Adventure in a Natural Play Area

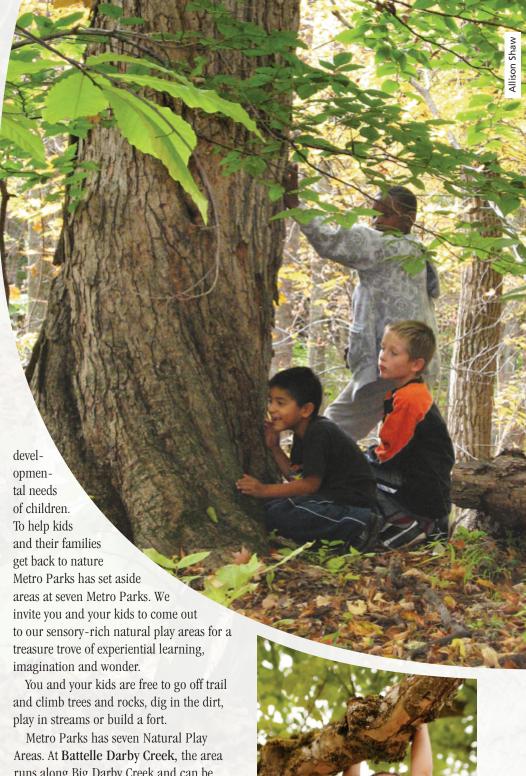
As children, most of us spent our weekends, summers and evenings playing outside. We climbed trees in the backyard, played hide-n-seek with neighborhood friends or rode our bikes at the local park. We caught crayfish in a stream, lay on our backs imagining the clouds were animals or explored the woodlots close to home.

For most kids today those days are gone. Families are busy with activities, parents are afraid to let their children roam freely, kids are consumed with electronic gadgetry and there is less access to natural areas. According to a new study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, the average American child ages 8-18 spends almost 8 hours a day watching TV, playing video games or sitting in front of the computer.

Author Richard Louv coined the term nature deficit disorder to describe this trend where kids are spending less and less time outdoors. In his bestselling book "Last Child in the Woods," Louv examines this phenomenon and the dramatic negative effects this may have on an entire generation.

Unstructured play in a natural environment has been shown to have a strong positive effect on the social and psychological





Metro Parks has seven Natural Play
Areas. At Battelle Darby Creek, the area
runs along Big Darby Creek and can be
accessed from the Indian Ridge parking lot
or along the Terrace Trail. Blendon
Woods has a 10-acre area with a wooded
hillside and ravine, turn left at ranger
station. Highbanks' natural play area runs
along the Olentangy River and is accessed
from the Big Meadows Picnic Area. At
Prairie Oaks the area surrounds Beaver
Lake and runs along Big Darby Creek.
Sharon Woods has a 7.5-acre play area
accessed from the Apple Ridge Picnic Area.
Slate Run's 7-acre wooded hillside is
bordered by a creek and can be accessed

from the Shady Grove Picnic Area. The natural play area at Three Creeks is alongside the Evergreen Trail in the Confluence Trails Area.

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