

Youth in the Outdoors

Friends of Big Elkin Creek

Life Inside and Screen time

Many people can remember their childhood summers filled with outdoor exploration in their backyard, a creek at the end of a pasture, or a local park. Coming inside was only reserved for supper time or to cool off from the summer heat with a glass of tea. Over the last 20 years and more rapidly in the last decade, this summertime experience is becoming less common for our youth. More school-aged children than ever have moved their summer break indoors, spending more time on screens. The culprits for this change include the allure of digital screens and more structured schedules for children and adolescents. It is estimated that the amount of unstructured outdoor play for today's youth only averages 5-7 minutes per day and that they are spending 37% less time outdoors than their parents.

Health

As many as half of children age 11 and 90% of teenagers have their own smartphones. Professional organizations such as The American Academy of Pediatrics suggest no more than 2 hours per day of screen time per day. However, data suggest that 9-12 year olds are averaging between 4-6 hours and teenagers could be as much as 9 hours a day. Research suggests that these increases are contributing to an increase in mental and physical health problems not normally seen in youth under 18 years of age. These problems include obesity, sleep disorders, and depression.

Connecting to the Environment

Time spent outdoors when we are young can strengthen our connection to place and community, which can help us play a positive role in our neighborhoods especially when it comes to caring for our environment. Research shows that over 85% of adults who value protecting their natural environments say that their first connection to caring about nature came from outdoor play as a child. ***Our interactions with the natural world can have lasting positive impacts on us and our community as we grow into adults.***

Last Child in the Woods

Richard Louv's 2005 book entitled "Last Child in the Woods" explores the idea of what he calls nature-deficit disorder and the importance of reconnecting children with the natural world. Louv also addresses the role of parents, educators, and community in reintroducing children to nature. He emphasizes the importance of creating opportunities for outdoor play that foster a sense of wonder and curiosity. Many of the things that he advocated for almost 20 years ago are happening in our world. Our local communities and schools are working hard to create a nature friendly community.

Local Opportunities

Outdoor recreation opportunities for youth are essential for building a strong connection to nature. Efforts in the Elkin community by groups like Elkin Valley Trails, Trips for Kids, and Watershed Now, have created better access to public space. Local schools are working to

provide access to local youth. Elkin City Schools incorporate programs like an annual creek week about watershed education. Appalachian State's Elkin Academy is working to create access right out their door by partnering with EVTA to build a trail down to the Mountains to Sea Trail. The local non-profit private school, Yadkin Valley Community School, incorporates daily outdoor adventure to their programming.

Summer Camp with Watershed NOW and the Reeves Downtown School of Music

In its second year, Reeves Downtown School of Music and Watershed Now are offering a summer day camp for rising 4th-8th graders. Half the day is spent learning or improving skills with traditional instruments like banjo, fiddle, and guitar. The other half of the day is spent using the Big Elkin Creek as an outdoor classroom. Topics covered include stream ecology, forestry, gardening, natural resources, and recreation through trout fishing, mountain biking, and hiking. This is happening July 31st- August 4th. In addition, a half-day camp will be offered for K-3rd graders the week before, July 24th- 28th. Contact meredith@reevesmusic.org for more information about the summer camps.