

The Florida “Back to Nature Initiative” -- Little Moments. Big Magic.

## PART 1: Project Overview

### A. Executive Summary

Together, Big Brothers Big Sisters Association of Florida (BBBS), Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Division of State Parks (DEP) are developing a “Back to Nature Initiative.” This initiative also brings together numerous other partners with a vested interest in linking youth and adult mentors to nature through a coordinated statewide effort.

The project will connect children with nature by offering approved outdoor recreation and conservation programs to 14,000 young people participating in mentoring relationships with 16 BBBS agencies throughout Florida and will be open to other accompanied youth throughout the state. Over 90% of youth involved with BBBSA identified fishing and nature-based activities as an activity in which they wanted to participate. Youth, primarily 8 to 16 years of age, many with typical nature-deficit backgrounds, and mentors will acquire better understanding and connection to wildlife and nature through active participation events that introduce them to outdoor recreation and conservation. Hands-on educational programs will be conducted in natural settings such as state parks, FWC wildlife and fish management areas, conservation camps and other appropriate venues. Programs may incorporate wildlife viewing, wildlife habitat exploration, photography, fishing, water safety and boating, firearms safety and hunting. Children will experience live animals in natural habitats, and learn new ways to enjoy the outdoors. A “Back to Nature Initiative” brand will be developed by all of the partners working together at a summit workshop along with a mission statement, guiding principles and critical messages that will be consistently conveyed throughout the program by all partners.

A Web site will ultimately enable partners to sign up, post events, download program materials, and record event results. The public and media will have access to event calendars, materials to enhance their outdoor recreation experiences, maps of local outdoor recreation facilities/venues and status reports on program results. High profile celebrity spokespeople will be recruited to stimulate interest.

A two-tiered approach allows for both a wide breadth of contact with numerous partners and large numbers of youth throughout Florida and ongoing media coverage, and more in depth, full immersion programs for those that become engaged. Tier-1 programs are planned as half- to full-day programs that could readily, by modifying and expanding partner programs, reach over 100,000 youth annually. The initiative will culminate in Tier-2 weekend nature immersion programs for thousands of youths and mentors, at youth conservation camps. Tier-2 participants will receive resource books that include activity materials from new and existing nature programs, fishing rods, reels and tackle, a calendar of events, admission tickets and coupons provided by sponsors. With Florida’s 7,700 lakes, state parks, and 2,276 miles of shore, this initiative is uniquely positioned to provide thousands of children regardless of age, sex, race, economic status or physical ability with both planned and unstructured time in nature. The

program provides children with a back to nature foundation that will have a lasting impact and plant seeds for future societal change.

Richard Louv in his milestone book “Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder” clearly links lack of parks and open space with high crime rates, depression and other urban maladies. He also refers to new studies that suggest exposure to nature may reduce symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Along with other researchers, he has documented numerous benefits from reconnecting youth with nature and providing them with a mentor. These include enhanced self confidence, better academic performance, improved fitness, reduced obesity, stress reduction, improvements in immune systems, and more respect for the environment. The future of our society and natural resources are in the hands of our youth and in the vision and commitment of parents, extended family, mentors, teachers and friends, who help mold their ideals and values. Recreational fishing in particular and other outdoor activities in general are American traditions as old as the country and have long been valued for the peace and tranquility they provide to anyone who wishes to escape the pressures of life for a few blissful hours. Outdoor recreation also provides an opportunity to spend quality time in a peaceful, non-intimidating setting, talking and reconnecting with family and friends. As skills develop, a level of self-confidence is attained along with a greater sense of responsibility.

With funding from the National Forum on Children and Nature and various sponsors, Florida’s “Back to Nature Initiative” can make huge strides towards reconnecting our youth with nature, improving their health and mental agility, and restoring many values for which our society has been revered.

#### B. Description of Success

The “Back to Nature Initiative” will create a self-sustaining legacy program using best management practices for education that can be evaluated to show changes in long-term behaviors. Our vision foresees youth and mentors participating statewide in an ongoing series of interrelated outdoor activities, which provide a commitment to conservation stewardship, introduce lifetime recreational skills and address self-confidence and obesity issues, mental and physical health concerns, drug and alcohol dependency, and instill a sense of community. Awareness, knowledge, participation and behavioral change will be measures of success.

#### C. Sustaining the Program

Non-profits, government organizations, for profit businesses and private citizens with a vested interest in nature and youth will work together as part of the “Back to Nature Initiative” by sharing resources, expertise and a common vision. This will produce a “village” environment to nurture youth and provide them with resources to grow and thrive through a connection with nature. Partners and sponsors will be invited to contribute to the “Back to Nature Initiative” under the BBBS’s non-profit status. Some Tier-1 events may accept donations and Tier-2 events (full weekend camps, including board, meals, recreational information and products) may charge a fee. However, it is our intent to provide scholarships for as many participants as possible. In return, partners will benefit by creating a robust clientele for the future who are healthy,

proactive citizens with a long-term commitment to safe and enjoyable outdoor recreation and ensuring a sustainable future for our resources.

D. Two-year implementation plan/timeline (attached)

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## PART 2: Organizational Background and Budget

### A. Organizational Background

Big Brothers Big Sisters Association of Florida (BBBS) was organized as a not-for-profit to increase resources and create opportunities to enhance service growth for 16 affiliate members. In 2006, members delivered mentoring services in over 300 Florida cities and 240 schools, and mentored 14,000 children. They are affiliated with Big Brothers Big Sisters Association of America, which is the oldest, largest and most effective youth mentoring organization in the U.S. The BBBS' mission is to help children reach their potential through professionally supported, one-to-one relationships with mentors. Researchers found that after 18 months with their Bigs (mentors), Little Brothers and Little Sisters were: 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs, 27% less likely to begin using alcohol, 52% less likely to skip school, more confident of their performance in schoolwork, one-third less likely to hit someone and got along better with their families.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is the constitutional agency charged with "managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people." They have many collaborative partnerships with other government, academic, non-profit, and private fish and wildlife management and research institutions and enforcement entities. FWC programs are funded from user fees such as hunting and fishing licenses, and fines, specialty license plates, donations (including a specific check off for youth fishing and hunting programs), contracts, grants, fuel and documentary stamp taxes, and state general revenue to provide effective conservation and protection of Florida's natural living resources. Those resources and their users include 1,275 species of fish and wildlife that are enjoyed by 2.8 million anglers, over 200,000 hunters, and 3.3 million dedicated wildlife watchers. These groups collectively have an economic impact of more than \$11 billion annually. FWC provides a variety of train-the-trainer and direct hands-on outreach and education programs for youth across the state.

The Florida Park Service, under the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), is among the largest in the country with 161 parks spanning 723,000 acres and 100 miles of beach. From swimming and diving in Florida's rivers and springs to birding and fishing or hiking and riding on natural scenic trails, Florida's state parks offer year-around outdoor activities statewide. The Florida Park Service won the National Recreation and Parks Association Gold Medal award in 1999 and 2007. Their mission is to provide resource-based recreation while preserving, interpreting and restoring natural and cultural resources. They are the lead agency for Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE), an initiative to establish a series of field-based, environmental-science, education programs statewide.

## B. Profile of Responsible Individuals

Deb Thielen—

Currently the Chief Executive Officer of Big Brothers Big Sisters Association of Florida, she has a Masters of Public Administration and 25 years of non-profit leadership experience including managing up to \$125 million budgets. Her proven effectiveness in fund raising has enhanced BBBS ability to reach more youth, mentors and sponsors. She has offered her guidance and the accounting/administrative support of BBBS to ensure a dynamic “Back to Nature Initiative” that is accountable to its partners.

Steve A. Marshall—

Grant writer and coordinator for FWC’s, Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management, Statewide Aquatic/Angler Education Project. He has a B.S. in Fisheries and Wildlife Management from Montana State Univ. and a M.S. in Fisheries Biology from Iowa State Univ. As state coordinator and trainer for Hooked on Fishing–Not on Drugs, a facilitator for the National 4-H Sportfishing Program and participant in the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation’s workshop on Best Practices in Boating, Fishing and Aquatic Resources Education, he brings expertise for converting non-participants into outdoor enthusiasts who understand stewardship. He is enthused with evaluating and documenting behavioral changes resulting from education/outreach efforts and will share that expertise with this team.

Scott Robinson—

On his way to becoming Assistant Director of DEP’s Florida Park Service, he managed 13 state parks. He has a degree in parks and recreation from Florida State University. He has been with DEP for 25 years. With expertise in volunteer coordination and putting together park support organizations, and access to the network of state parks and their collaborators, he will be an invaluable member of this team.

Bob Wattendorf—

Marketing and Special Project Coordinator for FWC’s Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management, he has a M.S. in Fisheries Biology from North Carolina State Univ. and a M.S. in Executive Management from Florida State Univ. He was an author of the Federal Aid Aquatic Resource Education Guide and involved in founding the Aquatic Resource Education Association. He was active in forming the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (a non-profit organization authorized by Congress to grow participation in fishing, boating and aquatic stewardship) and has served as a task force member on several of their research and marketing teams.

C. Budget (attached)

### PART 3: Target Population and Impact

The “Back to Nature Initiative” will be statewide in scope utilizing a coalition of partners with vested interests in youth and the outdoors to cover a wide array of outdoor recreation activities and incorporate venues from the Florida keys to the panhandle. Having Florida’s Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (80 fish management areas and more than 130 wildlife management areas comprising 5.6 million acres), Florida State Parks (160 parks spanning 723,000 acres), and Division of Forestry (35 state forests encompassing more than a million acres) ensures adequate natural resources to connect youth with nature statewide.

Youth ages 8 to 16 will be the focus of both Tier-1 and Tier-2 events and materials, but partners will not be excluded who want to reach a slightly broader audience. It is our intent to be entirely open to all children regardless of gender, ethnic background, physical/mental challenges or family income. The focus is on getting children with a nature-deficit condition exposed to nature and taking them through a progression of stages to become outdoor enthusiasts and conservationists with associated mental, physical and societal benefits that come from being close to nature.

Expectations for the first year of the “Back to Nature Initiative” are to reach over 100,000 youth and mentors with Tier-1 events and have 2,000 students and mentors attend the full-immersion Tier-2 camp experience. In addition, printed material and media will introduce the brand and concept to millions of youth, parents and potential mentors, raising the importance of reconnecting with nature and the diverse benefits highlighted in Richard Louv’s book.

A March 2006 article from the International Journal of Pediatric Obesity by Dr. James stated that 28% of children were overweight or obese and that by 2010 the percentage will increase to over 50% in North America. An obese often becomes an obese adult, thus risking a lifetime of diseases, disorders, illnesses and injuries linked to obesity. Childhood obesity and related children’s health issues cost Florida almost \$4 billion in annual medical expenses. Although eating habits contribute to this epidemic, lack of physical activity contributes even more. We believe that throughout the Sunshine State youths and families will benefit by getting kids back outdoors and enjoying our natural resources in a safe and sustainable manner.

## PART 4: Partnerships and Leverage

### A. Partner List and Description

In addition to the leadership role of Big Brothers Big Sisters Association of Florida (BBBS), the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Division of State Parks (DEP), other relationships are tentatively being established with many government agencies and nonprofit organizations. Among those contacted already are: Audubon Society of Florida, BASS/ESPN, Clear Channel/Florida Radio Network, Federation of Fly Fishers, Fishing for Success/UF, Florida Boys & Girls Clubs, Florida Defenders of the Environment, Florida Department of Agriculture/Division of Forestry, Florida Department of Education, Florida Atlantic University, Florida State University, Florida Disabled Outdoors Association, Florida Paddle Sports Association, Florida Wildlife Federation, Foundation for Responsible Angling, International Game Fish Association, Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, Sierra Club, Snook Foundation, University of Florida, Youth Fishing Foundation, and Wild Turkey Federation.

These and many other potential partners with vested interests will bring to the table a variety of skills and experience as well as natural teaching venues. Major manufacturers and retailers of products used in outdoor recreation will be asked to provide donations. By leveraging their strengths and encouraging their involvement in a proposed strategic planning summit early in the implementation phase, we will be able to evolve a social marketing brand with a back to nature message, core values and guiding principles that will resonate throughout Florida and allow for ownership by partners. Altogether this list of key partnerships and resources, each with a definitive purpose, will serve to support and sustain the initiative beyond the first year as well as attract further support. This model can then be replicated by youth mentoring and conservation organizations throughout the nation. Plans will be incorporated to present successes and lessons learned at a series of national conferences and in peer-reviewed and popular press articles-- giving the "Back to Nature Initiative" an opportunity to remedy the issue of children's isolation from nature and expand the healing process nationwide.

### B. Select Letters of Commitment (see attached)

## PART 5: Measures of Success

Evaluation is a critical to planning and evolving the “Back to Nature Initiative.” Tier-1 success measures will quantify awareness, knowledge and participation. Counts of how many partners sign up, number of events held, youth participation rates, number of mentors/volunteers involved, materials distributed, Web site hits, media coverage, and quantifying of spokespeople that advocate the “Back to Nature Initiative” will document program reach. The Web site will facilitate tracking this data and making it available to the Conservation Fund and National Forum on Children and Nature. In some instances, simple surveys will be handed out that can also be completed online to document participant satisfaction, suggestions for program enhancements and to determine their past and anticipated future outdoor recreation.

Tier-2 full-immersion weekends will be more scientifically evaluated recognizing the importance of behavioral changes and associated benefits, and including return-on-investment. Ultimately as this program becomes self-sustaining, evaluation measures will track longitudinal effects on youth, mentors and communities. Surveys will be used to pre-test attitudes and past-participation prior to camps. We will follow-up three months after each Tier-2 event, with surveys of youth and mentors to determine if they continued to participate in target activities. Cognitive questions about environmental concern and understanding of stewardship principles will be incorporated. Examples of this type research are “An Evaluation of Joe Budd Aquatic Education Center Fish Camp Program,” by Dr. Tony Fedler, Human Dimensions Consulting, for the FWC; and “Making a Difference—An Impact Study of Big Brothers and Big Sisters,” by Tierney et al., Public/Private Ventures (available on request).

An effort will be made to engage participants in electronic communications (e.g., electronic news letters, blogs, or chat rooms) that can stimulate continuing interest, while furthering their education about outdoor recreation skills and conservation stewardship.

In the long-term, we anticipate creating a self-sustaining legacy program that puts youth and mentors in touch with nature. Through expanding their interest in outdoor recreational activities and commitment to conservation stewardship we expect to impact their physical and mental well being and to create happier more responsible citizens. Measuring this goes beyond knowing how many participated in a half-day recreational event. Longitudinal tracking of participants and mentors primarily via surveys (electronic when possible but supplemented with phone or written surveys as necessary to evaluate response bias) will help document changes in cognitive awareness of health and conservation issues, record changes in participation rates in various activities, associated expenditures, and possibly even document correlations with body-mass index (obesity) as an indicator of health.

A Web site with a backend database to log and analyze information will be critical to our ability to evaluate long-term impacts. These techniques are rapidly evolving (e.g. [anglersurvey.com](http://anglersurvey.com) and [huntersurvey.com](http://huntersurvey.com)) and becoming simpler to develop and maintain but provide a wealth of information to demonstrate program effectiveness, including return on investment. Focus groups may also be used in the second year to refine our approaches.

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PART 1. (ATTACHMENT)

D. Implementation Plan and Timeline with Major Milestones (NOTE: Specific months depend on the date of the grant award and initial funding, these dates presuppose the award is made in September. Certain activities are limited by weather and other seasonal concerns)

Month 1:

**Major Milestone: Grant obtained and Public announcement of award**

Open invitation to become involved in The Florida “Back to Nature Initiative”.

Conference call/Planning meeting for current partners.

Hire contractor/staff to facilitate partner coordination, summit, cultivate sponsors and administer grant.

Develop a Web site, including a survey instrument, calendar of events and reporting mechanism for Tier-1 events.

Create materials to advertise the Back to Nature Initiative and summit.

Plan Florida “Back to Nature Initiative” summit location, speakers and facilitators.

Month 2:

Inform and invite potential partners and other nonprofits, for-profit businesses, government agencies and interested private parties of the grant and to the summit.

Advertise program with news releases, radio spots and television interviews.

Seek out high-profile spokespeople to join the Florida “Back to Nature Initiative” team.

Month 3:

Conduct a summit to select a brand, develop guiding principles and formalize a strategic plan and future funding opportunities to create a Florida “Back to Nature” legacy program. Evaluation criteria and instruments developed.

**Major Milestone: Summit conducted and strategic plan/funding established**

Month 4:

Based on summit input, create, print and distribute a flyer, with Web site advertisement to partners, media and other appropriate venues.

Initiate first of the Tier-1, branded activities and continue indefinitely with events and results coordinated via the Web site (including evaluation criteria).

Develop curricula for Tier-2, full-immersion camp weekends. Evaluation pre- and post-survey material developed for Tier-2.

**Major Milestone: Tier-1 activities begin to introduce youth and adult mentors back to nature in Florida.**

Month 5:

Conduct first Tier-2 camp and continue on a monthly basis, reporting results via the Web site.

**Major Milestone: Tier-2 full-emersion in nature weekend camps begin.**

Month 6:

Advisory group holds first full after-action analysis to refine programs and look at preliminary evaluations. Utilize findings and results to promote further fund raising and partner development to make this program self-supporting.

Months 7 and beyond;

Continue recruiting partners and sponsors, Tier-1 and Tier-2 events now ongoing with calendar of activities and reporting accomplished via a Web site.

Consider additional printed materials and media coverage to expand the reach of the program and get more youth and their mentors back to nature.

Month 8:

First 3-month post Tier-2 longitudinal evaluation survey launched.

**Major Milestone: Tier-2 programs are evaluated to determine changes in attitude toward and interest in nature among youth and mentor participants.**

Year Two:

Focus on making Florida “Back to Nature Initiative” self-sufficient based on long-term sponsorship and balanced cost:-benefit approaches. Share program with National Big Brothers Big Sisters of America and encourage them to emulate our successes. Inspire other not-for-profit groups, government conservation agencies, education institutions and for-profit corporations to adopt the Florida “Back to Nature” model.

INCOME		FUNDED	REQUEST	COMMENTS
	Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation		\$50,000?	For consideration-tentative (in-kind/cash)
	Big Brothers Big Sisters	\$5,000		Fund Raising Director (in-kind/cash)
	Florida Dept of Environmental Protection/State Parks		\$50,000?	For consideration-tentative (in-kind/cash)
	Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Protection/Division of Forestry		\$50,000?	For consideration-tentative (in-kind/cash)
	Florida Foundation for Responsible Angling		\$50,000?	\$20,000 rods/tackle; \$30,000 grant-tentative
	Wildlife Foundation of Florida, Inc		\$5,000?	For consideration-tentative
	Clear Channel Radio Network	\$5,000		State-wide radio high impact spots-tentative
	Fund Raising support from National Forum on Children & Nature		\$1,000,000	Applied for.
	Income Totals	\$10,000	\$1,205,000	\$1,215,000
EXPENSE				
	Administrative Costs		\$80,000	Cost of operations, office, insurance, business equipment, phones, fund raising and secretarial support
	Supplies/Postage/Printing/Marketing Materials		\$75,000	
	Travel		\$5,000	
	Media Buys		\$300,000	Radio, TV time
	Contract Support		\$100,000	Web & Media design
	Outdoor Equipment		\$100,000	Rods/reels/tackle/binoculars/guides
	Youth/Mentor Scholarships		\$400,000	Program attendance per diems
	Evaluation		\$40,000	Independent Evaluator
	Summit Costs		\$85,000	Strategic summit for current & potential partners; corporations and funders
	Misc		\$30,000	
	<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>		<b>\$1,215,000</b>	