



Nature Conservancy Study Finds Today's Kids Are Choosing TV Over Trees

Nature Conservancy-Funded Study Finds Visits Decline Video Games, Television, and Internet Use May Be the Reason

A Nature Conservancy-funded study to be published next month found that per capita visits to U.S. national parks have been declining since 1987, after having risen for the previous 50 years. The drop occurs as the use of electronic media is on the rise – something that researchers call “evidence of a fundamental shift away from people’s appreciation of nature.”

“When children choose TVs over trees, they lose touch with the physical world outside and the fundamental connection of those places to our daily lives,” said [Steve McCormick, President and CEO of The Nature Conservancy](#).

“A simulated waterfall can never compare with the wonder of Niagara Falls, and an electronic world cannot replicate the awe of standing at the base of half-dome in Yosemite or watching the eruption of Old Faithful. These places aren’t just part of the American experience; they’re part of the *human* experience – something no one should miss.”

The data was analyzed by University of Illinois ecologist Oliver Pergams and Stroud Water Research Center ecologist Patricia Zaradic with contributions from [Conservancy Lead Scientist Peter Kareiva](#). The project was funded through a National Science Foundation grant to The Nature Conservancy.

While more than two dozen variables were tested, Pergams said that video games, home movie rentals, going out to movies, Internet use, and rising fuel prices explained almost 98 percent of the decline in people visiting national parks.

“It’s fairly stunning,” Pergams said, but he cautioned that correlation is not the same as causation. “We’ve shown statistically that the rise in use of these various types of media, as well as oil prices, is so highly correlated with the decline in national park visits that there is likely to be some association.”

Pergams and Zaradic ruled out variables such as family income, aging of the population, a recent rise in foreign travel or park capacity as major factors. These variables were tested, but the correlations were not nearly as strong as home entertainment and fuel prices, Pergams said. He added that further research is needed to explain the relationships found in this study.

Both the researchers and McCormick also noted that the results of the study point to a need to find ways to connect children to the special places and natural systems that sustain us all. “We demonstrate our values in the way we allocate our time,” suggested Zaradic. “Research indicates that children who experience nature with a mentor develop an appreciation of nature as adults.”

“Achieving meaningful conservation in the 21st century takes tremendous commitment, innovation, and collaboration,” added McCormick. “Conservation is becoming increasingly more difficult as the pressure to develop natural areas becomes intensified, and we will be relying on the next generation to carry forth



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Young boy wearing snorkel explores the Conasauga River in [Tennessee](#)
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this very important work.”

Peter Kareiva, Lead Scientist for The Nature Conservancy, added, “Nature cannot just be found in exotic, far-away continents. From each city to every subdivision, there must be access to lands and waters that inspire and teach. This study reminds us that we need to do conservation to connect with children.”

The Conservancy continues to step up its efforts to engage young people in environmental and conservation issues through the organization’s Web site, such as by [offering podcasts](#) for “nature on the go” and by allowing people to [join the Great Places Network](#) via email.

The Conservancy has also worked with parents on a “[Take Your Child To Nature Day](#),” and at the end of this month, the Conservancy and the National Park Service are sponsoring a “[BioBlitz](#)” [educational activity at Potomac Gorge](#) near Washington, DC. There are [ample volunteer opportunities](#) at many of the [1,400 other nature preserves](#) as well.

The study is set to be published in the *Journal of Environmental Management* at the end of July 2006.

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Steve McCormick
President/CEO
The Nature Conservancy



Pine savannahs at The Nature Conservancy’s Piney Grove Preserve, [Virginia](#)
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Local student visits a waterfall in the Serra das Almas Reserve, [Brazil](#)
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