

# Awakening and Strengthening the Connection of Urban Youth to the Land

Social science is needed to understand communications and media messages among youth in relation to the outdoors; research is essential to help create a culture of inclusivity that awakens and strengthens all peoples' connections to the land, especially young people living in urban areas.

2014-15

Since the 1970s, the USDA Forest Service has created multiple community engagement initiatives to enhance opportunities for youth. The *Youth Conservation Corps*, *More Kids in the Woods Children's Forest Network*, and the *Discover the Forest* PSA campaign are all examples of creative endeavors to get more kids outside to experience the wonders of the great outdoors and become stewards of our natural resources.



✓ According to the U.S. Census, there are approximately 33 million teenagers ages 13-19 across the nation. This social group carries remarkable influence on their peers, their parents and our society as a whole. The nations changing demographics, including increasing cultural diversity among our youth, creates an imperative for new engagement.

✓ For over a decade, there has been a steady decline of youth involved in organized programs outdoors as well as a decrease in unstructured free play in forests, parks, and other natural areas.

However, other studies show a slow increase in some areas, and research shows a need for greater action and more involvement of youth (see [childrenandnature.org](http://childrenandnature.org)).

✓ Research suggests urban youth are not enjoying public lands/outdoor spaces as frequently, or in the same ways, as their suburban and rural counterparts. Stewardship starts in our neighborhoods; as our nation continues to experience diminishing resources, adverse effects of climate change, and species extinction, to name a few, it is imperative to determine the relevancy of the outdoors for future generations.

## Projects Goals

1. Understand how to effectively reach diverse urban youth by identifying appropriate media and social media forums
2. Develop key messages for diverse urban youth regarding urban and rural forests on topics of interest to adolescents
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of these media campaigns with a variety of urban youth from San Francisco, Inner city Oakland and Richmond

## Our Team

A multi-disciplinary team of researchers from San Francisco State University is collaborating on this important project. The department of Recreation, Parks & Tourism is nationally recognized as one of the strongest parks and recreation programs across the 23 CA State University campuses and accredited by the National Recreation & Park Association. Additionally, the Broadcast and Electronic & Communication Arts department is a nationally prominent program and the Child & Adolescent Development program has 1,000 declared majors in teaching and providing students with opportunities to engage in research and community work.

SF State is collaborating with Bayview Hunters Point Center for Art and Technology (BAYCAT), a local non-profit organization that *educates, empowers and employs* diverse youth and young adults from historically underserved neighborhoods of San Francisco and the Bay Area. By bridging the digital divide, BAYCAT inspires students to stay in school, become lifelong learners, and to use the power of digital media and design to shape their communities and tell their unique stories. In 2012, BAYCAT received the Community Partners Award from the SFSU Institute for Civic and Community Engagement.

## How we'll Accomplish Our Objectives

- ✓ Engage youth through BAYCAT interns and youth participants from San Francisco to create media relating to the outdoors that is culturally relevant to urban youth living in the Bay Area
- ✓ Test the media messages among teenagers from diverse urban communities around the Bay Area via listening sessions—Youth will be invited to participate and provide feedback/input through community-based organizations; a multi-method approach will be used to determine the campaign's effectiveness
- ✓ Illustrate that urban youth are an important contributor and not just a recipient of services or outdoor spaces managed by the Forest Service and understand the meaning of those places to young people
- ✓ Present recommendations for future media-based opportunities to the US Forest Service



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