

# Taking action to connect two million children with nature

by Nancy Rosenow

*"When we are dreaming alone, it is only a dream. When we are dreaming with others, it is the beginning of reality."*

— Dom Helder Camara

Seventy teams of people from around the world — all eager to develop concrete plans for ways to connect more children and families with the joys of the natural world — met together in October, 2010, to share ideas, wrestle with common issues, and dream together. Delegates from more than 50 countries spent three productive and inspiring days together at Arbor Day Farm in Nebraska, USA, for the "Connecting the World's Children with Nature Action Forum," sponsored by the World Forum Foundation's Nature Action Collaborative for Children Leadership Team. Earlier that year, World Forum Foundation Co-Founder, Roger Neugebauer, made a pledge during a meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative that the Action Forum would result in connecting two million children with nature. Forum delegates eagerly embraced that challenge. Delegates were inspired as teams from Afghanistan and Haiti described ways that children's connections with the natural world could help them heal from the devastating effects of war and from natural disasters. And, as all delegates explored the outdoors together, made music, and ate foods fresh from the farm, a renewed sense of community was strengthened. Many delegates commented that when children (and adults) are reminded that all people on earth share a connection with the wonders of the natural world, we are really forging bonds of peace and understanding.

Exciting and concrete plans have been developed by all 70 teams and work is now underway to make those plans reality. Already reports are trickling in of actions beginning to take place. A nature education conference was held in India: a multi-disciplinary group of early childhood and environmental educators from

the United States are getting ready to teach a collaborative college course using the online Environmental Action Kit (debuted at the Forum) as core curriculum; Community Forums to discuss ways to bring nature connections to towns and cities are being scheduled throughout the world. And, so much more is to come.

So many people wrote of how their experiences at the Forum inspired them to re-new their commitments to this work that it would be impossible to include words from everyone. Following are a couple of excerpts from two of the first teams to send comments after the Forum:

From Marsha Swanson, United States:  
*"The enthusiasm and energy shared by the participants is so stimulating! Our team worked in the car for a couple hours on the way home refining our conference action plan to include more than just the conference. We have since presented the plan and a Power-Point, including photos of the Forum, as well as the DVD of the "Universal Principles for Connecting the World's Children to Nature" to our area's Nature Connections Team. We are expanding our initial ideas for our 4th Annual "Outdoors: Let's Explore Conference" to include much of what we learned at the Forum. In addition, some of us met today to review the design for a Nature Explore Classroom on the grounds of our county nature center and begin the next stage of development."*

From Margaret Wachu Gichuhi, Kenya:  
*"For me, the drive to Arbor Day Farm was full of wonder . . . the rivers meandering, oxbow lakes and wetlands, which made me connect very well with nature. In one of the activities outside, a red fox scampered to safety when it heard us make some noise. That to me was a great experience to have happened during the day. The highlight was dinner at the Barn . . . with the very exciting drums, the moonlight, all under the blue sky."*

*"The interaction with the Forum participants was an eye opener, which gave first hand experience of how Early Childhood is being inte-*

*grated with nature in other parts of the world. This was a memorable experience which shows that learning outdoors should be incorporated in all Early Childhood programs."*

A new resource, developed for the Action Forum, is now available to everyone, everywhere. An "Environmental Action Kit" — which includes a wealth of downloadable activities, research briefs, PowerPoints, and DVDs — is accessible free of charge at [worldforumfoundation.org/nature](http://worldforumfoundation.org/nature). Groups all over the world are encouraged to become part of the effort to help connect two million children — and counting — with the sustaining and enriching power that nature can bring to all of our lives.

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To read Memory Loader's in-depth account of this year's conference, please visit the NACC website: [www.worldforumfoundation.org/nature](http://www.worldforumfoundation.org/nature)

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Nature Action Collaborative for Children  
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The mission of the Nature Action Collaborative for Children is to re-connect children with the natural world by making developmentally appropriate nature education a sustaining and enriching part of the daily lives of the world's children.