

Love, Not Loss

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There is a terrible challenge facing all of us who worry about the future of the Earth, and its inhabitants—human, domesticated and wild. That includes all of its living ecological inhabitants, and the whole systems that nourish and sustain all of us. All of us.

Two organizations that I care about and support are among those trying to help.

First is the Children & Nature Network (C&NN), www.childrenandnature.org. The Network's vision is a world in which all children play, live and grow with nature in their everyday lives. Since its founding in 2006, C&NN has made a significant difference in inspiring and growing the worldwide movement to reconnect children, their families, and whole communities to nature. Today, people from more than 100 nations are joined together in a common purpose. Families are getting outdoors together, schools are creating gardens and wildlife habitats, hospitals are planting healing gardens, and whole communities are working to provide access for everyone to parks and natural settings for people of all ages to be outdoors in nature. Visit the C&NN web site to see and download a variety of helpful resources and tools, including annotated bibliographies containing summaries of more than 200 studies with relevant research about the benefits to people's health and well-being, and that of the Earth, from direct experiences in nature. And sign up on the Network's Directory to showcase your own work and interest, or find allies in your part of the world, at www.childrenandnature.org/directory.

Second is the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), www.iucn.org/. The IUCN is focused on conservation of species and habitats, worldwide. Beginning in 2008, with a series of presentations about the need to address what author Richard Louv has called "nature-deficit disorder," IUCN's Commission on Education and Communication, www.iucn.org/cec/, has helped bring attention to the need to connect people of all ages, especially children, to nature in order to enhance the likelihood of their growing up to conserve and protect the living world. At the IUCN's 2012 World Congress in Jeju, South Korea, the IUCN's membership passed a resolution in support of a "child's right to nature." The IUCN's Commission on Education and Communication has created a compelling and powerful set of video messages "Love, not Loss," www.iucn.org/lovenotloss/ that artfully convey a positive approach to inspiring hope for creating a healthy and sustainable future. As IUCN says, "If you want a happy ending for nature and people, it has to be a love story." And further, "The best way to rekindle a lost love is not to talk about what went wrong—extinction, habitat loss or resource scarcity. It's to remember what we loved in the first place."

A healthy and sustainable future for all life on Earth begins with children's positive experiences in nature through all of their growing years. Healthy communities are the key to peace in the world, and healthy communities begin with healthy children who enjoy and benefit from a nature-rich childhood.