

America's Great Outdoors
Notes from Youth Listening Session

Location: Missoula, Montana

Date: June 2, 2010

President Obama launched a national conversation about conservation in America at the White House Conference on the Great Outdoors on April 16, 2010. The President understands that protecting and restoring the lands and waters that we love and reconnecting people to the outdoors must happen at the local level. Therefore, President Obama directed the principal leaders of the Initiative to travel across the country to listen and learn from people directly involved in finding grassroots solutions to conserve our lands, waterways, historical and cultural resources and to reconnect Americans with the Outdoors. The President indicated that the sessions should engage the full range of interested groups, including tribal leaders, farmers and ranchers, sportsmen, community park groups, foresters, youth groups, businesspeople, educators, State and local government, recreation and conservation groups and others. The President placed a special priority on engaging with America's youth. Below are notes from the breakout groups at the Listening Session sorted by Discussion Question. Please feel free to use the ideation tool at <http://ideas.usda.gov/ago/ideas.nsf/> if you would like to share your thoughts.

Discussion Questions

Y1. Where do you go when you are not indoors?

Y2. What do you do personally to protect the environment?

Y3. What are some obstacles and challenges that prevent young people from spending time outdoors?

Y4. What recommendations would you make to President Obama to get more young people engaged in, and connected to, the outdoors?

N/A. Not available or not applicable.

Discussion Question Y1-Y4	Comment
Y4	Try to get local organizations to participate or engage; they already exist. Organizations such as YMCA, Flagship, Camp Fire, and other after school programs (don't reinvent the wheel). Also include troubled youth. Expand and fund what we already have. Provide jobs for more youth leaders like MCC. Need people with ideas and what we already have in place. Get the Forest Service or BLM into these organizations speaking, and giving slideshows. Get kids excited about this. She remembers D.A.R.E. – that stuck with her (as an example); an hour with a policeman and getting out of class. Bring the Forest Service in to schools. It comes down to the school systems, advertising, and after school programs.
Y4	To find people for programs, try advertising on the internet and spreading by word of mouth. It's just like music: we get it off the internet. Focus on going to websites. Advertising on different media websites would work; pay for advertisements. That's how AmeriCorps found him.
Y4	She feels like most of us are preaching to the choir. There are so many Conservation Corps members here; we need to take what we think and bring it to an urban setting. It would open the floor to more ideas.
Y4	Many Montana Conservation Corps members are here and SCA as well. The fact that we're here says something. The reason there is a big group is due to ARRA money. That money may or may not be there next year or the year after. If we need more seats at the table then it needs to be funded. These kids become advocates. Darren coming from

	Massachusetts goes back home and becomes an advocate.
Y4	In addition to bike paths why don't we design communities so cars weren't the only option? We are thinking about this in Missoula County but not as much at the State level in general.
Y4	I have a boring, non-visionary suggestion: AVUE. It's your introduction to the Forest Service and it's a nightmare, it's gridlocked. Last year I got hired to work for the Forest Service and it took 5 weeks before I was offered the job. AVUE doesn't seem to work for anyone.
Y4	He says he had a great childhood growing up in Montana but his childhood was sterile due to lack of time or access or something (to the outdoors). But when he went to high school he read about the wilderness and realized 'it's out there'. He went on the internet and was lucky to find the Montana Conservation Corps. Now that he's here and going into the wilderness, there will be a satisfaction when he's finished with his term of service; he can talk to others about it. He knows the internet was mentioned as a communication method but thinks word of mouth is the most important. When they're done with their experience, the most important thing is to get the word out and share their experiences with others. He thinks we'll find a lot of volunteers waiting in the wings.
Y4	Getting the voice of youth is really important since we are inheritors of the generation before. It's up to our generation to break the cycle. It's not just an idea we hold in our heads but to get the youth voice is to empower the organizations that already exist. But have it be the Voice of America – not the Youth Voice of America. Empower organizations that already exist. Give that respect the voice deserves; give it more credence. Not 'what do they know?' but really respecting it.
Y4	She believes Service Learning is the best model at a young age. She suggests using the same method for recruiting used by an organization called "Teach for America." They have recruited huge numbers of youth; their target age is the 22-28 age groups. They use alumni from their organization, who are excited about the program, to go out and get more people involved. If there are alums with our program, you could do this. They (Teach for America) may have incentives. This could apply to high school and middle school. Have alums come talk to schools and say this is what I did and it was cool. Do research on this.
Y1	He said he was very fortunate to have grown up in the Five Valleys (Missoula, etc.) because this school system did encourage kids in outdoor activities. They could also go home and climb a tree. They were able to go to Plum Creek Timber Company locally and see how trees are processed into wood products. He knows this works because he has these memories still from back in the fifth grade.
Y4	He likes what he's hearing today. I think one of the hardest parts of getting youth to the outdoors is to provide a reason to go there. The Education Award is a good thing. He participated in a Career Fair where they got to talk to kids face to face and the kids got excited seeing all the tools they brought with them. Developing leadership skills is important; youth can then carry it on further into their lives. You need to probe what motivates those kids: is it cranking out 10 miles of trail? Or being better speakers? Or more engaged in community? Find out what motivates youth. Youth will motivate youth. It's like a baseball team – someone tells a friend, who tells a friend, etc.; the ripple effect. The YCC focuses on leadership – but the Forest Service doesn't do this. It's so important to your community.

Y4	Would like to see local solutions to big problems with the federal government incentivizing. In Montana what's important is our own autonomy. In Montana it's important the Federal Government uses a light hand. Use incentives (we're creative people) and get local people together to make choices. For instance with energy: small diameter trees/biomass – utilize them to solve local energy problems. Do on a smaller scale so we can get our hands on it. It creates local jobs too.
Y3	It's important to remember that just because children live near the woods they will not necessarily be engaged. She grew up in Alaska, but thinks she was the only kid at school who spent the majority of her time outside because her Dad was a trapper. They won't go out there on their own. At school, the Tongass National Forest was surrounding it but they weren't allowed to go outside the playground. Their teachers never took them outside the playground. It's important to not assume kids near the woods use it. On same note, she thinks her classmates were not engaged, they did art/music instead. She later had a job as an education coordinator in Alaska where she used art and poetry to connect kids to the outdoors.
Y4	She is originally from Minnesota. She came from the suburb and urban areas. Getting kids outdoors should be emphasized in school programs. They had local people from the State Parks come to her school sometimes; they went to the pond in back of the schoolyard where they could get in the mud. We should encourage kids to take what they learned back to the classrooms. She had an Arctic Explorer doing programs in her school when she was in the 6th grade; she thought it was very important and sort of unique – others didn't get that experience. Getting kids outside for half an hour will have a huge impact. They know there's something bigger out there. Also, set up more urban outdoor spaces like community gardens. People can be working in gardens growing things and we can be encouraging parks to outreach to kids in education.
Y4	Public land should continue to be multi-use managed but energy development needs to be better scrutinized. Montana is a very energy intensive state. She doesn't want to see things similar to the Gulf spill happen or the mining deaths in West Virginia. The administration should look into what kind of energy development can be done here as well as alternative energy. We need a solid energy plan. Public lands will be looked at for solar, wind, coal, and natural gas. Look at the pros and cons of each. We need a 20-year plan along with multi-use planning.
Y4	Mentioned youth who live in Los Angeles who have never been to the ocean even though it's just a few miles away. He grew up in Boston and there are kids there who haven't been to the woods there, even though they aren't far away. There was a Sierra Club program that tried to help with this. His "in" to working with the Forest Service was working for the YCC. He really hopes the Obama Administration will establish a national service framework to bring back the CCC – the New Deal. We could reach out to new student high school graduates. Could make parents realize this is a great experience before college – to do work for the government and perhaps get education awards like having tuition waived. This is a huge opportunity in our country.
Y4	Regarding the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation and other associations who outreach to young people and have partnerships with the Forest Service: I hope agencies will fund these associations more. These are ways to connect youth to ground.
Y4	They (youth) are influenced by things like humor – make them laugh and they'll listen to you; if it's boring they will turn it off. Try to draw on their interests or the music they listen to. Advertise through TV shows.

N/A	Lived by a national forest in Tennessee. The local school system didn't take advantage of the local forest. The local Forest Service office really isolated themselves and you never saw them in town. It would be great to put the local office in town and combine the town and the agency to increase education.
N/A	Couldn't afford to spend time in the outdoors so he took a job that paid him to go in the woods. It's a great organization – everyone comes for a variety of reasons but they all end up working in the outdoors. Some come from an advocacy background. What drew him was the educational component. The incentive for education would be good for other programs too.
N/A	Would be helpful if there were money available for community collaboration. A piece that is missing is a way to provide incentives for youth to participate and ask them what would get them out. Also need to think about access – for example this was held during school and the kids couldn't come.
N/A	Website for finding jobs for the Forest Service and National Park Service is terrible. If we go to a web site that's not well put together we are turned off and we don't want to work for them. It's hard to get a job for the FS so why not put links on your site of alternative ways to work in the woods that may not be as good as pay but get us out in the woods and work experience.
N/A	His roommates recently got a record player and you can't skip a bad song easily. When you deal with a job site – the kids are used to skipping past bad songs easily so when you're dealing with a web site need to make it so that there are not bad sites that youth will skip. Make it fast – the youth are used to operating really fast. Use of social media facebook and twitter is really important. The NYC people who aren't in the woods use FB and Twitter and that is how we can connect with them. Also remember that use of social marketing technology skips over the young folks who aren't on facebook yet. Keep in mind that when using facebook you are missing elementary and middle school kids and we need to get kids into the habit of using the outdoors.
N/A	Took part in a non-profit called Greenbeans who brought the outdoors to the urban setting. That is what led her to Missoula. 80% of Americans live in the cities so it's important to bring the outdoors to the city such as by community gardens.
N/A	He's from Illinois where we don't have prairies any longer. It is now urbanized land – farms that have fertilizers and pesticides. In an ideal world the Federal government would introduce more of the native land that used to be there. Not every place is like Montana with native lands.
N/A	It would have a huge impact to move the Forest Service out from under Department of Agriculture because when you view trees as a crop it makes a big difference in how they are managed. The way to set policies should be based on watershed health as the basis for all management because, for example, drinking water will be one of the primary problems of the next century.
N/A	He brought seven people here all of which can't come back because of the limits of the program. This creates problems and also brings in new ideas. He's seen Forest Service people getting comfortable in their jobs. He'd like to see the agency have rules where employees would have to move on – for example they could be a GS-4 for a number of years before you move up or move out. This would help the younger people move in and would keep the government agencies fresh.

N/A	Has been an environmentalist for years; he's never seen an effort like this listening session. He's asked the government agencies to follow up by creating an interagency working group combined with local participants to work together on local issues. There are a lot of people who don't want to do anything different than the way they do things now – coal, oil, etc – and when you are making a lot of money you don't want anyone to break up your game. The state legislature follows the money so it's hard to get things done through that route. But here there are progressive agency people. Let's bring them together with the local citizens to get out from under the money game. Get all outfits to the table and work together to solve the local problems. He asks the top government agencies heads to leave in place a process for the locals to have follow-up to this session. He's very appreciative of our Agency heads coming here and taking this leadership and listening to all of these great ideas. He's inspired by all the great ideas he's heard here and very invigorated by it.
N/A	Two issues: Sustainability in the timber industry. There is a way to use these renewable resources. There's a way to use the trees without clearcuts – use the woods at the same time as keeping them growing. Land use ethics: he moved to Kalispell thinking he was coming to a little mountain town and instead found out it had six grocery stores and two Walmarts. He'd think it would be huge if people understood the land that they're destroying by building on it.
N/A	He would like to see the FS change their stance on mining and international Forestry.
N/A	This group is not representative of youth in Montana. She is a 5 th generation Montanan and there is a need to take this to more rural communities. It would be good to have smaller groups, led by youth and get in touch with more youth groups.
N/A	Not every community has access to the forests around them. It's important to bring the outdoors to the communities such as through community gardens. Or take the kids out to the woods – but not every community has a national park so embrace what you do have, such as regional parks.
N/A	You asked how to reach out to the youth. The way to do that is to treat us as the new and upcoming voice – do not marginalize us – don't just see us as a group of young people who are upset and have too much time on their hands – instead see us as leaders – we are concerned about national security - we recognize that the problems going on are not just problems now but will be problems for the next 30 years and we're going to have to be the ones to deal with it. Recognize us for that.
N/A	Use the model of Montana Conservation Corps and build on collaboration at the local level. Partner with successful programs like Knowles (??) or Yellowstone Expeditions which takes city kids out in the Yellowstone ecosystem to learn about the outdoors.