



The Nature of Americans Disconnection and Recommendations for Reconnection

National Recommendations Excerpt

Full report is available at NatureOfAmericans.org

Dr. Stephen R. Kellert
Yale University

David J. Case, Dr. Daniel Escher, Dr. Daniel J. Witter,
Dr. Jessica Mikels-Carrasco, and Phil T. Seng
DJ Case & Associates

Chapter 5

Major Findings and Recommendations: Connecting Americans and Nature

The prior three chapters of this report have described detailed results from a study of 11,817 American adults, children, and parents through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. The chapters so far, in other words, have focused on the first task of *The Nature of Americans*: to deepen the understanding of Americans' relationship with, evaluation of, and experience with nature. We started with the basic premise of the biophilia hypothesis, namely, that people possess an inherent affinity for contact with nature through diverse ways and that this affinity has to be developed and nurtured. From there, we have shown what this relationship with the natural world looks like in today's society, what benefits emerge from it, and what impedes and facilitates contact with nature.

This chapter shifts the emphasis toward *The Nature of Americans*' second task: to deepen Americans' connection with nature. We do so by distilling major findings about the American public and by generating recommendations. The core premise to these recommendations is that connection to nature is not a dispensable amenity but, rather, is essential to the health, prosperity, productivity, quality of life, and social wellbeing of all. In other words, the conservation of species, the protection and restoration of habitats, and the provision of healthy streams and clean air are inextricably linked to human flourishing. This implies that what follows has profound consequences for American society in general and a variety of sectors.

We certainly do not presume to know all the changes needed to support and grow a public that is more deeply and actively engaged with nature, the outdoors, and wildlife. Hence, the recommendations offered here are some necessary first—but far from final—steps toward bold and important changes. Additional steps will involve 1) incorporating these findings into communications and outreach efforts, 2) additional analysis of this study's rich data, 3) application of the findings of this study and other studies in innovative ways, 4) focused research into new areas, and 5) bridge-building inside and outside of the conservation and environmental communities. In some of the recommendations below, we specifically address the “conservation and environmental communities”—that is, agencies and organizations working to conserve the natural environment and to promote experiences with the natural world, the outdoors, and wildlife. Most of the recommen-

dations are addressed to those in “various sectors,” including conservation, healthcare, education, recreation, community development, urban planning, and more.

5.1 Major Findings and Recommendations

1. Americans face a significant gap between their interests in nature and their efforts, abilities, and opportunities to pursue those interests.

Five interrelated, society-wide forces disconnect adults and children from nature in daily life. 1) Physical places, or a built environment, generally discourage contact with the natural world. 2) Competing priorities for time, attention, and money prevent contact with nature from becoming routine and habitual. 3) Declining direct dependence on the natural world allows Americans to orient their lives to other things. 4) New technologies, especially electronic media, distract and captivate. 5) Shifting expectations about what “good” contact to nature ought to be mean adults are generally satisfied with the relatively little time they spend outdoors in nature.

Some groups—especially minorities, younger adults, and urban and suburban residents—encounter additional barriers, including discomfort being outdoors alone, a lack of financial resources, and a lack of social support, such as adults to accompany children outside or friends to encourage other adults to make time for nature. Two-thirds of adults surveyed agreed that there were more important issues in their lives than their concerns for nature. Furthermore, most Americans reported spending relatively little time outside in nature each week, and most were satisfied with that amount.

1. Pay close attention to—and respond to—adults’ existing concerns about younger generations’ disconnection from nature.

The presence of a gap between a general interest in nature and a connection to nature is not foreign to most adults. In each of the focus groups we conducted, by far the most poignant moments occurred when we asked how interest in nature today compared with interest in the past. Middle- and older-aged adults expressed deep concern that American society in general and younger generations in particular are disconnected from nature: overly reliant on electronic media, unaware of how the natural world works, and unacquainted with the simple enjoyment of being outdoors. To underscore the point, *adults in our study were not calling for merely another recreational or educational program. Alleviating their concerns and fulfilling their desires will require a profound restructuring of how they and their children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and friends live their lives.* Listen closely to how particular communities and groups experience disconnection from nature—and how they seek to adjust their lifestyles in response.

2. Emphasize regular, recurrent, and routine engagement with nature, the outdoors, and wildlife.

While people may possess an inherent affinity for nature and wildlife, for this connection to become an important component of their learning and development, it must be nurtured and reinforced. Our research indicates that sporadic and occasional contact with the natural world is insufficient to instill in children and adults the curiosity, wonder, and connection they require for nature to become a meaningful part of their lives and to bestow a range

of physical and psychological benefits to their learning and development. Securing these outcomes requires that the experience of nature become a repeated and recurrent part of lives at home, school, work, and at play. We see an opening to promote making contact with nature habitual—a more routine part of daily and weekly life, rather than a once-a-month, once-a-year, or even a once-a-lifetime activity.

3. For adults and children, promote nature not only as a place for experiences, but also as a place for involvement and care.

A clear distinction emerged in our study between experiences in nature and connection to nature. *Experiences* were the actual activities people did—the time they spent outside or the trips or activities they undertook. *Connections* to nature were different: They involved a sense of being connected to a place, to an unforgettable memory outdoors, or to a particular species. This connection often instilled a sense of responsibility and commitment toward the natural world. For adults and children alike, connection seemed to emerge when nature was not passively enjoyed but, rather, was something to be involved in via exploration, care and responsibility, observation, learning, and familiarity with a particular landscape. We encourage the conservation and environmental communities to continue their efforts to promote a deep connection with nature via activities like hunting and fishing. However, we also encourage these communities to find additional ways. Given that many adults may only have access to relatively curated places (like parks, zoos, and aquariums), these places should enhance their existing efforts to deepen engagement among a diverse public. We recommend providing opportunities for adults and children to take responsibility for the natural world in places and ways that are appropriate to the contexts and settings in which they live, work, and play (such as classrooms, play areas, yards, offices, living rooms, parks, gardens, and more). This could involve planting and caring for native plants not only during early childhood, but also during adolescence and into adulthood and older age. Some examples include creating and maintaining habitats for fish, birds, and other wildlife in suburban environments or launching community gardens in both urban and rural areas.

2. Experiences in nature are deeply social.

Developing strategies for addressing the interest–action gap begins with the reality that for the majority of adults, children, and parents, experiences in nature are not primarily marked by solitude. Instead, influential, meaningful, and durable moments in nature and connections to special places typically occur in the company of others, especially family and friends. When describing influential or memorable moments in nature, respondents revealed again and again that these experiences occur—and are remembered—because they connect people to one another.

4. Assure adults and children that time in nature can be (and even ought to be) social.

For participants in our study, the interests, action, and influences of other people have shaped and are currently shaping their own interests and actions around nature. For children and adults alike, these are overwhelmingly people who are close to them, especially family members and friends. While most adults reveal that they spend time in nature with others, many nevertheless describe experiences in nature as requiring some amount of solitude to be “authentic” to some (perceived) external standard. Nature experienced alone can be a powerful thing for many, but this is the exception, not the primary way adults and children experience nature. The *default* design and promotion of programs and natural areas should nurture op-

opportunities for people to forge connections with nature together. This may in turn alleviate the concerns of people who are wary of being alone outdoors.

5. Recruit pre-existing groups to programs.

Instead of merely inviting individuals to participate in a program or activity, recruit pre-existing groups—groups of people who are already connected to one another through a common interest, activity, or lifestyle. Doing so boosts the likelihood that people who would not normally participate will feel more comfortable doing so by lowering the social risks of isolation and helping to lower fears of not fitting in. In addition, by increasing the social familiarity of the setting or activity, participants can more readily focus on building familiarity and comfort with the natural environment. It also appears that involving close ties creates richer, more memorable experiences in nature: for children and adults alike in our study, memorable experiences in nature seemed to occur because of (not in spite of) the presence of particular other people.

6. Reach adults through children.

Our research shows that adults who are making time to share their interest in nature with children themselves tend to spend more time outdoors, rate their interests in nature as among their more or most enjoyable interests, and report higher interest in exploring the outdoors. In other words, the act of socializing children to have interest in, respect for, and commitment to nature appears to have a reciprocal effect on the adults who do the socializing. Programs should encourage parents and other trusted adults to participate in activities together with children. We see particular potential among adults who are over 50 years old—a group that was concerned about younger generations and reported having additional time for their interest in nature, yet was much less likely to indicate sharing their interests in nature with children. Cross-generational programs could promote conservation activities not just among younger generations, but also among older ones. Programs could encourage greater adult participation outdoors with children and friends, emphasizing that these can be relatively simple, close-to-home activities. Boosting adult participation could also have the effect of diminishing parental concerns about their child’s safety.

7. Support mentorship that extends beyond the parent–child relationship.

While parents play an important role in influencing their children’s views and connections to the natural world, there are other people in children’s lives that can also support or play this role. Other influential figures that influence how people relate to the natural world included friends, grandparents and other family members, and teachers. These findings indicate the need to support not only parent–child mentorship, but also friend–friend, grandparent–child, conservation professional–adult, and so on.

3. Adults and children differ in where they locate unforgettable, authentic nature.

For children, nature is located quite literally right out the door, and special places outdoors and unforgettable memories often consisted of nearby yards, woods, creeks, and gardens. Adults, to be sure, describe nature as consisting of the trees, beaches, animals, flowers, and lakes near where they lived. But in contrast to children, adults tend to set a high and even impossible standard for what they perceived to be “authentic” and “pure” nature, believing that it requires solitude and travel to faraway places, which reinforces their perceptions of the inaccessibility of nature. In our experience, existing programs and promotional campaigns often help to foster this understanding. We think this is dangerous for two reasons. First, it

sets adults up to fail, especially those who lack the time and money to access such experiences. Second, it affords little connection between what happens locally with what happens in relatively distant places. We therefore see a major need to adjust experiences in nature and widely shared *expectations* of those experiences in nature to emphasize the routine and the habitual aspects of engagement.

8. Carefully consider how different sectors promote what “good” connection with nature is or ought to be.

Many of the experiences portrayed in television programming, marketing campaigns, magazines, and billboards are those that few Americans will be able to do even once in their lifetimes. Even visiting national parks or national wildlife refuges are rare events for most people. Different sectors (especially the conservation and environmental communities) ought to assure Americans that the natural world does not need to be completely untouched or remote to be “authentic”—nor does exposure to nature require vast amounts of time and income. Note that promoting local connections need not be mutually exclusive with conserving more distant places or wildlife: our research provides no evidence that Americans base their perceptions of what should be conserved by evaluating whether they will have the opportunity to visit that place. The public values iconic sites, and they value experiences there, but Americans also believe they ought to be able to incorporate nature into their daily lives in ways that do not require large amounts of travel, time, and money.

9. Deepen local experiences in nature near home.

Most children’s contact with nature, including unforgettable times outdoors and the experience of special places in the natural world, occurs relatively close to home. Given that children do spend most of their time near their home and school, experiences there should provide opportunity for doing the things in which children already express interest—for example, climbing trees, exploring woods, and learning about the natural world through firsthand observation. Open spaces, parks, playgrounds, backyards, and schoolyards should provide more opportunities for unstructured play and exploration. Given that adults tend to think of “pure” or “authentic” nature as geographically distant, more engaging experiences close to home could help to bring out the beauty, wonder, and complexity of the natural world around them. These opportunities could also illuminate how nearby natural places and processes (such as water supply and quality, weather patterns, migration routes, erosion, and more) link with distant processes and places.

10. For children and adults, use geographically local or familiar activities as a bridge to geographically distant or unfamiliar activities.

Sociological and psychological research demonstrates that people tend to want to do what they already know how to do. Expanding interest and participation, then, requires using existing interests in familiar activities as bridges into other ones. Both children and adults expressed high interest in visiting places like zoos and aquariums that teach, allow for exploration, and promote social interactions. These nature-education centers can serve as gateways and entry points to activities outside of those places. This further suggests the importance of training and providing teachers, docents, and interpretive guides who can interact successfully with a diverse range of audiences to spark interest and participation and who can provide suggestions to parents of ways to encourage involvement at home through, for example, the care of special plants or animals. Furthermore, we suggest that programs use overlapping interests between children and adults to promote inter-generational participation, leveraging our finding that

children learn about and experience nature most often with family members, such as parents, aunts and uncles, sisters and brothers, and grandparents.

4. Access to nature is as much about the quality of places as their quantity.

The vast majority of adults agreed that there are “plenty” of places to enjoy nature—a finding that held across race and ethnicity and residential location. However, when asked about places near where they live, minorities and urban residents perceived fewer places *nearby* to enjoy the outdoors. In addition, parents of minority children reported that there were fewer parks nearby compared with parents of white children. In terms of the quality of places, overall, less than one-third of adults were “very satisfied” with places for outdoor and nature recreation near where they live. The social safety of places (traffic, speeding vehicles, dangerous people, etc.) was an important concern for all parents and children, and even more so for minorities and urban residents.

11. Provide socially safe and satisfying places outdoors, especially for urban and minority adults and children.

Our research provides general insights into what produces dissatisfaction with parks and open spaces, including traffic, speeding vehicles, dangerous people, and noise. Other concerns centered on the physical environment, especially the lack of opportunities to explore and to find peacefulness. Many sub-groups said they dislike or feel uncomfortable being alone in the outdoors. Spend time and effort listening to the *particular* concerns that may be present in specific locations and among specific groups. Program planners and communications professionals should also pay attention to how they label and frame activities. For example, among certain minority groups, interest in hiking paled in comparison to interest in taking a walk outdoors, likely due to differences in perceptions about the social and geographic familiarity and safety of the two activities.

12. Work to lower the perceived costs of participation in recreational activities.

The majority of adults in our focus groups presumed that high-quality nature experiences mainly occur in environments that are remote, difficult to access, and relatively undeveloped. Accessing these types of places requires 1) financial resources (to pay for specialized equipment and training, as well as the cost of transportation) and 2) time, both of which are in short supply. Perhaps not surprising, then, for adults in our survey, interest in activities that often require significant discretionary income and leisure time increased in tandem with household income. In contrast, activities that take place more locally—such as taking a walk outdoors, visiting nature-education centers, or watching or feeding birds and other wildlife—did not appear to evoke the same perceptions of inaccessibility and, thus, seemed to prompt interest from a diverse array of adults.

5. Americans value nature in remarkably broad, diverse ways.

One of the most striking and consistent findings of our study of Americans today was their broad, diverse valuation of nature—a pattern that held across demographic differences of age, race and ethnicity, residential location, educational attainment, income level, and gender. The great majority of adults and children we studied enjoy contact with the natural world through multiple dimensions, including affection and attraction, intellectual development, spirituality, and symbolism. They express complex, nuanced attitudes toward controlling the nature world and using its resources for different purposes.

13. Promote experiences in nature that match Americans' multidimensional values of nature.

Adults appreciate and value multiple aspects of nature, each of which can be intrinsically satisfying and beneficial in and of themselves. Children ages 8–12 particularly told us of their interest in learning about nature and how the natural world works. Still, experiences and programs that only teach formal knowledge about the natural world speak to only one way Americans interact with and enjoy nature. Our research suggests that attracting a broader, more diverse, and larger number of participants to programs depends on promoting and speaking to a range of values, including:

- Affection and even love for nature, the outdoors, and wildlife
- Appreciation of nature's aesthetic appeal and beauty
- Enhancement and enrichment of intellectual development and human knowledge
- Appreciation of the many practical ways people materially benefit from the natural world if utilized in a sustainable fashion
- Ability to cope with a variety of threats, risks, and at times dangers characteristic of the natural world, while concurrently appreciating and respecting the strength and power of species and systems in nature
- Realization that any species' survival and evolutionary development depends on exercising a degree of mastery and control over nature without harming it
- Observation of how nature fosters the ability of humans to communicate, be creative, and design basic elements of their world
- Feelings of peacefulness and, for many, spiritual connection to the natural world of which humans remain an integral and essential part.

14. Broaden programming to include a range of outcomes.

The public overwhelmingly thinks that acquiring formal knowledge of nature and outdoor skills is good: the great majority of adults thought knowing how nature works is highly important, children expressed interest in learning about things like snakes and insects, and places like nature-education centers attracted interest from all demographic groups. Yet adults and children alike also revealed they desire a range of outcomes from their engagement with nature, including discovery, peace, challenge, curiosity, beauty, love for places and wildlife, and more. Programs ought to offer participants more ways to engage with nature than only acquiring formal knowledge.

6. Americans support nature-related programming, funding, and conservation.

Across major demographic groups, adults supported nature-related programming, funding, and conservation. The majority of adults surveyed believe programs to help Americans enjoy nature and wildlife are underfunded. Most support increasing the number of these programs. A majority of adults support using a variety of funding sources to pay for nature and wildlife activities. Furthermore, most adults, when faced with trade-offs such as building on land even if it results in fewer places for wildlife to live, opt to protect habitat and wildlife. Children and adults on the whole both disagree that people need to be dominant over wild animals and plants.

15. For adults, promote conservation efforts as a way to improve their overall community and quality of life.

Adults who were highly satisfied with the fundamental human services where they live, such as schools and water quality, were highly likely to support increasing the number of nature and wildlife programs. So too were adults who were highly dissatisfied with these aspects of their local community. This finding indicates one of the ways Americans link what happens in their community with what happens in nature. In addition, we believe a significant expansion of funding for nature- and outdoors-related programs, including wildlife conservation, will be achieved when various sectors effectively link nature, wildlife, and the outdoors to the public's self-interest in health, productivity, and quality of life—which this research suggests is already intuitive to the vast majority of Americans.

7. Americans' relationship with nature is complex and nuanced.

Across many questions, such as time spent outdoors and general interest in nature, Americans of all types were similar. However, clear and substantial differences emerged across and within race and ethnicity, residential location, and age in two particular areas—interest in particular recreational activities, and barriers to those interests. For example, interest in activities like camping and hiking differed dramatically across groups, while interest in activities like fishing, walking outdoors, and visiting nature-education centers was more widely shared. In addition, minorities, younger respondents, and urban residents were especially concerned about the lack of nearby places to enjoy nature, competing interest from computers, health issues, lack of time, and lack of social support for their interests in nature. Black children had participated in far fewer nature-oriented trips (such as hiking or fishing) than white children had. Undoubtedly, further differences would become salient when designing and implementing programs in particular neighborhoods and among particular groups. These results point to the level of cultural competency required for various sectors to reach new constituencies and work to connect all people to nature. As The Nature of Americans study demonstrates, seeking to understand these nuances requires long-term time, effort, and attention.

16. Set clear goals and objectives.

Members of various sectors should clearly define what exactly they are trying to do, affect, or accomplish, and how they anticipate their efforts will influence that particular outcome. At a basic level, clearly stating what exactly the goal is narrows the target, and the conversations, programs, and policies that lead up to that target. As an example, consider how promoting interest in nature is related to but distinct from promoting time spent outdoors; both of these in turn are distinct from valuing nature in particular ways; each of these three is in turn distinct from participation in fishing or hunting or camping trips.

17. Question one-size-fits-all and “silver-bullet” diagnoses and prognoses.

Avoid unfounded generalizations or presumptions that what works for one group in one place will work for all groups in all places. As our research shows, connection to nature often looks and operates profoundly differently across places and groups. Understanding comes when program providers place themselves in the lives and neighborhoods of the constituencies they seek to serve and by including those we wish to serve in the development of programming. Also recognize that multiple causal pathways can produce the same outcome; therefore, less time should be spent searching for “silver-bullet” solutions that purportedly would have a one-to-one effect on some outcome for all groups.

18. Be explicit about common assumptions, and consider revising them.

Based on our experience, one common assumption in the conservation and environmental communities is that more is inherently better: more time spent outdoors, more visitors to a refuge or park, more memberships to organizations, and so on. But what is the threshold for experiences in nature? What is the minimum required? Is more always better? A second common assumption is that the public is best viewed as a large number of individuals who change their decisions based on the information presented to them. Yet our study demonstrates the powerful role of intergenerational transmission of knowledge and values from family, teachers, and other influential adults. Our study also illustrates the influential effect of social networks on individuals' interests. It further begins to suggest the effect of community context on what people do and do not do. A third common assumption is that providing (more) information will change people's behaviors. Our study questions the effectiveness of merely providing more information, since Americans are already aware and persuaded of nature's benefits and importance—and since most are already concerned about younger generations' disconnection from nature.

19. Use differences across age and stages of life to tailor programs and policies.

Our research revealed tremendous variation by age in how Americans value and experience nature. For the children in our study, time spent outdoors shrank as time spent on electronic media and organized sports rose with age. Younger adults, on average, reported spending more time outside in nature than older adults. Adults in their 30s were the most interested in fishing and hunting; interest in hiking declined steeply among older adults. Older adults were relatively more comfortable being in nature by themselves and more likely to link their spiritual or religious feelings together with nature. Further differences emerged in satisfaction with time spent outdoors, perceptions of financial resources to devote to nature interests, personal influences on thoughts and feelings about nature, the presence or absence of competing issues in life, time devoted to sharing interests in nature with children, attitudes toward using natural resources, and so on. Despite these differences, age does not often emerge as a salient factor affecting programs, policies, and campaigns related to nature. It should.

20. Clearly state, trace, test, and analyze causal pathways.

We urge members of the conservation and environmental communities in particular to be as explicit in their social analysis as they are in their ecological analysis. We are particularly concerned about unverified explanations for particular outcomes, such as support for nature-related programming. We found that feelings of affection toward wildlife were indeed related to this support—but we also found that adults with strong values of control toward and exploitation of nature supported the same programs. These two findings almost certainly indicate different causal pathways at work that, nonetheless, produce the same outcome. Designing a communications strategy around only affection for nature would therefore overlook a swathe of potential supporters. Furthermore, beyond merely observing that one action tends to produce a certain outcome, we urge careful attention to *why and how* one factor affects another via the identification of generalizable processes and mechanisms. What exactly was it that drew neighborhood residents to visit a particular wildlife refuge on multiple occasions? Why was a certain media campaign so popular? How were so many different stakeholders able to work together to conserve a particular species? Under which settings is a particular program or policy most effective? Such questions demand robust, nuanced social science

research. This study, we hope, provides an example of this type of research and also fertile ground for additional work.

8. Americans perceive tremendous benefit from experiences in nature.

Across demographic categories, the vast majority of adult Americans surveyed reported that nature is highly important for their physical health and emotional outlook. Most noted that certain smells and sounds of nature bring to mind some of their happiest memories, that being in nature provides a sense of peace, and that being in nature helps to give meaning and purpose to their lives. In addition, nearly all the 8–12-year-old children in our study said contact with nature made them happier and healthier and deepened their relationships—in short, that exposure to nature promoted their physical, psychological, and social wellbeing. Their parents agreed with this assessment, with a sizable minority reporting that contact with nature had improved some aspect of their child’s health.

21. Join parents, children, and adults alike in recognizing that expenditures on children’s engagement with nature are fundamentally important investments.

For the children, parents, and other adults in our study, nature is an important and fundamental part of growing up. Most adults cited the role of childhood experiences in nature in shaping how they think and feel—and even who they are today. The great majority of parents cited nature’s influence on their child’s growing healthy and stronger, feeling confident and independent, and making and deepening social relationships—results that children also overwhelmingly affirmed. Indeed, we found that interest in nature is highly positively associated with experiences in nature, which in turn are positively associated with particular benefits and connection to special places and unforgettable memories. Thus, expenditures on enhancing children’s connections with nature represent an investment no different than expenditures on health care, formal education, and other services that improve quality of life. Our data suggest the return will be substantial over time.

22. Build partnerships among professionals in healthcare, education, urban planning, conservation, community development, and other sectors.

When Americans connect with nature, they bond with their families and friends, develop intellectually, and find respite and rejuvenation. Linking Americans to nature creates lasting memories, provides outlets for children and adults to explore, and facilitates moments of joy. It positively affects the physical, psychological, and social wellbeing of children. It creates places where Americans want to live, work, and flourish. These outcomes provide a powerful justification for forging partnerships across sectors as diverse as healthcare, education, urban planning, conservation, recreation, and community development so that every one might work toward connecting Americans and nature.

5.2 Conclusion

Dr. Stephen R. Kellert, a principal investigator in this collaborative study with DJ Case & Associates, was hopeful and enthusiastic that the study findings would provide important insights to improving human health and wellbeing. In fact, he wrote extensively on his vision for applying the findings of the study. In a note to a colleague, he wrote:

...The very critical and challenging work will be translating these understandings into a practical and implementable reality.... We never embarked upon the national initiative with the intention of only doing another research project, even if at a large national scale. Our goal has always been how we can foster real, substantive, sustainable, and relevant change. We believe our nation faces a challenge to the future of nature and wildlife not unlike the crisis that faced our nation toward the end of the 19th century when the focus then was unbridled exploitation and massive habitat loss. Today, the crisis facing us is precipitated more by an ominous and increasing disconnect from the natural world, a rapidly urbanizing nation, and changing demographics and historic relations to wildlife. Ironically, this is all occurring at a time when scientific evidence is evermore indicating that ongoing contact with nature and wildlife is not a dispensable amenity but rather critical to the health, wellbeing, and economy of our nation. I am certain the results of the national initiative will help us to address this great 21st-century challenge.

Central to Dr. Kellert's hopes for this study was transformative action. Connecting Americans and nature must be a vibrant, ongoing effort propelled by all members of the public. We live in a remarkable age when quarter centuries seem to pass in the blink of an eye; the state of the natural world and our place within it cannot afford for us to act slowly. As Dr. Kellert continually urged throughout his career, we must act now to ensure that present and future generations are connected with nature.

Overcoming these forces and barriers will require ambitious solutions that break out of existing silos and the inertia of merely adjusting existing programs. Members of the conservation and environmental communities can no longer rely on pre-existing social expectations, uncritically repeat many of the programs that have worked in the past, or simply rely on providing more information extolling the benefits of nature.

But lest the situation seem hopeless and over-determined, recall the source of these issues is not faceless: the world in which children and adults live is a world that they themselves have helped to create and therefore can help to change. The deep potential is already present for various sectors—conservation, healthcare, education, and so on—to step in and propose ambitious solutions to shape a society that matches what most Americans themselves personally value.