

# ACA CAMP RESEARCH CAMPS & NATURE SURVEY

Industry Relevant Research and Resources for Camp Professionals from ACA  
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## Summary

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The notion of children and nature has evoked great discussion particularly since the publication of Richard Louv's (2005) book, *Last Child in the Woods*. Most camps continue to emphasize the importance of the outdoors and now perhaps more than ever have an integral role to play in connecting children, youth, and families to the outdoors.

The purpose of this research was to create a baseline regarding the attitudes that camp directors in ACA-Accredited® camps had about nature and camps during the spring of 2007. We wanted to assess the status of nature-based activities in organized camps. A random sample of camp directors was invited to participate in an online survey (i.e., Survey Monkey) to determine their attitudes about nature and the roles that camps currently played in using the natural world.

The questionnaire was developed by the authors in collaboration with members of the American Camp Association's Children, Nature, and Camps Task Force. The survey consisted of twenty-three questions including: opportunities for nature activities at camp, factors impacting children's connection to nature, nature focus and opportunities at camps, personal attitudes toward the environment, and camp characteristics.

Several **broad conclusions** can be stated based on this study designed to create a baseline for camp directors' attitudes about children, nature, and camp.

- This sample of respondents was fairly representative of the characteristics of camps that are accredited by ACA.
- The connections that children made to nature were important to almost all camp directors.
- Camp directors recognized that many reasons exist for why children are not more connected to nature.
- Three-fourths of the camp directors said their mission reflected some focus on nature.
- Many camp directors believed that connecting children and nature required purposeful programming.
- Most of the camp directors indicated that camp activities and programs were primarily conducted in the outdoors and over three-fourths said campers spent more than seven hours outdoors in the fresh air each day.
- Camp directors did not believe that nature opportunities at camp influenced parents' decisions about sending their children to camp.

This study was a first step in describing the influence that camp programs can have on children's connections to nature. However, further research is needed to learn more about the ways that nature activities, programs, and curriculum are developed and integrated in camps. In addition, strategies and resources used to train staff to address nature issues with campers are also important to consider.

Visit [www.ACAcamps.org/research](http://www.ACAcamps.org/research) for more information about this study.