourage collaboration among adjacent landowners, public and private, to link parks and outdoor recreation areas.

- Strategy 1:** Encourage the collaboration among willing landowners and nearby public natural areas to promote nature tourism.
- Strategy 2:** Encourage increased collaboration and communication between local, state and federal land management agencies and the formal and informal educational community.
- Strategy 3:** Encourage and promote best practices to share with landowners, elected officials and other stakeholders.

Objective 4: Support funding for park systems and outdoor opportunities.

- Strategy 1:** Raise awareness about issues that would negatively or positively impact park systems.
- Strategy 2:** Curate and distribute information about grants that support parks, trails, wildlife habitats, school or community gardens or other public lands.

Objective 5: Address liability concerns that limit access to nature on school grounds, parks, public lands and private lands.

- Strategy 1:** Seek clarity of liability laws and share findings.
- Strategy 2:** Determine recommendations based on findings.

GOAL 3: Plan, develop or expand built environments to include natural areas with interpretive elements.

Objective 1: Encourage the creation or expansion of natural play areas.

- Strategy 1:** Identify model interpretive projects across the state, and disseminate project plans and potential contacts for support in interpretive product design.
- Strategy 2:** Encourage the installation of accessible playscapes and equipment to accommodate children who use mobility devices such as wheelchairs or strollers.
- Strategy 3:** Encourage administration and school developers to utilize native vegetation that could be used as part of a wildscape learning area.

Objective 2: Encourage the creation of natural areas in residential and commercial developments.

- Strategy 1:** Identify and disseminate model policies such as open space ordinances for urban design and land use that preserve the natural environment.
- Strategy 2:** Educate reviewing agencies such as city planning departments, and planning and zoning boards about the benefits nature has on children and families.
- Strategy 3:** Mobilize the Texas Recreation and Parks Society (TRAPS) and Texas Municipal League membership to educate decision-makers about the need for more open space and accessibility.
- Strategy 4:** Encourage funders to provide funding for projects that include or increase natural areas to residential developments.

Objective 3: Include interpretive elements in natural areas.

- Strategy 1:** Ensure that interpretive elements are included on public lands and waters.
- Strategy 2:** Encourage and provide incentives and/or avenues for interpretive elements on private lands.
- Strategy 3:** Encourage interpretive elements that incorporate multiple learning styles, experiential learning and alternative access.
- Strategy 4:** Provide materials that model interpretive design.

Community Strategic Agenda

Studies show that nature deficit is evident across all communities, whether suburban, urban or rural. Many are unaware of the consequences of this disconnect and the benefits of time in nature.

Perceptions become barriers for many: for example, that stranger-danger is at greater risk outdoors; that children may more likely be hurt or bored outdoors; that the parent or caregiver must be all-knowing and guide all outdoor experiences; that nature is not near their homes and the value is only in far away, pristine places. Barriers, both perceived and real, must be overcome so that youth and families can connect with nature.

It is necessary to create an effective, diverse and connected network of community organizations to deliver a consistent and unified Texas Children in Nature message. Messages and opportunities that come from within a community will be most effective in making a cultural shift toward spending time outdoors and in nature. Leveraging efforts and sharing resources across the state will be the most efficient and effective method to help communities make policy and growth decisions that make it easy for its population to choose to play, learn and grow with nature.

Key Focus Areas:

- Build community capacity through partnerships
- Unified messaging and improved communication
- Promote the cultural and economic benefits to communities

GOAL 1: Engage, recruit and educate new and diverse partnerships to support nature activities in communities.

Objective 1: Build capacity for community-based regional collaboratives throughout Texas.

- Strategy 1:** Support a statewide initiative of diverse partners and professions to leverage the interests of stakeholders, available and emerging resources and creative strategies for the greatest impact for all Texans; and to help bring forth relevant resources from the international initiative.
- Strategy 2:** Recruit and support local leaders/partners in priority communities that will identify and communicate with diverse organizations within their region.
- Strategy 3:** Invite a diversity of civic and citizen organizations to join the state and / or local children in nature collaboratives.
- Strategy 4:** Develop a region-based toolkit for regional collaborative recruitment and retention.

Objective 2: Connect groups that engage children in nature-based activities, health initiatives and outdoor learning opportunities to one another, and leverage and share resources, ideas and strategies.

- Strategy 1:** Forge partnerships at the state level to foster policy decisions and actions that support community connections to nature-based opportunities.

- Strategy 2:** Utilize local Nature Rocks Texas websites to share local activities within a region.
- Strategy 3:** Support local organizations and businesses in establishing local collaboratives to share resources and increase program participation.
- Strategy 4:** Share and utilize tools and strategies from national, state and local organizations and campaigns.
- Strategy 5:** Encourage local governments and parks departments to be part of the networks and adopt the TCiN goals.
- Strategy 6:** Encourage volunteerism and action both locally and for those that are part of statewide initiatives for greatest benefit and impact.

GOAL 2: Raise awareness and action among adults and children through consistent and unified communication.

Objective 1: Promote the brand marketing campaign so it is well recognized.

- Strategy 1:** Work with local communities and regional collaboratives to create and implement a brand marketing campaign.
- Strategy 2:** Encourage youth and family oriented organizations and businesses to adopt and communicate the unified message, "Children who play and learn in nature are Healthier, Happier and Smarter" to their networks.
- Strategy 3:** Develop, provide and encourage youth and family oriented organizations and businesses to use campaign toolkits and materials located on the TCiN website.

Objective 2: Support local networks in promoting children in nature activities, exchanging information and sharing best practices.

- Strategy 1:** Support and promote the Nature Rocks Texas and regional Nature Rocks Texas websites.
- Strategy 2:** Encourage the use of TCiN and C&NN products and programs such as Family Nature Clubs to foster family engagement in the outdoors.
- Strategy 3:** Encourage involvement in the State Park Ambassador, Natural Leaders Network, Family Nature Clubs and regional Legacy Camps.

GOAL 3: Promote the cultural and economic impact and benefits of nature and nature-based learning opportunities.

Objective 1: Raise awareness for the concept that nature is local, near-by and is for everyone.

- Strategy 1:** Provide simple ideas for people to play outside and explore nature in their communities.
- Strategy 2:** Suggest easy-to-use resources or local programs to connect families to the outdoors. Encourage multi-generational participation and culturally relevant activities.
- Strategy 3:** Share information via Nature Rocks Texas and other avenues that many partner organizations have programming and resources available for visitors.



Marketing Strategic Agenda

We understand that marketing plays an important role in the success of changing attitudes towards nature, reaching families and promoting the partners who work to achieve the goals of this plan. While marketing in general is not a strategic goal of the plan, it is an important strategy toward achieving its goals.

GOAL 1: Develop a marketing plan that will promote the goals and objectives of Texas Children in Nature.

- Strategy 1:** Recruit a marketing team that will support and advise the TCiN director to develop and implement the marketing plan.
- Strategy 2:** Work with the regional collaboratives to develop a statewide marketing plan that is inclusive to each region.
- Strategy 3:** Identify the target audiences and methods to reach them.
- Strategy 4:** Establish an annual marketing plan that is executed by the regions, TCiN partners and the TCiN marketing team.

GOAL 2: Develop and utilize a unified message and brand.

- Strategy 1:** Create a unified message campaign that is derived from current research.
- Strategy 2:** Create marketing pieces that can be used by TCiN, TCiN regions collaboratives and TCiN partners.
- Strategy 3:** Design and maintain a logo and brand.
- Strategy 4:** Establish and share brand standards with regional leaders and partners.

GOAL 3: Utilize current technologies to reach targeted and new audiences.

- Strategy 1:** Develop and maintain a TCiN website that will support the regional collaboratives, house current research and highlight partner efforts.
- Strategy 2:** Maintain and improve Nature Rocks Texas websites to reach families and individuals.
- Strategy 3:** Develop and maintain social media for each region and for the statewide effort.

GOAL 4: Evaluate effectiveness of the campaign annually.

- Strategy:** Engage the marketing team to review the marketing plan to evaluate if all objectives were met and the effectiveness of each piece.

Objective 2: Communicate that nature and open space provide economic value to local communities in the form of educational programming, recreational opportunities, protection of water resources, providing habitat for recreation and commercial fisheries, and ecotourism opportunities.

- Strategy 1:** Sharing case studies that identify the value of nature and connecting children to nature in Texas and promote conservation as an economic benefit to communities.
- Strategy 2:** Identify ways to connect the nature-based educational programs that highlight the value of cultural and natural resources offered by local governments and conservation agencies with their communities.
- Strategy 3:** Share opportunities such as grants, tax breaks, technology upgrades, etc. for in and out of school programs to design curriculum and activities around local natural and cultural resources.
- Strategy 4:** Encourage and promote the value of native plants and landscaping for wildlife in private and public spaces.
- Strategy 5:** Encourage collaboration in communities to share costs and resources to better achieve the goals of TCiN.
- Strategy 6:** Encourage communities and businesses to collaborate to establish ecotourism opportunities.
- Strategy 7:** Encourage regional networks to participate in the Texas Nature Challenge to introduce families to local parks, nature centers and outdoor opportunities.

Objective 3: Encourage nature-based career path opportunities.

- Strategy 1:** Encourage public and private organizations to sponsor conservation and outdoor recreation job-readiness training and internship opportunities, targeting at-risk and underserved youth.
- Strategy 2:** Raise student awareness of natural- resource and outdoor-recreation vocational opportunities or college degree programs.
- Strategy 3:** Support and promote programs such as Natural Leaders and State Park Ambassadors to develop skills that encourage peer -to-peer engagement between young leaders to reach new and diverse audiences.
- Strategy 4:** Support the mentoring of young leaders in programs such as Natural Leaders, Stewards of the Wild, Texas Brigades, and State Park Ambassadors.



“ In Texas, 96% of the lands are privately owned, leaving only 4% to be enjoyed by the public. As the population continues to grow we need to expand our thinking and be creative to find ways for all citizens to have safe access to nature. ”

Jennifer Bristol, Director
Texas Children in Nature

About Texas Children in Nature

Texas Children in Nature is a network of eight regional hubs, in Austin, Caprock, Coastal Bend, Pineywoods, Houston, North Texas, Rio Grande Valley and San Antonio. Over 350 strong, this partnership of state agencies and organizations is dedicated to connecting children and Texans of all ages with nature. TCiN is guided by a steering committee representing geographic regions and focus interest areas. Funding from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation provides support for a paid, part-time state director.

The mission of the Texas Children in Nature network is to strengthen and leverage the work of the partners and regional collaboratives to improve the connection between nature and all children and their families in Texas.

The roots of this effort began in 2006 when a group of concerned professionals began meeting in response to the revelations of the watershed book by Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods*. Further investigations confirmed the alarming impact on children held true for Texas. What was also evident was that it was a solvable problem.

During the 81st legislative session, Sen. Eliot Shapleigh and Rep. Donna Howard called for a Texas Partnership for Children in Nature. Senate Bill 205 was championed by the Texas Wildlife Association, the National Wildlife Federation, Texas PTA, the Texas Pediatric Society, and many other conservation, education, and public health organizations. These groups advocated for the well-being of children through the creation of a formal state plan to enable children to spend more active time outdoors in nature and to better understand Texas' rich natural and cultural legacy.

Although S.B. 205 passed the Senate unanimously and cleared House committees, it did not make the final House deadline for a vote. To keep momentum on this issue, a bipartisan group of legislators tasked the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Education Agency, Texas Department of Agriculture and Texas Department of State Health Services to create a formal state plan to promote "healthy children in a healthy world" by integrating health and school initiatives with increased opportunities for understanding Texas' natural resources and developing outdoor skills, scientific study and outdoor play opportunities for children.

Carter Smith, executive director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, chaired the effort. In January 2010, an 18-member Steering Committee representing the state agencies, NGOs, health, education and business, convened to establish stakeholder teams and embark on a strategic plan to enable children to spend more time out-of-doors and to better understand Texas' natural resources.

Focus areas were Education, Health, Access and Community, with key components of Marketing and Policy/Legislation. Stakeholder teams formed for each focus area brought in a diversity of expertise and perspectives. Altogether, over 85 professionals from state and federal agencies, NGOs, health, education, natural resources, community organizations and business worked on the plan.

In 2016 the TCiN steering committee, with the help of subject matter experts, updated the plan to reflect current and future goals of the network. The current plan, along with supporting research, can be found on the TCiN website.

Key Successes:

- Regional collaboratives in eight locations around the state, serving 97 counties.
- 3.1 million children participated in our partner's outdoor and nature-based learning opportunities in 2015.
- Vetted and updated research that supports the top ten reasons children need nature.
- Grown the network to include over 350 partner organizations including; state agencies, schools, non-profits, churches, businesses, and community leaders.
- Collaborated with the Children in Nature Collaborative of Austin and the City of Austin to produce the first local Children Bill of Rights and Cities Connection Children with Nature implementation plan.
- Co-hosted the first International Children & Nature Network Conference and fundraiser.
- Partnered with Texan by Nature on the Natural Connection: Exploring Positive Outcomes in Health and Healing Through Nature summit in Houston.
- Produced seven Nature Rocks Texas regional websites to give families an online resource to find local parks, nature centers and activities in their communities.

Texas Children in Nature Steering Committee 2016

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Citations

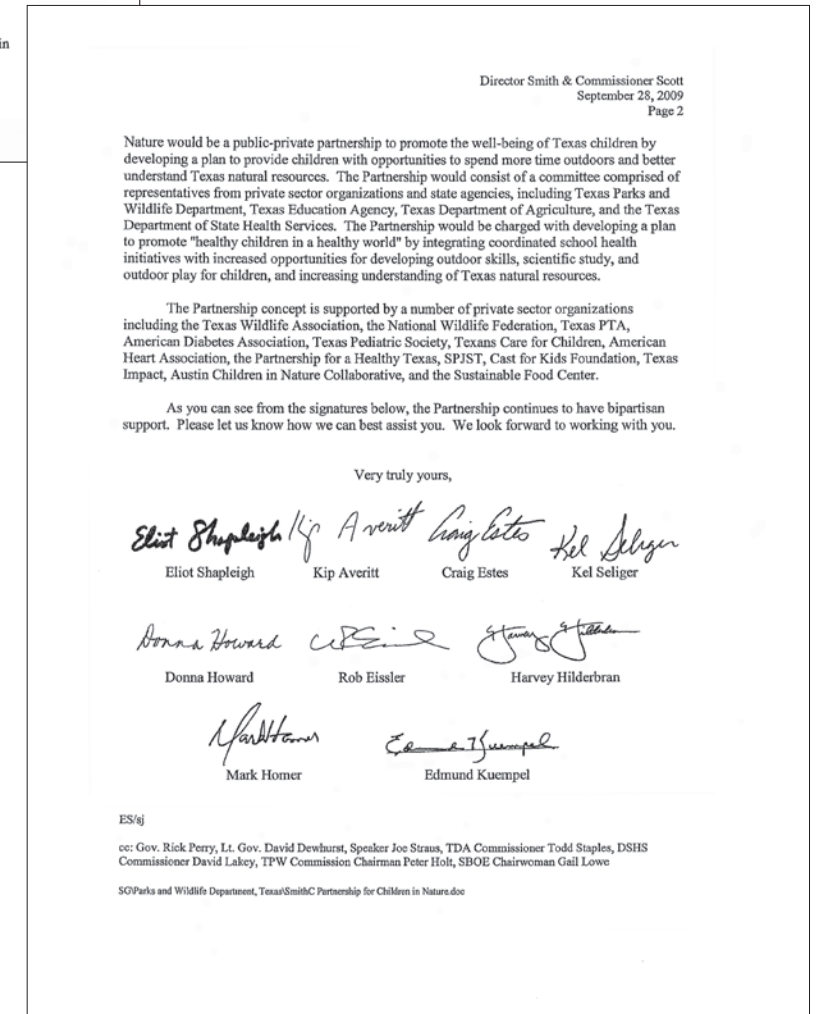
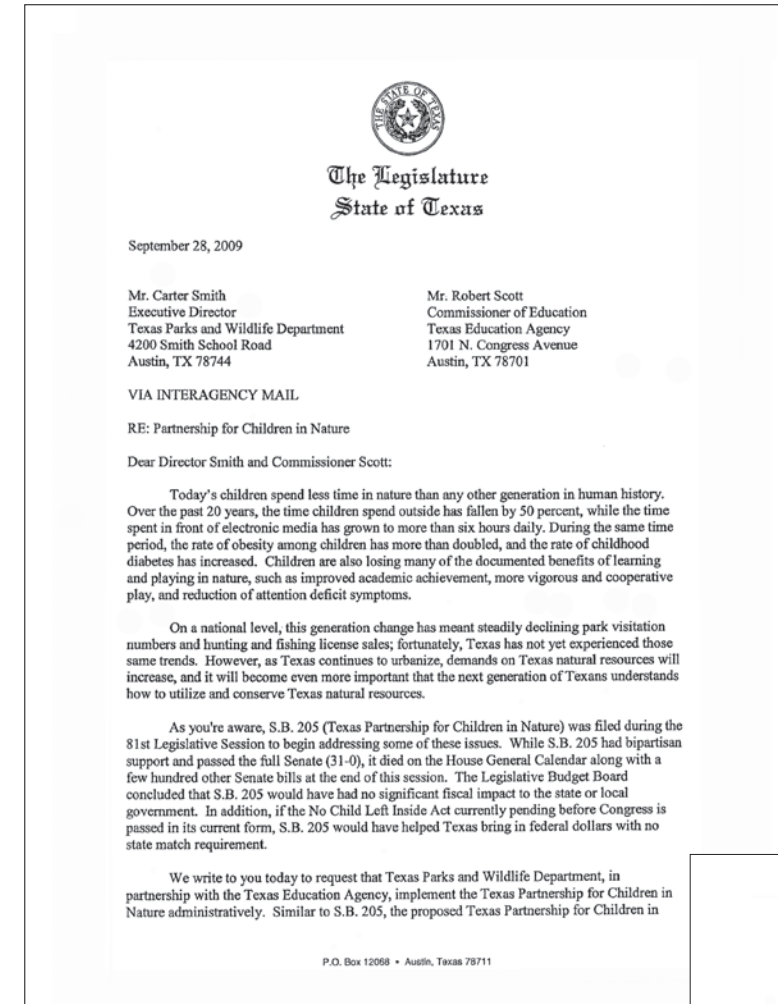
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For a complete list of all the research related to the strategic plan and contributors, please visit www.texaschildreninnature.org



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