



California Roundtable on Recreation, Parks and Tourism  
2012

**W**ith recent concerns about youth detachment from outdoor activities, lack of physical

exercise and increased health risks, the California Roundtable on Recreation, Parks and Tourism has adopted The California Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights. It is a fundamental list of experiences that every child in California would benefit from experiencing, before entering high school. Studies document that children who do these things are healthier, do better in school, have better social skills and self-image, and lead more fulfilled lives.

The California Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights provides that every child should have the opportunity to:

Play in a safe place

Explore nature

Learn to swim

Go fishing

Follow a trail

Camp under the stars

Ride a bike

Go boating

Connect with the past

Plant a seed

## **Mission**

To encourage California’s children to participate in outdoor recreational activities and discover their heritage.

## **Objective**

That every child in California, by the completion of their 14<sup>th</sup> year, have the opportunity to experience each of the activities listed within the California Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights.

# Research

A survey of published research provides the following substantiation of the benefits to children of the activities listed within the California Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights:

## PLAY IN A SAFE PLACE

### *“The Benefits of play”*

- “Active play has been defined as unstructured physical activity which takes place outdoors in a child’s free time (Veitch et al. 2006). In addition to physical health benefits, active play adds unique contributions to children’s development which may not be obtained from more structured forms of physical activity, including creativity, resolving conflicts and informal social engagement away from the influence of adults” (Ginsburg K.R. 2007, Burdette et al. 2005, as cited in Brockman et al. 2011).
- “Play has characteristically been viewed as the mechanism by which all young children interact with their worlds and learn” (Yelland 2011).
- “Children do not make a distinction between ‘play’ and ‘work’ and neither should practitioners. Children need time to become engrossed, work in depth and complete activities” (QCA, 2000, p. 11).
- Play isn't a luxury - it's a necessity. Play is as important to our physical and mental health as getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising. Play teaches us how to manage and transform our "negative" emotions and experiences. It supercharges learning, helps us relieve stress, and connects us to others and the world around us. (Lifelong benefits of play, 2012).
- “Engaging youth in outdoor recreation and other activities makes a lasting impression...Almost 60 percent of adult outdoor participants took part in outdoor activities from ages 6 to 12, compared to only 21 percent of non-outdoor participants — that’s a nearly 40-percent gap” (Outdoor Recreation Participation Report 2011).
- Among outdoor participants, frequency of participation is highest among those with

walking and biking routes. Youth with local outdoor infrastructure average more outings than those without — about 20 percent higher on average” (Special report on youth 2010).

## EXPLORE NATURE

### *“The benefits of exploring nature”*

- “A recent study surveyed mothers and found that 70% of mothers in the U.S. played outdoors everyday when they were children, compared with only 31% of their children, and that when the mothers played outdoors, 56% remained outside for three or more hours compared to only 22% of their children” (Clements 2004).
- In the United States, from 1997 to 2003, there was a reported possible decline of 50 percent in the proportion of children 9 to 12 who spent time in such outside activities as hiking, walking, fishing, beach play, and gardening, according to a study by Sandra Hofferth at the University of Maryland (Charles & Louv 2009).
- “Throughout most of history, when children were free to play, their first choice was often to flee to the nearest wild place—whether it was a big tree or brushy area in the yard or a watercourse or woodland nearby” (Pyle 2002).
- “Quality outdoor play environments can provide children rich educational opportunities, particularly in the area of social skills and environmental learning” (Evan 1997).
- “The lives of children today are much different. Children today have few opportunities for outdoor free play and regular contact with the natural world. Their physical boundaries have shrunk” (Francis 1991, Kyttä 2004).
- In 2010, “More young people got up and got outside. Historically underserved youth populations — females, African Americans and Hispanics — saw the most significant uptick in outdoor participation. These trends reflect a greater emphasis and investment by the outdoor community in programs that reconnect youth and nature. But there is much more to do if we are to reverse the documented nature deficient disorder among America’s youngest generation” (Outdoor Recreation Participation Report 2011).
- “A mere 40 percent of outdoor enthusiasts participated in outdoor activities at least once a week in 2010, and only 24 percent got outside two times per week or more” (Outdoor Recreation Participation Report 2011).

- “Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity” (John Muir, cited by California State Parks).

## LEARN TO SWIM

*“The benefits of playing in the surf, lakes, streams, ponds and swimming pools”*

- “Children experiencing a regular programme of baby swimming at 2 to 7 months of age manifested superior motor performance on a standardized, age-appropriate test as 4-year-olds relative to a matched group of coevals without such experience” (Sigmundsson & Hopkins 2010).
- “Parents of children with developmental disabilities find that recreational activities, such as swimming, improve family connections” (Mactavish 2004).
- *“Physical Benefits:* Improved flexibility and strength, builds up endurance, increases muscular flexibility, muscular balance, heart muscle becomes stronger, improves the physique, increases circulation, rehabilitates muscles, improved ability to control and maintain healthy weight”(The United States Water Fitness Association).
- *“Social Benefits:* Have fun, fellowship with other people, enjoyable - even when working hard; it is a safe program” (The United States Water Fitness Association).
- *“Psychological Benefits:* Helps develop a positive attitude (individually and as a group), contributes to a feeling of well-being, teaches patience, releases stress and tension, renews energy” (The United States Water Fitness Association).

## GO FISHING

*“The benefits of going fishing”*

- “ ‘next-gen’ anglers, those under 18 years of age, make up nearly a quarter of all fishing participants. Reaching individuals in their early years is critical according to past research, which shows that 90 percent of adult outdoor enthusiasts were introduced to nature-based activities between the ages of 5 and 18” (Special Report on Fishing and Boating 2009 p. 22)
- ”Participation in outdoor activities often begins with specific “gateway” outdoor activities. These activities- fishing, bicycling, running/jogging/trail running, camping and hiking-are

popular, accessible and often lead to participation in other outdoor activities” (Special Report 2009 p. 8)

- “44.9% of Boaters + Anglers report that fishing “extremely” or “very much” influenced their decision to get involved in boating” (The Boating and Fishing Relationship Market Research 2007).

## FOLLOW A TRAIL

### *“The benefits of walking, biking, and riding”*

- “In 1969, 41% of all trips to school in the United States were made by walking or biking. By 2001, this had declined to 13%. Over the same time period, the proportion of children being driven or driving themselves to school rose from less than 20% to 55%” (Ham, Martin, & Kohl, 2008; McDonald, 2007, as cited in MacDonald & Aalbor 2009).
- “In addition to spending less time playing outdoors than children in previous decades, there is evidence that children have lower participation rates in active transport, such as walking and cycling, and are increasingly chauffeured to/from school and other destinations” (Carver et al. 2008).
- “The CDC estimates that more than 40 percent of the U.S. population is sedentary. In the last 10 years alone, children ages 8 to 18 have increased nonactive time from 6 1/3 hours per day in 1999 to 7 2/3 hours in 2009” (Park Prescriptions).
- “There are many potential health benefits of walking, including: strengthening muscles; enhancing cardiovascular fitness; controlling weight; improving regulation of lipids, insulin, and glucose; increasing bone density; and improving one’s psychological state” (Hart 2009).

## CAMP UNDER THE STARS

### *“The benefits of going camping”*

- “The results showed that camp had a positive influence on self in relatively short periods of time across all age groups, but particularly among younger campers” (Henderson 2001).
- “Campers...said they also felt they were healthier when they were at camp because they ate better, exercised more, were outside in the fresh air, slept better, and enjoyed the pace of life” (Henderson 2001).

- “Camping is now one of the most common ways Americans spend time in the outdoors, with more than one-fourth of the U.S. population participating” (USDA Forest Service, 2000, as cited in Garst 2010).
- “Young people who attend camp experience beneficial factors that help them move toward healthy social development” (Durrall 1997, as cited in Henderson 2001).
- “Spiritual well-being may be an outcome that might occur in recreation activities such as camping” (Heintzman 2000, as cited in Henderson 2001).

## RIDE A BIKE

### *“The benefits of riding a bike”*

- “Youths who regularly bike or walk to leisure-time activities have better low back strength, low back extension, hip flexion, and extension than those who ride a school bus” (Sjolie, 2000).
- “Lifetime physical activities learned early in life (such as walking, riding bicycles, and doing active physical tasks around the home) contribute to active lifestyles and help obese children maintain healthy body fat levels later in life” (Epstein, Win, Koeske, Ossip, & Beck, 1982, as cited in Corbin, et. al., 1994).
- “Young teens who live in neighborhoods where they can safely bike and walk to school and other destinations are significantly less likely to be obese” (Priedt, 2010).
- “Girls who walk or bike to school perform better on tests. Longer commutes were associated with higher test scores, regardless of how much exercise students got outside of school” (Martinez-Gomez, D., et al., 2010).
- “Adolescents who bike or walk to school are 30% more likely to bike or walk to other neighborhood destinations, regardless of age, free-time physical activity, and neighborhood risk” (Dollman & Lewis, 2007).
- “Overweight adolescents who participate in bicycling 3 to 4 days per week are 85% more likely to become normal-weight adults” (Menschik, et al. 2008).

## GO BOATING

### *“The benefits of going boating”*

- “A survey conducted by Discover Boating and Russell Research in 2007 found boaters expressed a greater degree of satisfaction in several key areas of life than their non-boating counterparts. Boaters rated better in physical fitness and overall health, leadership abilities, the performance of their children in school, even their love lives”.
- “Canoeing and kayaking are low impact activities that can improve your aerobic fitness, strength and flexibility” (Better health).
- Paddling is a great way to enjoy waterways (Better health).

## CONNECT WITH THE PAST

### *“The benefits of knowing history”*

- “Scholars say that teaching history to kids has many important benefits. History provides identity. Studying history improves our decision making and judgment. History shows us models of good and responsible citizenship. History also teaches us how to learn from the mistakes of others. History helps us understand change and societal development. History provides us a context from which to understand ourselves and others” (Deutsch n.d.).
- “History has a role to play in teaching young Americans about their future roles as members of a modern democracy” (National Standards for Civics and Government (1994).
- “Ancient cultures devoted much time and effort to teaching their children family history. It was thought that the past helps a child understand who he is. Modern society, however, has turned its back on the past. We live in a time of rapid change, a time of progress.” (Crabtree 1993).

## PLANT A SEED

### *“The benefits of planting a seed”*

- “Children educated early in life about the benefits of healthy eating and who are encouraged to grow their own fruits and vegetables are more likely to eat healthfully as adults” (Bell and Dymont 2008; Koch et al. 2006, as cited in Pecaski McLennan, 2010).
- “Perhaps by encouraging our children to become engaged in gardening practices at a young age, we can encourage them to be not just readers and writers, but life long appreciators of the outdoors, one garden at a time” (Pecaski McLennan, 2010).



- “City children search out dirt, water, trees, and natural elements and explore and play in the same manner in which rural children do, but urban sprawl and environmental degradation reduce the frequency of these city children’s positive experiences with natural elements in their environment” (Finch, 2004; Kellert, 2002; Orr, 2002, as cited in Blair, 2009).
- “Gardens that children help to plan allow close, personal experiences with the earth” (Thorp & Townsend, 2001, p. 349, as cited in Blair, 2009)
- “Gardens ground children in growth and decay, predator–prey relations, pollination, carbon cycles, soil morphology, and microbial life: the simple and the complex simultaneously” (Blair, 2009).
- “To decrease the threat of the obesity epidemic, children need to broaden their perspective on what foods are edible and to repersonalize food” (Blair, 2009).
- “A study on a youth gardening program in Detroit reports that after gardening, children have an increased interest in eating fruit and vegetables, possess an appreciation for working with neighborhood adults, and have an increased interest for improvement of neighborhood appearance. In addition, they made new friends, and showed increased knowledge about nutrition, plant ecology, and gardening” (Pothukuchi, 2004).

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