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## **Get Healthy, Get Outside! National Wildlife Refuges Partner with Health Care Providers for Better Patient Health**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees and pediatric health care providers from around the country will converge at the National Conservation Training Center in West Virginia to become “nature champions” for children in a unique program aimed at confronting health problems associated with increasingly sedentary lifestyles.

Through a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), the National Environmental Education Foundation’s (NEEF) Children and Nature Initiative is holding a series of workshops to prepare pediatric health care providers to serve as nature champions in their communities. Employees from four national wildlife refuges (NWR) in the Northeast Region will attend the conference and will partner with pediatric health care providers from their local areas. The Northeast refuges taking part in the program are E.B. Forsythe NWR in New Jersey, John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum in Pennsylvania, Patuxent Research Refuge in Maryland and Potomac River National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Virginia. The national wildlife refuges involved in the program will offer activities and special incentives for families who visit a refuge at the request of their health care providers.

After attending the conference, each new “nature champion” will be prepared to train 30 peers in prescribing outdoor activities for health. The program is scheduled to educate more than 700 health care providers in the Northeast within two years. They, in turn, will reach hundreds of thousands of children and their families.

“The Service holds lands in trust for the American people. We are pleased to be partnering with the health care community on refuge lands to show people that being in nature is good for you,” said Northeast Regional Director Marvin Moriarty.

According to Leyla Erk McCurdy, senior director of NEEF’s Health and Environment Program, “Unstructured outdoor activity may improve children’s health by increasing physical activity, reducing stress and serving as a support mechanism for attention disorders.” The program addresses two important issues – preventing serious health conditions like obesity and diabetes and reconnecting children to nature.

Other partners involved in the program are the National Audubon Society, U.S. Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Department of the Interior’s Office of Youth in the Great Outdoors.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).