

Playing in the wild affects kids for life

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A Cornell University study suggests children who "play" in the wild before age 11 grow up to actively care about their environment.

"Although domesticated nature activities -- caring for plants and gardens -- also have a positive relationship to adult environment attitudes, their effects aren't as strong as participating in such wild nature activities as camping, playing in the woods, hiking, walking, fishing and hunting," said environmental psychologist Nancy Wells, assistant professor of design and environmental analysis at Cornell.

Wells and Kristi Lekies, a research associate in human development, analyzed data from a U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service survey conducted in 1998 that explored childhood nature experiences and adult environmentalism.

"Our study indicates that participating in wild nature activities before age 11 is a particularly potent pathway toward shaping both environmental attitudes and behaviors in adulthood," said Wells, whose previous studies have found that nature around a home can help protect children against life stress and boost children's cognitive functioning.

The findings will be published in the next issue of *Children, Youth and Environment*.

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