



# WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

---

P. O. Box 7882 Madison, WI 53707-7882

February 26, 2013.

## VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL AND HAND DELIVERY

Secretary Cathy Stepp  
Department of Natural Resources

Laurie Ross, Liaison  
Natural Resources Board  
101 S. Webster Street, 8<sup>th</sup> floor  
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Secretary Stepp and Ms. Ross,

Recently, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced the department is going to cancel its contract with the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation for staffing and education curriculum at the MacKenzie Environmental Education Center (“Center”). Because environmental education and encouraging our children to interact with nature is of fundamental importance to ensuring our children grow up healthy, we ask you to kindly reconsider your decision and allow the current programming to continue. At a minimum, public input should be solicited and incorporated into any planning which would alter current programming at the Center.

The MacKenzie Center is one of the preeminent environmental education facilities in the state. Annually, 16,000 youth receive environmental educational at the Center, which includes seeing and learning about native Wisconsin animals in the center’s live wildlife exhibit, exploring the arboretum and viewing over 100 different species of trees, hiking nature trails that wind through prairies and forests, exploring an old log cabin that serves as a logging museum, and learning how maple syrup is made.

We believe it is vitally important for children to connect with nature. It improves their overall health and ensures we have a new generation of stewards to protect Wisconsin’s valued natural environment. The MacKenzie Center helps facilitate these opportunities for our youth.

According to a recent survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Fund, children ages 8-18 spend more than 7.5 hours each day, or 53 hours a week, on smart phones, computers and watching TV. These figures are in stark contrast with the amount of time children spend outdoors, considering the average 6 to 12-year-old spends just 30 minutes per week in unstructured outdoor activities such as gardening, camping or hiking.

As a result, our children are now suffering from a “Nature Deficit Disorder,” which has begun to take a toll on the health of our children who are facing skyrocketing obesity, diabetes and attention deficit

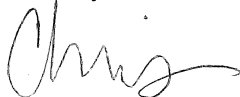
disorder rates. Statistics from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention find that from 1980 to 2008, childhood obesity in children aged 6-11 nearly tripled and childhood obesity in children aged 12-19 more than tripled. This means that approximately one out of every five children today is considered obese, leaving today's youth at risk of becoming the first generation to have a shorter lifespan than their parents.

The MacKenzie Center promotes behaviors and activities that are shown to improve the mental and physical health of our children. Time outdoors is proven to benefit our children's health as it decreases stress levels and lowers their risk of developing asthma or being overweight. It also increases our children's chances for success since students who play and learn in outdoor settings perform better on tests, have higher grade point averages and cause fewer classroom disruptions.

The DNR's proposed plan is vague in regards to how it will change the center's environmental education program other than it will be emphasizing outdoor skills and training mentors to teach children about hunting, fishing, and trapping. Given the importance of connecting children to nature, we urge you to continue the current educational programs at the Center. At a minimum, the public deserves to be heard on this issue and public opinion should be incorporated into any plan to change the Center's programming.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to your response.

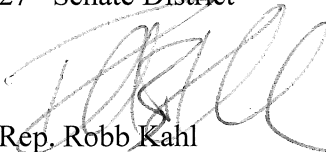
Sincerely,



Rep. Chris Taylor  
76<sup>th</sup> Assembly District



Sen. Jon Erpenbach  
27<sup>th</sup> Senate District



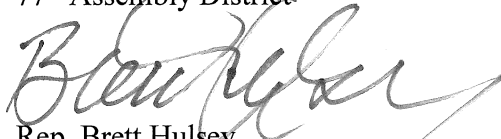
Rep. Robb Kahl  
47<sup>th</sup> Assembly District



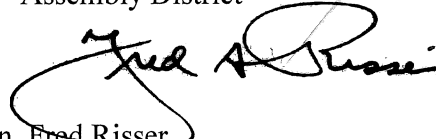
Rep. Melissa Sargent  
48<sup>th</sup> Assembly District



Rep. Terese Berceau  
77<sup>th</sup> Assembly District



Rep. Brett Hulsey  
78<sup>th</sup> Assembly District



Sen. Fred Risser  
26<sup>th</sup> Senate District