

Connecting with Nature: A Matter of Significance

2013 AORE Research Symposium Abstracts Introductory Paper

Andrew M. Szolosi
Ohio University

Raymond A. Poff
Western Kentucky University

From 2010-2013, a special issue of the *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership* (JOREL) was published each year containing research symposium abstracts from the AORE (Association for Outdoor Recreation and Education) Research Symposium and the Outdoor Leadership Research Symposium (OLRS). Due in large part to author interest in submitting full manuscripts instead of abstracts, this regular issue of the JOREL includes select abstracts presented at the 9th Annual AORE (Association for Outdoor Recreation and Education) Research Symposium in College Park, Maryland, November 6-9, 2013.

The symposium continues to serve as a forum for the exchange of scholarly work among both academics and practitioners. Abstracts submitted undergo a double-blind peer-review process in order to ensure the quality of the research presented. As has been customary in previous years, JOREL has provided symposium presenters with the opportunity to disseminate their research efforts. Such opportunities serve to not only further enhance the body of knowledge within the field of outdoor recreation, education, and leadership, but also inspire and promote future inquiry in these areas of interest and significance.

As a matter of significance, connecting with nature is one area that has received substantial attention in both popular and academic writing (Leopold, 1949; Louv, 2006; Mayer, Frantz, Bruehlman-Senecal, & Dolliver, 2009). Writings of this sort have largely focused on two lines of review: 1) physical and psychological benefits derived from interacting with nature, and 2) humanity's increasing separation from the natural world. Each of these foci has led to the prevailing sentiment that connecting with nature is not only critical to human well-being, but also the

well-being of the ecological environment (Mayer & Frantz, 2004). To that end, regular and meaningful interactions with nature can play an instrumental role in shaping the kinds of connections people develop.

Interactions with nature can take on many forms. Stopping to appreciate the song of a wood thrush, promenading through a local park, or tending to the garden are just a few of the ways in which many people may garner meaningful contact with the world of nature. For others, meaningful contact may come by way of their involvement in outdoor pursuits. The natural environment is often a ubiquitous part of these experiences; in some cases superseding the activity itself. As a person scales the summit of a mountain or explores the depths of a wilderness area, a sense of personal meaning can form that intimately bonds that person to the landscape. Understanding these meanings has important implications for not only how we manage the resources so enthusiastically visited, but also in how we might better foster the benefits they could provide.

The abstracts, which follow this paper, highlight to an extent the complexities underlying the connections we make with nature. Our first abstract addresses the significance that interactions with wildlife may have in people's relationship with nature. Interactions of this kind can be deeply emotional and can evoke a sense of wonder and awe. The second abstract focuses on how our connections to nature, viewed through a climbing lens, may stretch beyond the physical world and enter a realm that is more spiritual in quality. In such instances, nature may serve as a vehicle for elevating our consciousness concerning our place in the world. The third abstract focuses on the role that instructional adventure programming experiences may have in the formation and development of a person's concern for the environment. Although our fourth abstract does not speak directly to people's connection with nature, the concept of fidelity has practical relevance toward the issue. Understanding how and why an adventure programming experience strengthens one's connection with nature depends, in part, on knowing whether the implementation of that program occurred as intended. In this way, we might better evaluate the ways in which we can assist people in establishing meaningful connections with the natural world; a true hallmark of our industry.

Four abstracts from the 2013 AORE Research Symposium follow this paper:

- Mapping the Connections between Wildlife, Learning, and Emotion ~ Jonathan Hicks
- Investigating Climbing as a Spiritual Experience ~ Michael Pond, Bruce Martin, Elizabeth Collins, and Andrew Szolosi
- Environmental Attitudes of Students Enrolled In Adventure Programming Classes ~ Geneviève Marchand
- The Role of Fidelity in Experiential Education ~ Ryan J. Gagnon

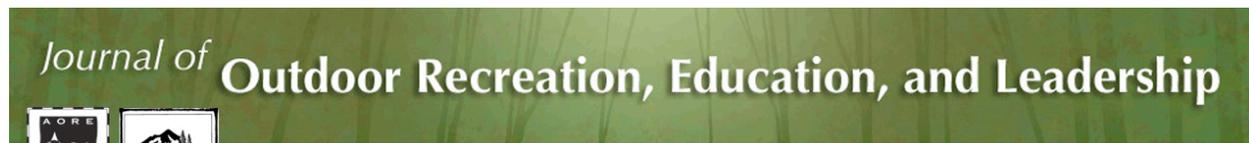
Thank you,

Andrew Szolosi
Raymond Poff

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- Louv, R. (2006). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.
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Research Symposium Note: The AORE Research Symposium is held at the annual Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education Conference. For more information on the AORE research symposium, please visit <http://www.aore.org/>



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