



Get Outdoors Florida! is a coalition promoting outdoor experiences to help Floridians have healthier lifestyles and develop an appreciation for our abundant natural resources.

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Take This Path to a Healthier You

Dr. David Jones

This health path isn't a metaphor. It's real: an outdoor trail close to your home. You'd be surprised how many trails exist and how many more the medical community and U.S. cities want to create. The reason? It's spelled out in the theme of National Trails Day: "Take the Path to a Healthier You."

Exercise—and More.

Excess weight, high blood pressure, heart disease, osteoporosis, back pain, stress: Walking is a proven weapon against all of these, and yet Americans today are more sedentary than earlier generations. Experts now know that trails have special properties for both exercise and motivation.

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Blaze It, and They'll Come.

Great advantages of trails are access, attractiveness, and variety. They can be designed for walking, running, biking, rollerblading, and wheelchair recreation. When well laid-out in natural settings, trails beckon people—fostering exercise as an everyday activity.



That's why blazing more trails is a nationwide urban and medical movement. Almost a decade ago, the U.S. Surgeon General created the Health and Trails Initiative. In 2006, as one example, the Medical Mile greenway opened in downtown Little Rock, Arkansas, a collaboration among Heart Clinic Arkansas and the city and national park services. A

Nebraska study found that every \$1 investment in trails resulted in nearly \$3 in reduced health care costs (Health Promotion Practice, April 2005, pp.174–79).

Nature Deficit Disorder.

Childhood expert Richard Louv's term "nature deficit disorder" is deliberately catchy

to catch awareness. Today, kids under 13 spend only one-half hour weekly in outdoor freestyle play. Nature outings for most of us are limited.

Exercising outdoors—playing, rambling . . . not directed activity—has been shown to foster more creative and cooperative play in children, says Louv.

Bottom Line Benefits.

Interestingly, data is building that city trails increase economic activity and can increase property values—in addition to the health care and insurance savings. The real end-benefit, though,



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