

**PA CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION JOINS THE
CONSERVATION FUND, US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE AND JOURNALIST
RICHARD LOUV AT NATION'S LARGEST GATHERING ON CHILDREN AND
NATURE**

Slippery Rock, PA (September 28, 2006) – In an effort to create stronger connections between children and the outdoors and to address the disturbing increase in children's health issues, including obesity, diabetes and attention disorders, **Kathleen Paul, Director of the Slippery Rock, PA-based Pennsylvania Center for Environmental Education (PCEE)**, joined with 350 educators, developers, health professionals and conservationists at the National Conservation Training Center in West Virginia to discuss the problems associated with what journalist and best-selling author Richard Louv has dubbed "nature deficit disorder." The conference, convened by the Conservation Fund, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Louv, was the nation's largest gathering on children and nature.

Louv is the author of *Last Child in the Woods*, which has been a catalyst for discussions among educators, health professionals, pop culture experts, developers and conservationists. Among the attendees at the symposium were Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne, US Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dale Hall, The Conservation Fund's President Larry Selzer, Executive Director of the North American Montessori Teachers' Association David Kahn and Yale University's Stephen Kellert.

Paul was one of four Pennsylvanians invited to participate in the symposium. "The PCEE is dedicated to making environmental education resources available to every Pennsylvanian," she commented. "And while it's important to ensure that every child receives a basic understanding of the environment as mandated by the PA Department of Education's Standards, the research brought to light by this symposium shows that it's also critical that every child has opportunities to play in a natural setting. We're committed to working with our partners across the commonwealth to make that possible."

"For eons, human beings spent most of their formative years in nature, but within the space of a few decades, the way children in many Western countries understand and experience

nature has changed radically, with profound implications for mental and physical health, cognitive development, creativity, and for the future of nature itself,” said Louv.

Together, some of the nation’s most influential and inspirational minds – business leaders, high-ranking elected officials, foundation presidents, medical professionals and educators – focused on identifying key disconnects between children and nature within four areas: health, media and culture, education and the urban and built environment.

“Spending time outdoors, fishing and just playing around in the woods, was an important part of my childhood,” said H. Dale Hall, director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. “Our kids need to have chances to tromp through a woodlot or muck around in a creek. That’s the foundation of a healthy relationship with the outdoors and a way to spark a conservation ethic.”

About PCEE: The Pennsylvania Center for Environmental Education (PCEE) was created by Executive Order of the Governor in 1997 to “provide an avenue for increased participation of educators, local officials, citizen and non-profit groups, business and industry as partners in the implementation of quality environmental education on a state-wide basis.” Administered by the PA State System of Higher Education, PCEE is housed at Slippery Rock University.

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