



CRANG & LIZ LARCOM

No Child Left Inside

Do Montana children suffer from what child advocate Richard Louv calls “nature deficit”? Maybe not yet, but if the national trend outlined in Louv’s 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods* continues to spread, our youngsters might soon find it harder to identify elk and walleyes than cartoon characters and rock music celebrities. That’s a troubling prospect.

According to Louv and other experts, kids today spend far less time outdoors than they did in the past. Instead, youngsters nowadays are glued to indoor video games, computers, and MP3 players. The change is due in part to technological advancements, overdevelopment of woods and open space, and parents’ unreasonable fear of natural and human predators. Experts say this “de-natured childhood” leads to increased levels of childhood stress, hyperactivity, and obesity.

One way to unplug kids is to introduce them to outdoor activities such as fishing, hunting, wildlife watching, camping, and boating. Through these and other outdoors pursuits, kids learn about fish and wildlife, see the splendor of Montana’s various landscapes, and awaken their senses to natural wonders such as the sound of bugling elk,

the smell of sage on a warm breeze, or the sight of cutthroat trout rising to fluttering caddis flies.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has a long tradition of enticing kids into the outdoors. Each year in 100 classrooms statewide, our Hooked on Fishing Program introduces 2,500 students to the joys of recreational angling and the fascinating world of fish and other aquatic life. And our community fishing ponds provide youngsters with easy access to catchable fish. Last year 17,000 Montana students visited state parks, where they learned about the state’s natural and cultural resources in outdoor classrooms.

Through our Hunter Education Program, volunteer instructors teach and certify 10,000 youngsters each year—among the highest number per capita of any state. Because hunting is such an important part of Montana’s culture, we have been working with hunting education experts and state lawmakers to find new ways to increase the number of kids recruited into the hunting ranks. One proposal would lower by a few years the age a resident youngster could hunt (the current minimum is 12 years old). Another would allow new hunters to waive the hunter education requirement for a year if they were hunting with an experienced, licensed adult hunter. The idea behind these “try before you buy” proposals is that more youngsters might take up hunting if it were easier to participate on a trial basis.

More anglers, hunters, and state park visitors is good for Montana and its fish and wildlife. For decades, fishing and hunting license fees have funded most fish and wildlife research, population monitoring, and habitat protection across the state. Outdoors enthusiasts contribute to nonprofit conservation groups and vote for initiatives and candidates that support the conservation of fish, wildlife, and open space.

This department continues to look for new ways to attract young people to hunting, fishing, wildlife watching, camping, boating, and other outdoor activities. We believe that time spent in the natural world creates more and better conservationists in the future. It also makes for healthier and happier kids today.

—M. Jeff Hagener, Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Q I’ve been reading about your bison hunt in Montana. Do any other states have bison hunts?

A Yes. Each year, wild bison are hunted (and harvested) in Alaska (100), Arizona (45 to 65), South Dakota (35), Utah (60), and Wyoming (42).

Q Who or what are the popular fishing towns Ennis and Livingston named after?

A William Ennis, one of the first men to settle in the Madison Valley, was the area’s first

postmaster. Crawford Livingston, a resident of St. Paul, Minnesota, was a director of the Northern Pacific Railroad, which for decades was the lifeblood of the Montana river town.

Q I’ve read about bears having twins. But what about triplets or even quadruplets?

A It happens. According to Jamie Jonkel, FWP bear management specialist in Missoula, most (roughly 90 percent) black and grizzly bear litters consist of two or three cubs. But if sows have enough food,

they can produce quadruplets or even quintuplets.

