

**America's Great Outdoors  
Notes from Listening Session**

Location: Helena, MT

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

1. What works: Please share your thoughts and ideas on effective strategies for conservation, recreation and reconnecting people to the outdoors.
2. Challenges: What obstacles exist to achieve your goals for conservation, recreation, or reconnecting people to the outdoors?
3. Federal government role: How can the federal government be a more effective partner in helping to achieve conservation, recreation or reconnecting people to the outdoors?
4. What additional tools and resources would help your efforts be even more successful?

Discussion Question 1-4	Theater Breakout Group Comments
What works	She just moved back to Missoula and can compare it to where she was previously. Bozeman is so incredible and different mainly in their biking, hiking, and cross country trails from town to the outskirts. They are for fun but also for getting to the stores and businesses. People are using these systems a lot more there (than Missoula).
What works	We need to connect people (to the land). We need a good education program and after school programs so we can get youth outdoors and tell them more about our environment; it's a good way to connect people.
What works	I'm not from Montana. The National Forest I live near is close to town but there's no connection to town. There are no announcements of activities going on – 'town' and 'out of town' are completely separated. We need to build bridges between the two and get people out from town. I know there's a Forest Service office in town but they don't seem involved. We need more outreaches from that office to the community.
What works	Thank you for holding this session. This agency does a good job when it does educate – i.e. "Leave no Trace" and 'Pack it Out' are so effective; light switches goes off in people's heads "this is not just green clothes people who do this (pack it out/leave no trace) we, the people have responsibilities to do this too". We can do more to give Americans pride in their public lands and define for them the gradations of management. From what the

	wilderness act calls for in maintaining 110 million acres to recreational areas in National Forests to where ATV's are allowed. We're in a period right now where there's confusion – "where am I entering; what are the other opportunities?" We need national education to develop pride and an owning of their responsibilities.
What works	One thing I've seen work in this area is citizen science monitoring; it gives the average citizen a responsibility. Promotion of this kind of program would help connect people to the landscape. How can we have citizens gather information and do effective monitoring? The Audubon Society has done some of this.
What works	Create social responsibility. The direct way to do this is to teach kids in the third, fourth and fifth grades. He went to the Teton Science School when he was in grade school; he may have drug his feet to go but he's now infinitely grateful he went. This early on interaction with wilderness fosters a great relationship. He doesn't recall much emphasis on natural sciences in high school; thinks having a curriculum that you continue in secondary school would be good in the long run. It will benefit and create a generation of people with social responsibility.
What works	<p>Lives in Seeley Lake which is a small community. She and another Mom (Jeannie - sitting next to her) started an Adventure Club at the Elementary School from first grade on where once a month the children go out for an entire day. It has been enormously successful. The program has attracted kids that don't usually do that sort of thing (would usually play video games indoors). It has captured kids. They take them on hikes. They've been amazed at how well the program was received. Five mothers have taken this on and they have a supportive Superintendent. It's at a small school so it's easy to get the word out and there hasn't been much resistance.</p> <p>Another comment about science: she would like to see, as a Mom, more emphasis on science. With reading/math and the standards for "no child left behind" we've dropped the ball on science. Kids want science and they need it but aren't getting it because of the reading/math emphasis. They should focus on science and how it applies to real life.</p> <p>The parent group is toying with the idea of starting a garden and greenhouse on school grounds and implementing some science and connecting kids that way. You have a captive audience at school so give it to them that way. Take advantage of it so the kids can feel a connection to the natural environment.</p>
What works	<p>The community is like a cell membrane; she compared this to the notion of engagement. Every Forest Service employee should sit on a community board and transfer some of their knowledge – have a flow back and forth. Another idea regarding Heritage Resources: everyone in the community has stories – i.e. the place where someone kissed his wife for the first time. There are tangible values and attachment to place. We're missing the boat by not connecting these stories.</p> <p>Volunteers connect it all. They help us understand the power of community. We need a rubric in the Forest Service volunteer program to put people's skills to work. Some volunteer out of the goodness of their heart s; we need to formalize.</p>

What works	Strategies that are working are the Extension Program and Institute for Recreation Research. We need to increase collaboration between these programs, do outreach into the community and enhance partnerships. We need more folks in the Forest Service or Park Service to come in and also get different levels of government working together (i.e. county commissioners and go statewide) to build it up. These two programs would work.
What works	When open space bonds are used, there should be more allowance of public access on private lands.
Challenges	I think in Montana the lack of zoning is an issue; it affects our ability to have open spaces. There are social and environmental problems related to zoning. Maybe state level laws would work by being stricter on development. There could be incentives for proper development.
Challenges	Thinks it's a wonderful idea to develop lands (for public gardens, etc. Anthony Rivers talked about earlier) for better usage. Would it involve planning boards working to get the community involved and gardens approved or should we use another method? We need public education to get support for gardens.
Challenges	Comments on Geoff's input: It all starts with bringing this into the schools and creating awareness on a daily basis. If kids have exposure to the land and a connection to the land they will be more likely to care about it. Waiting to deal with people who are abusing the land now is a backwards approach. Many parents do work with their own children (to instill value for land) but we can't count on all parents, as many parents don't work with their children.
Challenges	When she was growing up, she was outside all the time even though it was in suburban areas. She and her brother played along a creek bed. Education is the key. She was in the education field and the year she left education she was told to bring the kids inside not go outside. You can educate, mandate, regulate, but at the core you have to have things available. On any developments in the future, housing or commercial, there should be a space there that is nothing but nature. People on their lunch hour can sit outside maybe by a creek. The longer you do that the more you appreciate it. It's the same with agricultural spaces, small spaces, in housing developments; if you take care of it, you'll appreciate it and you'll know that the rain, sun, and soil are important. Kids need to be out there in it – digging, eating worms, and throwing stones - every day. It (nature) needs to be around us.
Challenges	In elementary school I received a good education in this but in high school they dropped the ball. We need to do more outside in high school.
Challenges	This speaks to the future – the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century in Conservation, Kids in the Outdoors, etc.: Federal agencies were organized and located 50–100 years ago under a different paradigm. Look at how agencies are organized now. We need to change from “doers” to “conveners”. We aren't funded that way. We are organized under a different paradigm that needs change.

Challenges	When the first open space bond passed, people were not aware of the public access issues that went along with it. But five years later we passed the second bond on open space. People want to protect open space on private land whether there's access or not. He personally allows hunting and fishing on his land but he doesn't think we need to dictate to landowners that they must allow public access.
Challenges	A comment on volunteerism: if there is any way to promote and/or subsidize volunteerism (the government) we should be doing it. There are baby boomers retiring in droves; what will they do after retirement? They have the experience and education (to volunteer), they have 40 years of life left and it would keep them alive longer.
Challenges	We need to establish more of an identity and be carbon neutral. We need to have access to wilderness and public land and have green spaces connected to public lands as the model. He echoes everyone's comments so far; he's heard a lot of support for education.
Federal Governments Role	I have a thought on how the federal government can help. We need some kind of censorship on advertisement. The aesthetics of location: there is almost nothing uglier than a highway billboard. They go against every notion of nature. Nature provides beauty at every single angle. People are inspired by nature – the trees are just right, the clouds are just so. Once they discover a sentiment for nature, they don't regress; it's probably a lifelong sentiment. He is big on aesthetics.
Federal Governments Role	We should look at empowering more youth. There are a lot of us who are older (youth) who didn't get an early education in conservation. The Montana Conservation Corps is a way to get us out there connected to the land we cherish. It's about starting a foundation with them too.
Federal Governments Role	When we're working with noxious weeds or building trails, it helps us understand things and makes a connection with community and with government.
Federal Governments Role	Our agency is not aligned. We need to reinvent ourselves. I'm a District Ranger in Idaho and my staff gets this works accomplished. Community involvement isn't a priority – we don't walk the talk. Employees put in too much of their own time – due to their passion for the job. The biggest benefits are at the grass roots level. Bring in diverse interests. It doesn't filter down from the top.
Federal Governments Role	Wilderness management: we need more of it at less cost.
Tools	Thank you for this meeting; we need more meetings like this. It would be beneficial. We should require our Representatives to be here and involved in process and hear what is being said.
Tools	He works with wolf conservation. What he has seen that doesn't work is incentive based compensation to ranchers. We need to look at non-incentive based strategies in the

	<p>future. Concerning conservation on private land, we need to figure out some more strategies. Project Wild: it's really interactive and cool even though it's not outdoors.</p>
Tools	<p>We're a small group in attendance; how do we promote the interest in what's going on today instead of having people sitting there and waiting until something happens and then complaining about how it was shoved down their throats?</p>
	<p>First: Community is like a membrane of a cell around public land. Everything that enters the public land comes through community. The people in a community know what happens on the federal lands. Forest Service employees should sit in on community meetings to take advantage of the knowledge of the community. Participation helps the knowledge cross the membrane.</p> <p>Second: Value heritage resources. Community has stories: where they went finishing, where they kissed the first time. These are intrinsic values that get attached to places, heritage resources.</p> <p>Third --Volunteers connect it all. Need a rubric in the Forest Service to connect volunteers to it all. Need to connect those skills, to harness them. Resources are slim, but people volunteer out of goodness of their heart. Harness them.</p>
	<p>Looking at conservation strategies. 80% of open lands are private. Conservation easements are used to conserve private lands. People donate the conservation easement. The incentive is tax breaks. From personal experience, I entered an easement 13 years ago. I talked to my neighbor about it. When congress passed an increased incentive for easement, spreading tax break over 15 years, then my neighbor also did an easement. Encourage congress to do the incentive again. For some it takes the added incentive.</p> <p>On other hand, there are those who want the land that they lived on and their parents lived on protected for their kids, but they don't make enough money to take advantage of a tax break. A purchased easement would help. Need a federal program to meet this. The video said that private land should be looked at for protection. The Farm and Ranch Protection Program has a minimum size. Congress should look at that to include larger and smaller acreages in the program. But that program needs matching funds, which are hard to come by. One thing that works well is the passage of a law like the Missoula open space law. Bozeman passed a second open space law. The local program provides the local funds to match the federal matching requirement for the easement program.</p> <p>FED AS BETTER PARTNER</p>
	<p>The biggest obstacle is lack of awareness. It seems reclamation is backburner. It takes one life cycle for a vacant lot to develop an ecosystem. Drive through any town. It probably has a vacant lot. Make an incentive for the owner to donate use of the lot to the community in neighborhood fashion like community gardens. When there is a neighborhood garden you can feel the neighborhood. There is less trash, its cleaner. The people are more neighbors.</p>

	<p>In my community there is a year long waiting list for the garden. Need many, many, many, many more gardens. The gardens put the conservation effort at the forefront of daily life.</p>
	<p>Attitude towards public lands. We are intent on our right to use public lands, which turned into a right to abuse public lands. These ecosystems create benefits for humans: clean air and water. These lands and creatures have right to their own existence and quality life. It is not all about use. It's about taking care of these lands. Pushing more use and people intensifies management. We lose touch with outdoors after awhile. We are not in dominion over these lands. We are part of them. Public agencies can help instill the attitude of being part of the land.</p> <p>It starts with bringing it into the schools at a young age. If kids have that exposure to land they are more likely to care about it. Waiting for people to start abusing and then dealing with it is a backwards approach.</p>
	<p>In previous comments someone asked the feds to continue to provide incentive for easements. Land and water conservation funds needs to be fully funded. If funds were available more conservation projects could be funded. The Community Food and Ag Coalition in Missoula has been requested to examine subdivision requests and assess possible impact on agriculture by subdivisions. Even when the planning board is convinced that agriculture values are so important, more important than the subdivision the planning board will override the recommendation because of the emphasis on individual property rights. How do we instill responsibility for common good and common value of agriculture and forest lands? Missoula is creating the "Place Project" where cornerstone properties will stand out. How do we implement protection for these "Place Project" lands?</p>
	<p>Get kids outdoors. The book "Kids in the Woods" sets up the problem well. Lewis and Clark Trail teaches kids conservation out on a trail setting. It is an important developmental step to get outdoors, not just in yards, on lawns, but in the wilderness. We are at a time right now, and people say the Lewis and Clark Trail is over. But it's wrong. It's a terrible thing to just drop the ball and not follow up with what they saw at Travelers Rest or wherever. Get them to look where we are and the history that we have here.</p>
	<p>Getting people connected and kids outdoors is important. Federal agencies were created under a different paradigm. A paradigm where congress allocated funds and agency went and did work. With people being more involved there needs to be a change in the federal agency organization. We won't be the doers anymore. We need to be reinvented.</p>
	<p>The agencies are good at inventory and monitoring on public lands. Extend inventory and monitoring onto private lands in the large scale conservation model. With that in mind we need public access. Access is based on consumptive uses. Focus on non consumptive uses. Would be more palatable to public</p>
	<p>about high schools. On national news, there is a high dropout rate in high schools. Some schools are letting them move on. They say it's ok if the kids leave. Revamp high school. There is a crisis in the high school. Maybe have an option or alternative for high school kids to get into the outdoors. Make them part of the solution</p>

	Adventure club kids will bring their parents. Some parents have never x-country skied or been on a trail. The knowledge to get there and access the trails is created. Kids can say let's go again and parent will be able to take them.
	Long-term strategies so many people want to help take care of pub lands. There is not a good enough interface right now. We need conservation leadership. How do citizens contribute? The funds we are talking about are all federal. Federal part is a black box. Everything else outside of fed black box is available through citizens. We need to work through the citizens. Things can be figured out at local level and so much good will happen. Do the local piece and it will feed to the big strategy.
	Empower more youth. People have said educate starting young. Those who are older have missed that bus and need to be empowered too. I didn't get the opportunity when I was a kid. But I got the opportunity. MCC is a way to empower us. Education empowers older kids. We want to help conservation. We have a better understanding of what the agencies do to conserve the resources.
	Building on what Jena said, we need expansion of programs like MCC.
	There is a lot of pressure on agencies to add things to wilderness areas like cell phone tower or poison fish or kill weeds. Remember the ethic of restraint in wilderness. Wilderness is the highest designation. These lands are the barometer in climate change. Leave them alone. We will need to know how nature will react to 2 deg change. We need a base.  ADDITIONAL TOOLS
	The federal land managers have the option to add "caring for" in wilderness there is a lot of caring for. Funds to add to the effort. There is ability for others to add. That's true of a lot of conservation organizations.
	I have a wish list  1. better planning strategies across the board  2. Incentive to save conservation areas  3. More information and advocacy  4. Increased collaboration between local and federal agencies. More gets done by the locals than the feds.
	Create more federal incentives and funds to public schools to implement outdoor learning programs. We do it with reading and math. Like "Project Wild" on a more regular basis. More than bring the trunk to school once or twice a year
	With crisis in Gulf it's an opportunity for kids to see how important it is. Here we can see

