



Healthy Kids Outdoors Act of 2015

Key Messages

Updated 04/28/2015

The Bills

H.R. 2014: Sponsored by Congressman Ron Kind (WI-3), this bill was introduced in the House of Representatives on April 23, 2015 and has been referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.

S. 1078: Sponsored by Senator Martin Heinrich (NM), this bill was introduced in the Senate on April 23, 2015 and has been referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

Text of the bills: [Senate Bill 1078](#)

Press Release

From Congressman Kind: http://www.thewheelerreport.com/wheeler_docs/files/0423kind.pdf

From Senator Heinrich: <http://www.heinrich.senate.gov/press-releases/heinrich-introduces-healthy-kids-outdoors-act>

The Issues

- Today's youth are experiencing less free and unstructured outdoor playtime in nature than previous generations — devoting an average of just four to seven minutes a day in unstructured play time versus an average of seven and one-half hours each day in front of electronic media (Charles & Louv, 2009).
- Our children's health is declining as obesity and attention deficit disorders are rising. Children are experiencing reduced mobility and less range for exploration, including a reduction in walking or riding a bike to school, a growing fear of strangers and nature itself, the dramatic rise in obesity, as well as vitamin D deficiency and other health issues. All of these may in part be related to low levels of outdoor activity and a sedentary lifestyle (Charles & Louv, 2009).
- Our military readiness is declining as nearly one in four applicants to the military is rejected due to being overweight or obese (Cawley & Maclean, 2010).
- Those who do not spend time in nature are less likely to protect it — leaving our nation's vast natural resources at risk (Kals, Schumacher, & Montada, 1999; Chawla, 1999).
- Few have recognized the value that alternative and expanded learning environments (such as the outdoors) can have in significantly improving academic achievement in reading, math, and science (Charles & Louv, 2009).

American Camp Association Position

The American Camp Association (ACA) believes that young people benefit emotionally, socially, physically, and spiritually from spending time in close contact with the natural world. This critical connection is essential to healthy development. ACA supports and actively participates in public and private partnerships and collaborations that make positive, nature-based opportunities available to children, youth, and families. Furthermore, ACA will advocate on behalf of and in cooperation with children and youth to develop and mobilize resources that introduce, educate, and personally connect children with the natural environment.

The Solutions Presented in this Bill:

The Healthy Kids Outdoors Act of 2015 will:

- Provide state-level incentives to develop five-year state strategies that **connect children, youth, and families with the natural world.**
- Require that each state's strategies include **partnering with non-governmental organizations (such as camps)**, especially those that serve children, youth, and families.

- Require that each state provide opportunities for the public to be involved in the development and implementation of the strategies. These may include opportunities for camps and other youth-serving organizations **to participate in the development** of these strategies — and in the **provision of outdoor opportunities** for kids.
- **Support research** documenting the health, conservation, and other benefits of active time spent outdoors in the natural world.
- Direct the President of the United States to develop a **similar strategy at the Federal level** by bringing together federal agencies and national partners to create a national action plan.

Data Points

- Direct experience in nature is important to a child's intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, and physical development (Kellert, 2005).
- Time spent in the outdoors can mitigate some health threats related to sedentary behavior and attention deficit disorder (Moore & Cooper Marcus, 2008).
- Physical activity, such as outdoor play, has been linked to increases in students' grade point averages and more efficient classroom learning, as well as positive associations with children's physical fitness, concentration, memory, behavior, and school satisfaction (Trudeau & Shephard, 2008).
- Many studies of environmental education programs — including a study of weeklong residential outdoor education programs — have found increases in mastery of science concepts, cooperation and conflict resolution skills, self-esteem, positive environmental behavior, problem solving, motivation to learn, and classroom behavior (American Institutes for Research, 2005).
- Access to nature facilitates self-discipline, peace, and self-control (Kuo & Taylor, 2005; Taylor, Kuo, Spencer, & Blades, 2006; Taylor, Kuo, & Sullivan, 2002). The ability to have self-control, concentration, and other positive qualities can carry over to academic settings, leading to academic achievement.
- A direct childhood experience with nature before the age of eleven promotes a long-term connection to nature (Arnold, Cohen, & Warner, 2009).
- Parks and recreation, youth-serving organizations (such as camps), service-learning, health, education, and environmental organizations all provide critical resources and infrastructure for connecting children and families with nature (Kals, Schumacher, & Montada, 1999).

Call to Action

The American Camp Association will be calling our community to action as these bills progress through their respective Committees in Congress. For the most up-to-date information, visit: <http://www.acacamps.org/publicpolicy/HKOA>.

References

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For more information, contact the American Camp Association Public Policy Office at 800-428-2267 or visit www.ACacamps.org/publicpolicy.