



## Getting Kids Outdoors The Appalachian Mountain Club's Commitment

### The Benefits

A variety of studies have shown that children benefit from positive experiences in the outdoors. Kids who are exposed to frequent, unstructured outdoor play and discovery are healthier physically and mentally, do better in school, have higher self-esteem, feel more connected to nature, and are more likely to be tomorrow's conservation leaders. Academic researchers have found a direct link between a child's stress level and the amount of time they spend outside playing and exploring. The Boston Youth Environmental Network reports that hands-on environmental education builds a closer connection between students and their surroundings and helps foster environmental stewardship. Recent research also shows positive links between environmental education and enhanced academic performance.



Photo: Lori Duff

### The Challenge

Children are bombarded by an enormous variety of activities that compete for their time and attention. A study by the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) found that 80 percent of today's kids watch more than three hours of television a day.

Today's outdoor play patterns have changed from generations ago. While energetic, free-play outdoors used to be the typical activity in childhood, such opportunities have become rare, due to parental fears about their child's safety, reduced access to green space, overscheduling of children's time, and an increase in organized youth sports. Decreasing levels of outdoor play among today's kids may also be a contributing factor in the alarming rate of childhood obesity.

Getting kids outdoors shapes their future interests. OIA reports that 90 percent of adults who are active in the outdoors participated in outdoor activities when they were youngsters. A 2006 study by Cornell University researchers, Nancy Wells and Kristi Lekies, of a broad sample of urban adults, aged 18 to 90, indicated that the most direct route to adult concern and behavior related to the environment is participating in such "wild nature activities" as playing independently in the woods, hiking, and fishing before the age of 11.

### Our Commitment

We at the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) are greatly concerned by trends that point to more sedentary lifestyles among our youth, and fewer young people and their families experiencing the natural world through direct outdoor recreational experiences. We believe that fostering a connection with nature among today's youth is a necessary component in building the next generation of outdoor enthusiasts and conservationists. AMC is



committed to reducing the barriers to active outdoor participation by youth, expanding the opportunities for environmental education, and making it easier for parents and adult leaders to introduce kids to the outdoors.

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**Each year, AMC serves nearly 40,000 young people through our lodge- and hut-based family programs, school programs, guided teen adventures, and programs for at-risk youth, as well as local, close-to-home programs for families offered by AMC Chapters.**

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## Our Approach

AMC has decades of experience in providing outdoor programs for youth, in many cases providing young people with their first backcountry experiences. Our educational approach is hands-on and place-based. With programs and facilities in spectacular outdoor settings, AMC programs help kids and adults alike learn about the joys and rewards of outdoor exploration and adventure.

We have partnered with state and local government agencies and other non-profits seeking to increase local outdoor experiences for youth and their families. AMC staff and volunteers have been actively participating in efforts in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, and Connecticut to reconnect youth and their families with the outdoors. We also advocate for federal funding for outdoor programs for children through the No Child Left Inside Network. In Connecticut and Massachusetts, respectively, our staff and volunteers are supporting the Great Park Pursuit and working with the Boston Environmental Youth Network to bring outdoor learning to Boston schoolchildren.

## AMC Programs for Youth

### School Programs

Our **A Mountain Classroom Program** helps students in grades 4 through 12 gain a deeper understanding of the natural world. Each year, we work with about 4000 students from 75 schools across the Northeast. Students have opportunities to study geology on mountainsides overlooking glacial cirques; to learn about forest ecology while hiking among the trees; to witness watershed science along the banks of mountain streams; and to explore winter ecology while trekking on snowshoes. We work closely with teachers to integrate environmental education into the classroom curriculum. As part of its Maine Woods Initiative, AMC has launched its **Moosehead Area Schools Project**, through which AMC is offering outdoor learning experiences to every elementary school, middle school, and high school student in Piscataquis County, at least three times over the course of his or her school career.



Photo: Lori Duff



## Programs for Urban and At-Risk Youth

**AMC's Youth Opportunities Program (YOP)**, trains youth workers and teachers to take their youth on day or overnight outdoor adventures. Once trained, youth workers receive free outdoor equipment loans and expert trip-planning advice. Founded in 1968, YOP has trained more than 3,300 youth workers and helped to introduce more than 82,740 urban and at-risk youth to the outdoors. YOP partners with more than 200 youth organizations in the greater Boston and New York areas to support their outdoor experiences. Each year, YOP helps more than 8,000 youth develop confidence, respect, and leadership skills through camping, backpacking, canoeing, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing adventures.



Photo: AMC Photo Library

## Destination-based Programs

Young guests at our AMC destinations are immersed in opportunities to get outside, and AMC has led the way in helping kids explore and increase their understanding of the outdoors through our **Junior Naturalist Program**, sponsored by L.L. Bean and the William T. Morris Foundation. Based at our White Mountain huts and lodges, this excit-

ing, hands-on, environmental awareness program was designed to help young visitors, aged 5 to 12, to gain an understanding of the natural world and their important role in helping to protect it. We also directly engage young people and their families through our **summer family camps**, **hut naturalist programs**, and our **walk-on programs** at the Highland Center and Pinkham Notch Visitor Center, where kids can try out animal tracking, geocaching, or join a nighttime salamander hunt.

## Teen Programs

Participants in our **Teen Wilderness Adventures** learn about the outdoors and develop essential life skills through our 5- to 23-day wilderness adventure programs in New Hampshire and Maine. With trips for novices as well as experienced outdoors enthusiasts, this program fosters an appreciation for the environment, develops self-esteem, instills a spirit of adventure, and promotes teamwork, friendship, and a sense of community through memorable wilderness experiences.

**AMC Teen Trail Crews** provide options for teens aged 15 to 19 to help maintain trails in the White Mountains of New Hampshire and Berkshires of Massachusetts. The experience incorporates physical activity, problem-solving, and teamwork, and is a great example of public service as participants contribute to the upkeep of trails used by the public. In some instances, participants can earn community service credits toward graduation.

## Local, Close-to-Home Programs

Many of AMC's 12 chapters offer **local family outings**. These programs provide opportunities for families and kids to get outside and actively explore the outdoors in their local communities. AMC volunteers are also helping local youth agencies connect with local outdoor spaces. Through our Chapter Youth Programs (CYP), AMC volunteers share their outdoor skills with local youth agencies, joining their staff on events with youth aged 6 to 18 who might not otherwise have the opportunity to get outdoors.



## “How To” and “Where To” Resources

AMC also encourages outdoor participation by families and children through its member magazine, *AMC Outdoors*, which contains periodic features and columns on Northeast outdoor destinations and gear of interest to families. *AMC’s Best Day Hikes and Discover* books provide at-a-glance guidance on the best hiking, paddling, and cycling trips for kids, and highlight such special attractions as waterfalls and swimming beaches. AMC has also launched a blog offering tips for getting kids outdoors called **Great Kids, Great Outdoors**. AMC has created pre-packaged, scripted **programs for volunteers** to offer locally that will help parents gain the skills and confidence they need to get outdoors with their kids.



Photo: AMC Photo Library

## For More Information

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