



Texas  
**Children  
in Nature**  
STRATEGIC PLAN

Executive Summary



Research shows children are spending between 7 and 11 hours per day indoors, sedentary with media and only minutes per day playing in nature. At the same time rates of childhood obesity, diabetes and depression have increased. Additionally this disconnection leads to a lack of understanding and care for the natural world. We believe these issues can be solved by increasing access to and improving a connection with nature for children and families.

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

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## Texas Children in Nature Strategic Agenda

### Health

We envision healthier children, families and communities as a result of increased time spent in nature and more outdoor physical activity. To achieve this, we will:

- Encourage and share sound research about nature and children's health and development, including the therapeutic benefits of nature.
- 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.
- As appropriate, encourage integration of nature opportunities as a health strategy in health and childcare guidelines.
- Promote health considerations in urban and community planning.

## Education

We envision that every child in Texas will be engaged in meaningful outdoor learning experiences and achieve natural resource literacy. To achieve this, we will:

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

## Access

We envision a Texas where all 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 and gain a sense of place. To achieve this, we will:

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

## Community

We envision a connection with nature that is relevant and welcoming to all, including unifying messages, partnerships and efforts that are respectful to Texas' diverse peoples, cultures and economic needs. To achieve this, we will:

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



### Children who learn and play in nature are:

#### Healthier.

Active nature play improves physical conditioning, and has a positive effect on emotional wellbeing and child development. Outdoor play has been linked to reduced risk of obesity, myopia and vitamin D deficiency.

#### Happier.

Nature play increases self-esteem and reduces stress. Children learn self-discipline and are more cooperative with others. Children feel more capable, confident and connected to nature.

#### Smarter.

Nature play stimulates creativity and improves problem solving. Schools using environmental themes report improved academic performance. And, children who play in nature are more likely to become tomorrow's conservation leaders.

[www.texaschildreninnature.org](http://www.texaschildreninnature.org)

TEXAS  
Children  
in Nature

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