

**A**s a child growing up in east-central Illinois, my parents encouraged me to play outside, took me fishing and camping, and instilled in me a love of nature. My brother and I often had to be called inside because it was too dark to play.

At that time, terms like nature-deficit disorder, family nature clubs and green exercise were unknown. As were the Internet, blogging, MP3 and instant messaging.

It was an age when cooperation in building a fort set the stage for days of imaginative play as wilderness explorers.

Nature play is inherently cheap, close by and requires little or no equipment. Remember the days of crawling on your belly through the grass looking for a four-leaf clover? Or rolling over and discovering shapes in the shifting clouds? How many evenings did you spend looking at constellations or running through the cool, dew-covered grass catching fireflies? In our age we would lie in a bedroom set aglow by a jar full of lightning bugs. Today's children fall asleep to the glow of their computer.



If you aren't convinced about the benefits of simpler days, listen to what researchers tell us. Dedicating time each week to get outdoors will vastly improve your health. Not only does the fresh air lower blood pressure, decrease anxiety and reduce Attention-

Deficit Disorder symptoms, it is an excellent—and much cheaper than the fitness center—means of countering the national obesity problem.

The Illinois General Assembly has sent a proclamation to Governor Pat Quinn asking

that June be declared “Leave No Child Inside Month.” The proclamation includes a Children’s Bill of Rights (below), with ten amazingly simple activities.

Unplug yourself and make time to rediscover Illinois’ rich resources.

Make it a point this summer to provide opportunities for the children in your life to experience each of the ten points identified in the Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights. Not comfortable tackling this yourself? Do a little research and you’ll find a wealth of agencies, conservation organizations and civic organizations offering classes, guided trail hikes, summer camps, fishing clinics, campfire programs and organized bike rides.

Illinois’ natural and cultural resources are priceless treasures, deserving our respect and stewardship. It also is our duty to lead by example and share the importance of this responsibility with our children.

The hundreds of men and women in the Department of Natural Resources staff join me in welcoming you to explore Illinois’ state parks.

We’ll be looking for you on the trail.

Marc Miller

