

**Butler Eagle, 7/23/08**

# **Nature-based group readies report**

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## **SR woman charges to get people outdoors**

**SLIPPERY ROCK** As the bonds between people and nature continue to fade with the proliferation of electronic gadgetry, Kathleen Paul is working to find ways to bring a new generation back to the beauty of the earth.

Paul, director of the Pennsylvania Center for Environmental Education in Slippery Rock, was one of 16 members of an Outdoor Task Force appointed by Gov. Ed Rendell to develop recommendations to strengthen the relationships between citizens and nature.

Last week, the task force proposed the establishment of a Governor's Commission on People and Outdoor Connections.

This was among recommendations in its 40-page report submitted to the governor.

Paul attended a conference in 2007 that studied the trends, ideas and solutions relating to the growing disconnect between citizens and the outdoors. The group was led by co-chairs Doug Austen, executive director of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, and Caren Glotfelty, director of the environmental program for The Heinz Endowments, according to a news release from the governor's office.

Paul said she was motivated from the start at the conference by the speech of Richard Louv, author of "The Last Child in the Woods."

"He was the one who named nature deficit disorder and he called attention to the fact that the bonds between citizens and the natural world have been loosening," Paul said.

"We are finding that children don't get outside to play as much as they used to and they are doing homework or video games or structured sports, or playing with a Wii board inside."

The task force began its studies in June 2007 and completed the project last week.

Paul said the lack of time people spend outdoors is a major factor in the obesity and diabetes epidemics that have spread across the country.

She also said the task force found there has been a drastic drop in the number of people applying for hunting and fishing licenses, which greatly affects the funding for parks and outdoor resources.

"Beyond that, one of the comments Louv made was because of the health concerns, this is the first generation that isn't expected to outlive its parents, so there are some real ramifications to this," Paul said.

The report that has been given to the governor summarizes the findings of the conference and five public hearings last spring and summer. More than 500 people provided input, which was formulated into key themes and recommendations by the task force.

In addition to the recommendation of a commission, the task force suggested 42 other actions by the

commission, government agencies, organizations, businesses and educational institutions. The report recommends schools integrate outdoor environmental learning with other subjects and train teachers to teach outside.

In another section regarding communities, the report recommends that towns celebrate open space and it encourages leaders to link civic, religious and community groups with organizations already engaged in outdoor volunteer efforts.

Christina Novak, press secretary for the DCNR, said she hopes to see the report have an impact.

"I think for DCNR and perhaps some of the serious environmental issues we face like climate change, it is important to connect people to the outdoors because when they have that experience, they are more likely to care about the environmental resources," Novak said.

She said the task force was formed out of the conversation that began at the convention last year and hopes the recommended commission will keep the work moving forward.

"I think that what was unique about this task force is that it looked at a really broad range of concerns and outcomes, so it looked at not only the intrinsic importance of having an outdoors experience, but also looked at what the impact on the health of citizens is if they don't go outside," Paul said.

The report and a detailed appendix are online at [www.connectoutdoors.state.pa.us](http://www.connectoutdoors.state.pa.us).