

conservation corner

NATURE IS FUEL FOR THE SOUL

Suzanne Tugman-Engel

Feeling lethargic? The solution may be as simple as going outside. In the June 2010 Issue of the Journal of Environmental Psychology, researchers concluded that being outside increased our sense of vitality above and beyond the energizing effects of physical activity and social interaction found in enclosed environments.

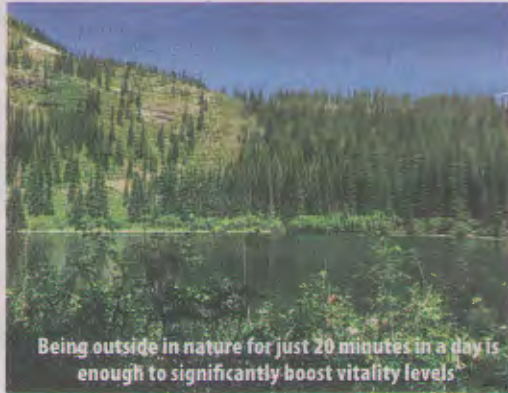
The prescription sounds simple right? After all, we live in the beauty of the northwest and the great outdoors are here in our own backyard. Yet competition for how we spend our time has grown sharply with the technology, smart phones and social media. According to the latest statistics we are spending upwards of 80% of our time learning about the world around us through millions of tiny pixels on our computers and cellular devices.

Have we gone off course?

Our history is one of humans living outdoors with a connection to



the land. Survival was synonymous with knowledge of nature, vitamin D from the sun, and knowing one species from another. However, in less than a generation's time, millions of people have become separated from nature.



Being outside in nature for just 20 minutes in a day is enough to significantly boost vitality levels

In his book *The Nature Principal* Richard Louv argues that many health problems in today's adults would be alleviated by spending more time out in green spaces, listening to the sounds of nature and disconnecting from technology.

The latest studies confirm Louv's findings by reporting that 35% of all American adults are dealing with obesity, heart disease, stroke,

type-2 diabetes and certain types of cancers. Much of this is due to a void of fresh air, green spaces and healthy foods.

Organizations in our region, including the Kaniksu Land Trust, have been working to provide opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to get outside. The trails at the Sherwood Forest provide access close to Sandpoint and Dover.

The Pend Oreille Bay Trail is another great amenity that is easy to get to and tremendously beautiful. For the more ambitious, there is the Mickinnick


trail, Schweitzer and the Gold Hill Trail. All of these are within an easy 30 minute drive of downtown Sandpoint.

The point being that one does not have to risk life and limb with an extreme adventure to get the health benefits. While we live in an area that has some of the best recreation in the country, there are also convenient, close-to-home opportunities for everyone to unplug from their desk and reconnect with nature.

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